

# A LONG JOURNEY OF MUSLIM CHILD-WIFE: AGE OF CONSENT BILL TO SHARDA ACT: A CASE STUDY OF UNITED PROVINCES

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**Abstract:** *Social Reform Legislation in India was one of the primary issues in which gender question has been debated in the late 19th century. In this series abolition of Sati, Widow Re-marriage Act of 1856 and Age of Consent Bill of 1891 were included. This paper takes a look and analyses the debate and protest on the Age of Consent Bill in the erstwhile United Provinces. Through the analysis the role of the Muslim elite has also been exposed visavis various reform measures along with the deep rooted tendency of the Muslims to relate every secular issue with religion and the consequent demand for 'no-interference' in religion.*

Social Reform Legislation in India was one of the primary issues in which gender question has been debated in the late 19th century. In this series, abolition of *sati*, Widow Re-marriage Act of 1856 and Age of Consent Bill of 1891 were included. It may be noted here that religious faith was often connected with social Reform Program. After 1858 the experiences of the great uprising of 1857 had warned the British rulers that interference in the social or religious life could lead to tensions and as such they decided to keep aloof of these issues.<sup>1</sup> Again the period of second half of the 19th century is a period of Social Reform.<sup>2</sup> However, In the process of codification of law, the British realized that Hindus had no systematic law and as a result, they began to search their sacred books to codify it into Hindu Civil Code and in case of Muslims into Mohammedan Civil Code.<sup>3</sup> At that time they introduced several modifications into this. But Muslims always demonstrated their protest to any modification in '*shari'at*'.<sup>4</sup>

This paper also makes an attempt to focus on this traditional attitude of Muslim society. Age of Consent Bill was the burning issue of late 19th and early 20th century that provoked a countrywide opposition against it.<sup>5</sup> The emergence of social reformers provided a broad space to debate. Whereas Hindu social reformers had criticized fiercely every evil custom that entered into their society with the passage of time and expected the government to

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abolish it through legislation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time there were some orthodox groups too, which considered it as unnecessary interference in their religious matters and opposed it.<sup>7</sup> At the same time European travelers and British Government were making efforts to attack the traditional education system and status of women was often their concern. Owing to their tolerant nature, Hindus did not oppose the new education but at gender question they became furious and related it with religious matters. It was largely due to the patriarchal society that it could not tolerate any steps towards women's empowerment.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from this Muslim women had different problems. Muslims had been concerned to some extent with social reform question but within certain limits. They had largely alienated themselves from these issues claiming that it was not practiced among them. Besides, as they took the stand, all sorts of solution to these questions are available in *shariat*.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, they felt that they did not have any need to modify *Shariat*. As a result, Mohammedan Civil Code was applied on them in the matters of marriage, divorce and family dispute.<sup>10</sup>

In 1870s the widespread prevalence of child-marriage had drawn attention of social reformers. As a result, in 1872, The Native Marriage Act came into existence under which the marriageable age of girls had been fixed to 14 years.<sup>11</sup> It proved a small test for a big problem. Besides, Muslim did not welcome this Act. Also, they considered it as an interference in their religious matters.<sup>12</sup> They claimed that as it was not in practice among them hence there was no need of any new law because *qura'n* does not give legitimacy to child marriage as any marital rite could not be consummated before puberty.<sup>13</sup>

Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan, a prominent social reformer of that time, was also a little uncomfortable with Legislative Reform, especially in matter of child marriage. He suggested to the government to refrain from social issues, because it could provide a space to revolt. He also took the stand that both the communities would consider it as interference in religious matters.<sup>14</sup>

It was alleged that Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan and his contemporary social reformers ignored the problem of common people and raised only those matters which were related to '*ashraf*' society. Child-marriage was practiced among *ajlaf* Muslims since long. It was most prevalent in eastern United Provinces,<sup>15</sup> relatively less affected by social reform program. The Durdi of Ispahan had written to '*Azad*' (Lucknow) that these so called leaders of Muslims were not really the well wishers of the '*Musalman*s'.<sup>16</sup>

In late 1880s, Rukmabai's case had enlivened the issue again.<sup>17</sup> A widespread reaction started from all over the country. Hindus and Muslims both regarded that Age of Consent Bill will caprice the women like European females.<sup>18</sup> In this way it would curtail the right for restitution of co-habitation with the wife therefore it would be dangerous for Indian society. They also started to raise their demand for a clear distinction between rape and co-habitation with wife,<sup>19</sup> that seemed impossible in a patriarchal social order.

Muslims contested it since they used to marry off their daughters after puberty while the provision of this Bill was to increase marriageable age from 10 to 12 years. Moreover, the girls of less warm countries do not reach puberty before this age.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, generally Muslim did not marry off their daughters before this age. Thus, they thought there was no use of it for them. In this way it would be considered unnecessary interference in '*shariat*.'



Besides, some Muslims had no objection to this Bill excluding some provisions of it that was strongly objected to.<sup>21</sup> It was natural for such a feudal and hierarchical society. Under the provision of this Bill any man who was under 12 years of age would be liable to imprisonment for seven years if he got married. The Bill did not forbid early marriages, but it provided that a husband and his wife should not cohabit even if they had attained the age of puberty, which was against the law of nature. It was impossible that they lived in the same house and refrain from sexual intercourse.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Muslims would be more affected than Hindus because Hindus could provide horoscope in support of marriageable age but Muslims could not do so.<sup>23</sup>

Also, they considered it as a tool of tyranny in the hands of corrupt police officers and magistrates. In this way, innocent people would be punished, as a result women would suffer more because they would have to face several new difficult situations if their husbands had been imprisoned for 7 years.<sup>24</sup> This bill complicate the social order of India whereas, girls became mother at the age of 11 or 12 years.<sup>25</sup> Despite several demonstrations Age of Consent Bill was passed in Legislative Assembly on 19th of March 1891.<sup>26</sup> However, Muslim women were spared, but they had no escape from Criminal Procedure Code that was applicable to all. A Muslim representative in Legislative Assembly, Nawab Ehsan Ullah, showed his full support to this bill, for which Muslims became very furious to him. Several newspapers demonstrated their indignation on this issue as to how Nawab Ehsan Ullah be considered sole representative of all the Muslims?<sup>27</sup> They contested that it could be his personal opinion. The '*azad*' and the '*muhaazib*' were the only two Muslim newspapers which conducted with intelligence. Nevertheless they too, disapproved of the Hindu custom of child-marriage, and desired that the bill should be radically amended before it was passed.<sup>28</sup>

The *najmul akhbar* observed that Child-Marriage was rare among Muslims. However, when such marriages take place the husband and the wife were not allowed by their parents and other relatives to co-habit until they attained the age of puberty. Under these circumstances, Sir Andrew Scoble's bill could not but be considered an unnecessary interference with the religious matters of Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Shaikh Kamil's case<sup>30</sup> was referred to show that people had started getting false medical reports to escape from its strict provisions. Else, it is surprising how a father became avaricious to ruin his daughter? Thus, there was no actual effect of this bill, neither on Hindus nor Muslims. It became a dead letter for them. Also, statistics of that time shows that there was decline in child marriage among Muslims for the whole province as a unit. (See table I).

Also, this paper makes an attempt to challenge the traditional tendency of Muslims to alienate themselves from real issues of the community. It became a traditional view that Muslims were a monolithic bloc and in this way it was always being denied the prevalence of local variations and customs that got priority over *shariat*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Muslims of United Provinces could be seen as a regional variation, such as, Eastern United Provinces, Central United Provinces and Western United Provinces. It is important to remark that their position should be determined according to their social and economic position that was often ignored in colonial reports. Land settlement had affected them more than any other factor. As for



as, Eastern U.P. was concerned there was no prevalence of cash allowance and mostly Muslim of that part were landless and lowborn.<sup>32</sup> While in Central U.P. it was of mixed kind. In Western U.P. cash allowance was in practice and Muslims of that region were mostly either big land holders or service gentry class and more urbanised.<sup>33</sup>

It is well known that marriage ceremony in India has always been expensive for both the communities. Report of Banking Committee and Revenue Committee demonstrate how indebtedness increased rapidly. It is remarkable that debts were taken for marriage of daughters. Contemporary literature also shows how a poor father is forced to give his daughter to a relatively much older bridegroom in return of some money.<sup>34</sup> In these circumstances, both communities used to marry off their daughters at an early age i.e. child marriage.<sup>35</sup> Almost certainly this could explain why Muslims of Eastern U.P. were more prone to child marriage beside the Hindus. Table II shows the tendency that wherever Muslims were in good position there was little evidence of child marriage. The 2/5th of the whole Muslim population resided in Western U.P. and in good economic position.<sup>36</sup> Thus, generally, it is concluded that child marriages was not in practice among the Muslims.

Caste variation was also considerable as local variation. Available sources show very little evidence of it among '*ashraf*' Muslims.<sup>37</sup> Basically it was widespread in a particular group i.e. '*ajlaf*' Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Probably, it was due to 'incomplete' Islamisation of this group. As a result their customs and traditions were similar as their Hindu co-brothers; religion was nominal for them.<sup>39</sup> While all the social reformers hailed from '*ashraf*' section, probably this could explain why Muslim social reformers used to refrain from these burning issues. The proportion of children under 12 who were married gives some idea as to the communities which favoured relatively late marriage for girls; among *saiyad* (53), *Kayasth* (60), *Bhumihara* (70), *Shaikhs* (86) and *Jats* (87). The reason for this variation was clearly related with school going. For instance these castes had a higher proportion of literate women than other castes<sup>40</sup>. (See Table III).

It was alleged in colonial writings that Muslim invasion was the main cause for bringing this evil custom and they give Nesfield's theory in support of their allegation,<sup>41</sup> that seems baseless.

Thus all the statistics from 1881 to 1921 proves that Age of Consent Bill became a dead letter. So there was no one opinion on this issue but circumstances had changed and Muslims too realised it was not an exclusive problem of the Hindus but also of them.<sup>42</sup> But still, orthodox groups of both communities continued their protest. At the same time several women organisations came into existence by this time and gender questions were taken up in their consideration and one of the most burning issues was the custom of child marriage.<sup>43</sup> In order to gauge public opinion on the reform measures as well as to ascertain a true picture of prevalence and effect of early marriage and motherhood, the Government established the Age of Consent Committee in 1928. The Committee was composed primarily of Indian members and included two women. The Bill received support from women's groups in India led by All India Women Conference (AIWC), which was formed in 1927. At both, local and national, levels, women condemned the practice of child-marriage and supported the Legislation.<sup>44</sup> It was surprising that U.P. was the third most affected part of



India,<sup>45</sup> while Muslims of U.P. were in most advanced stage than any other part of India.<sup>46</sup> (See Table IV). For this again, this issue had taken place in social reform agenda of both government and reformers. Begum Habibullah was the most prominent lady of that time who gave her staunch support to this Bill. She raised several questions towards miserable condition of child-wives. Also, she questioned the prevalent custom of marriage among Muslims. She asserted that, "Marriage under the Islamic Law is contract between a man and a woman with the free will and accord of the parties concerned and is attested by the testimony of the independent witnesses. It is therefore evident that the contracting parties should be adults and should have attained the age of discretion." Also, she questioned the behavior of men who always wanted to subdue their counterpart women. In her speech at the Oudh Women's Social and Educational Conference held at Qaiser Bagh Baradari<sup>47</sup> she asked the orthodox group of Muslim community if similar law could be passed in Turkey during the rule of Khalifa, and one finds the same kinds of legislation passed in Egypt then why not in India? She asserted that it was in no way against the Islamic Law and questioned if the Indian Penal Code was in uniformity with the laws of the *shariat*? Moreover, was the Civil Law of Succession which was applicable to Mohammedans as well which deprived the women of the right of the succession was in accordance with the *shariat*? In this way the long journey of Muslim child-wives reached its ultimate objective with the passage of Sharda Act.

Table I  
Marriageable Age of 0-10 Age Group of Females per 1000

Age	All religions					Hindus					Muslims				
	1921	1911	1901	1891	1881	1921	1911	1901	1891	1881	1921	1911	1901	1891	1881
0-5	7	10	9	6	51	7	10	9	6	53	6	8	8	6	35
5-10	102	101	110	99	11	107	106	115	104	-	72	77	82	73	-
10-15						520	541	562	594	569	379	419	419	456	428

Table II  
Number of Married Women at per mille in 1921

Religion & Natural Division	Age Group		
	0-5	5-10	10-15
<b>United Province</b>			
Hindu	7	107	520
Muslim	6	72	379
<b>Himalaya West</b>			
Hindu	1	61	542
Muslim	4	79	373
<b>Sub-Himalaya West</b>			
Hindu	2	85	492
Muslim	5	67	348

Contd....

Religion & Natural Division	Age Group		
	0-5	5-10	10-15
<b>Indo-Gangetic Plain West</b>			
Hindu	3	46	480
Muslim	4	44	333
<b>Indo-Gangetic Plain Central</b>			
Hindu	10	148	535
Muslim	7	82	346
<b>Central India Plateau</b>			
Hindu	9	141	626
Muslim	11	73	448
<b>East Satpura</b>			
Hindu	9	156	576
Muslim	13	111	467
<b>Sub-Himalaya East</b>			
Hindu	9	98	454
Muslim	6	99	496
<b>Indo-Gangetic East</b>			
Hindu	9	157	603
Muslim	8	97	452

Source: CR of 1921, Subsidiary Table II, P-106-7.

**Table III**  
No. of Married Girls of Selected Castes

Caste	0-5	5-12
Shaikh	6	86
Pathan	11	95
Nai	10	123
Saiyid	8	53
Julaha	11	171
Teli	18	183
Bhangi	12	150

Source: CR of 1921, p. 110-111.

**Table IV**  
% age of Married Girls at under 15 Age Group

Province	All	Hindu	Muslim
All India	42.2	48.6	37.01
U.P.	53.1	55.5	40.7
Bengal	-	-	51.7
Bihar	-	-	49.9

Source: Report of Age of Consent: 1928-29, p. 45.



## NOTES

1. All the available sources and proclamations of Queen show this attitude. S.A. Natrajan, *Century of Social Reform in India*, Asia Publishing House, p. 71.
2. Ibid.
3. Social Legislation in India, Government of India,
4. Jaisingh, Indira (ed.), *Justice for Women*, The Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa, 1996, p. 3.
5. Charles, H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, Bombay, 1964, p. 161-174.
6. Ibid, p. 9-27.
7. Ibid. p. 163-165. see also S.A. Natrajan, p. 66-67.
8. Bharat Bandhu (Aligarh), 1st July, 1887 p. 152.
9. Najmul-Akhbar (Etawah), 24th Feb. 1891 p. 152.
10. Jaisingh, Indira opcit. p. 3.
11. Natrajan, S.A. p. 49.
12. The Najmul Akhbar (Etawah), 8th Feb. 1891, p. 101. Government is not justified in meddling with religious and social matter.
13. Ibid. p. 100.
14. Akhbar-e- Scientific Society, Shaikh Ismail Panipati, May 1876, p.
15. Census Report of India, NW Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1911 E.H. Blunt, Allahabad, 1912, p. 230, also see C.R. of India NWP ovinces of Agra and Oudh, 1921 E.H.H. Edye, Allahabad, 1923 p. 10.
16. Azad (Lucknow), 23rd November 1894. Also they were alleged to be most selfish, self conceited and egoistic men, caring only for their own aggrandizement and not at all for material well being of their co-religionists or for the religion, manners, customs and civilization of their forefathers.
17. The Najmul Akhbar (Etawah), 8th April 1887. Several newspapers questioned the right of restitution of marital right and also s. 260 was in debate. Also see The Bharat Bandhu (Aligarh), 1st July 1887. The Azad (Lucknow), 5th August 1887.
18. The Bharat Bandhu (Aligarh), 29th Jul. 1887 also showed its protest against the proposed abolition of imprisonment in execution of a decree for the restitution of the conjugal rights because the fear of imprisonment often induces women to live with their husbands.
19. The Nairang (Agra), 19th Feb. 1891.
20. The Najmul Akhbar (Etawah), 8th Feb. 1891.
21. The Hindustani (Lucknow), 14th Feb. 1891.
22. The Najmul Akhbar, 8th Feb. 1891.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Heimsth, p. 173.

27. The Hindustani (Lucknow), 14th Feb. 1891 see also the Nazmul Akhbar 8th Feb. 1891 also see same paper of 24th Feb. 1891.
28. The Hindustani (Lucknow), 14th Feb. 1891.
29. The Najmul Akhbar 24th Feb. 1891.
30. Nairang' (Agra), 17th August. 1891. Shaikh Kamil of KrishanNagar whose father in-law falsely accused him of rape on his daughter, his object being to get Kamil relegated to Jail and then to marry his daughter to another man or receipt of some money. But Medical report declared that she was past 12 year of age.
31. Indrani Jaisingh p. 3.
32. All census reports of that time show it. See also, Firdous Azmat Siddique, 'Colonial report on census and its reflection of Indian Muslim women', *Islam and Muslim Societies*, Nadeem Hasnain (ed.) Serial Publication, New Delhi, 2005, p. 155.
33. Ibid.
34. Premchanda's novels show this practice. Also see Nazir Ahmad's *Aiqama*. See also Firdous Azmat Siddique, 'Unnisavi Sadi ke Utradh men Muslim Vidwavo ki Istithiti', in *A Perspective of Indian History* ed. A.K. Sinha, p. 359.
35. The Najmul Akhbar, 8th April. 1887, child-marriage was common among Hindu and Muslim. Betrothals were made as soon as children were born, and some time even before their birth.
36. Opcit Firdous Azmat Siddique.
37. C.R. of 1891, p. 246, C.R. of 1881, p. 78. such as weaver and cotton carder ect.
38. C.R. of 1921 p. 103.
39. C.R. of 1891 p. 246.
40. C.R. of 1921 p. 103.
41. C.R. of 1911 p. 225 Child Marriage was a means devised to save girls from intertribal communism and marriage by capture.
42. Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 4:2 (1997) p. 269-70.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid
45. Report of the Age of Consent Committee, 1928-29, p-95
46. Firdous Azmat Siddiqui in *Aspects of Islam and Muslim Societies*, (ed.) Nadeem Hasnain, 2006, New Delhi. p. 155.
47. The Leader, Allahabad, 5 Dec. 1929, p. 13.

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- C.R. of India 1901, Alld. R. Burn 1902.
- C.R. of India 1911, Alld. E. A.H. Blunt 1912.
- C.R. of India 1921, Alld, E.H.H. Edye 1923.



# RATIONALE OF MODERNIZATION OF MADRASA EDUCATION IN INDIA

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**Abstract:** *Madrassa and maktab have been very important institutions of Muslim Societies in the promotion of education and knowledge. Apprehensive of 'Hindu intentions' visa vis Islam, Muslims set up a large number of madrasas and maktabas apart from the old ones and lesser number of secular educational institutions. No doubt madrasas played a very important role in promoting literacy and women's education at lower levels but could neither provide them livelihood nor helped in broadening their world view largely because of their out dated and obscurantist system of education. This paper takes a hard look at the various issues pertaining to the modernization of rationale behind this agenda.*

## I

### The Issue

The deprivation and backwardness among Muslims in comparison with non-Muslims in India have become a matter of serious concern at present. For it, one of the most ardently advocated reasons infers that after the partition of country in 1947, Indian Muslims became the victim of a Self Proclaimed Prophecy by assuming that a grave threat lies ahead to their faith and existence from Hinduism, the religion poles apart from Islam. With this mindset of imaginary apprehension and threat perception, Indian Muslims, by and large, preferred to enclave and exclude their community from the mainstream education and employment. They preferred to set up large number of their ancient educational institutions of *Madrassa* and *Maktab*. Undoubtedly, these institutions have played a pivotal role in sustaining the Islamic knowledge among the Indian Muslims but the education imparted here has proved to be of little relevance to fulfill the contemporary educational needs of Muslims in terms of providing competitive capabilities to get jobs, economic justice and equality of status. On account of low quality of educational attainment, vast majority of Indian Muslims could not have many options in employment market. The way out to them for sustenance was to learn the artisan based crafts and trade. In this way, Indian Muslims missed the bus

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to obtain equality through education during post partition period when immense socio-economic development opportunities were available. The net result is the fact that as on today Muslims are the least literate and least employed among all social groups in India.

On the plea of necessity to increase the mainstream education among Muslims, the state has been pursuing an orchestrated plan to intervene in Madrasa education to reform and redesign the system to make it modern and mainstream. In the New Education Policy, 1986, in its Programme of Action and Revised Plan of Action, 1992, emphasis was laid on the need to introduce modern subjects in Madrasas like Science, Mathematics, English, and Hindi. The Government of India has launched a special scheme of Madrasa Modernization since 1993. Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided to Madrasas for introducing the teaching of the modern subjects. But the scheme has evoked poor response from the Madrasas and seems to be languishing. For instance only 120 Madrasas did obtain the financial assistance under the scheme up to 1996, out of the total estimated 20,000 Madrasas in Uttar Pradesh. Thus, the Madrasa education system seems to have shown a cold response so far to the state initiatives of reforming it purportedly in the name of its modernization.

On the other hand, when the BJP led National Democratic Alliance assumed power at the Centre hot debate about Madrasa and Madrasa education cropped up in policy circles, press and academics. The debate is still a frontline issue because the government continues with its tirade of campaign to link the Madrasas not only with the educational backwardness of Muslims but vilifies the system as den or breeding ground of fundamentalists and shelter for ISI activists/agents and terrorists. The vilification is gradually becoming loud and shrill to the extent of reckoning the Madrasas as centres of grave risk to our national security and integrity. The four member Group of Ministers of Government of India headed by the Home Minister Mr. L.K. Advani released a report on reforming the National Security System on 23rd May 2001. The report has justified the validity of the Government intervention in Madrasa education by mentioning that funded by Saudi and Gulf sources many new Madrasas have come up all over the country in recent years and steps should be taken for providing increased facilities for their modernization. The Central Sector Scheme for giving financial assistance for modernization of Madrasa education should be strengthened. The report mentioned that a Central Advisory Board may be set up for Madrasa education instead of leaving this critical matter to different State level Advisory Boards.

It seems that crusade of the government against Madrasas has been continuing to concrete grounds of intervention to keep this institution of Muslims under its watchful eyes even by labeling it as the base of Islamic fundamentalism and ISI in India. But the large number of Muslims and non-Muslims ideologists and leaders perceive the state attempts to intervene in Madrasa education as deliberate and blatant agenda of saffron brigade to spread lies and canards day and day out about the Muslim educational institutions and as a part of greater strategy of Sangh Parivar to marginalize and subjugate the Muslims. Such Muslims and non-Muslims altogether reject the basis of government intervention in Madrasa education, as these people perceive that Madrasa education is meant for Islamic



theology and it has nothing to do with the mainstream education. At the same time, there are large numbers of people who find no relevance and sense in the way government justifies the need of intervention in Madrasa education but strongly argues that the Madrasa education must be qualitatively improved to bring it at par with the mainstream education so that those Muslim children who get Madrasa education are not educationally handicapped to compete in mainstream life. The number of such people who advocate the urgency of Madrasa modernization is increasing day by day but no framework of modernization of Madrasa education has been presented by any one so far that may be acceptable to the concerned parties and could be implemented.

In such paradoxical situations, the core issue of rationale of persistent governmental intervention in Madrasa education needs to be put to serious academic exercise by undertaking empirical and scientific scrutiny of the debate to uncover the truth. It is also to be examined whether Madrasa education needs modernization in view of its origin and orientation to impart Islamic education. If there are plausible reasons that necessitate urgency to reform the system, what and how an action plan can be drawn up that would really modernize the Madrasa education in India. The analysis is likely to dispel some of our uninformed assertions, flimsy impressions, mindsets and hearsays. The hypothesis which have become stereotyped that have been examined in this paper are (i) the substantial number of Muslim children is going to Madrasas for their education, (ii) the core of Madrasa education is Islamic teachings and the present curriculum is hardly relevant to fulfill the educational need of today's world, (iii) large number of Madrasa students leave their education without completing it, (iv) Madrasas have become the centres of Islamic fundamentalism that breed terrorism and harbor ISI agents, (v) the issue of the modernization of Madrasa education has assumed political overtone as neither the Muslim leaders nor the government are serious to reform the system for the educational development of the Muslims, (vi) and therefore, to provide quality education to Muslim children, modernization of Madrasa education is the need of the hour. However, before collating the above issues and notions with ground realities, it would be meaningful to understand the system of Madrasa education, its sustainability and the type of education it provides. But the sole aim in this paper is to generate a logical and rational debate on the question of modernization of Madrasa education in India based on scientific perspective and ground realities rather than on assumptions and prejudices.

## II

### History of Madrasa Education

Madrasa is an Arabic word which means an educational institution. The system was never meant for Islamic teachings to Muslims alone. It is believed that for the educational needs of the Muslims, the first Madrasa was established by Zia-ul-Mulk Tusi in 1019 A.D. that combined the teachings of Islam with the subjects of contemporary significance. In India, evolution of Madrasa education began with the establishment of small mosque schools established in Sind in the wake of Mohammad Bin Quasim's invasion in the early 8th



Century and then to the setting up Madrasas by Sultans in various parts of northern India. The fact is recorded that the Madrasas initially catered essentially to the educational needs of elite Muslims and non-Muslims who were close to the ruler and administration. Both religious and rational sciences such as medicine, logic, philosophy, chemistry etc. were taught in Madrasas at that time. With the state patronage, expansion in establishment of new Madrasas continued. Those who got Madrasa education, irrespective of their religion, could have opportunity to obtain jobs in king's court and in other state services. There are historical records to indicate that towards the end of eighteenth century, the Hindus also studied with Muslims in several Madrasas of Bengal. The reign of Akbar marked a new epoch for Madrasa education because the system incorporated the *Ulum-aqligah*-intellectual knowledge with religious teachings, by adding the subjects of contemporary significance like mathematics, history and geography. However, with the medium of teaching through alien languages of Arabic and Persian and emphasis on Islamic teachings, Madrasa system gradually became an enclave for education of Muslims in India. With the collapse of Mughal Empire and establishment of British rule in India, the Muslims, under the influence of Islamic fundamentalists, considered English language as a threat to Islam and identity of Muslims. Therefore, as an outcome of reaction the preference for Madrasa education as savior of Islam and 'Muslim culture' manifested strongly during colonial period. The most famous Madrasas of today like Darul Ulum Deoband were founded during the British period. These Madrasas inspired the further expansion of the system after independence. Thus, the main problem of Muslims in India could be a self-conceived threat perception and notional danger that the Islam has been perceived to be faced with. Over the years or decades, this perception helped to develop an attitude of exclusiveness and isolationist approach. The historical and psychological processes that have gone into the expansion of Madrasa education in India are the creation of reactionary nature of this exclusionist attitude. The Ulemas supported by the elite Muslims played a pivotal role in the expansion of Madrasas during British period, after independence and more so after 1970's. The Gulf oil boom of 1976 accentuated the growth of Madrasas when huge donations and expatriate worker's earnings could be easily available to strengthen and expand the Saudi Model of puritanic Islam across the world including India. The Madrasas were chosen as most suitable Muslim institution to further the Islamic theology and teachings based on *taqlid* (blind faith). Those who were either educated in Madrasas or having extreme orientation of Islamic doctrines grabbed the opportunity of getting Gulf and community donations. So, began the mushrooming of Madrasas in India. The majority of Muslims being poor were swayed by the propaganda of hardliner Ulemas of 'danger to Islam' and thought to protect the faith by advocating the irrelevance of mainstream education and need of Madrasa education for Muslims with the belief that Islam will remain protected and sustained. In this way, the Madrasa education that was initially secular assumed the communal color with the passage of time and continuing to expand and now one can observe its mushrooming in any of the Muslims populated area in India.



### III

#### **Mushrooming of Madrasas In Border Areas**

The total number of Madrasas functioning at present is difficult to know unless state-wise enumeration is carried out. Certain states like West Bengal has made the registration of Madrasas mandatory with the State Madrasa Board and several states have encouraged registration to allure for the state grants. Our observation points to the fact that the growth has been largely of the smaller Madrasas imparting education equivalent to the primary or junior level. The management of these smaller but growing Madrasas does not prefer the registration with the state authority as the community donations become easily and sufficiently available to run the institution without any other support. No survey has also been conducted so far by any agency to assess the number of Madrasas in the country. Despite it, the Minister of State for Home reported in the Parliament on March 19, 2002 that there were 31,850 Madrasas in the country and that 11,453 were in border areas. Unfortunately, the government has been slanderously linking the growth of Madrasas as breeder of terrorism in general and in border areas in particular without examining the increase in their numbers. In news magazine "The Week", Kartikeya Sharma, quoting intelligence agencies of India tell us that during the last five years preceding 2002, 89 new Madrasas came up in border districts of Siddharthnagar, Maharajganj, West Champaran, East Champaran, Sitamarhi, Madhubani, and Araria. In border areas of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, 88 new Madrasas were opened during the same period. In the 10 districts of Nepal bordering India, 41 new Madrasa also came up. No doubt, these absolute figures furnish a spice to malicious government propaganda of danger of growing number of Madrasas in border areas but absolutely lose the logic when area-wise and year wise figures of new Madrasas are analyzed. It becomes evident that less than 3 new Madrasas per year were opened up in the border districts of Bihar and around 4 per year in border areas of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. It could also be seen that less than one new Madrasa was opened up in each of the 10 districts of Nepal bordering India. Thus, we find that the growth of Madrasas has been much slower in border areas of our country than what one may observe in inland districts having sizeable Muslims population. Therefore, the vilified campaign of the government against the new Madrasas being established in border areas is absolutely false and fabricated.

### IV

#### **Levels of Madrasa Education**

Madrasa education has nothing to do with the study of theology alone. But throughout the world including India, Islamic studies have become the core of Madrasa education. At present Madrasas offer education from primary to post-graduate level. Broadly, there are two types of Madrasas in India. The first one is the large Madrasas or *Jamias*/Seminaries that specialize in teachings of advance Islamic theology though mainstream subjects are also taught. These Madrasas are the world famous centers of Islamic education in India

and enroll students from across the globe. Several aluminiferous scholars have been produced from here whose contribution has been well recognized. The prominent among them are the Dalum Uloom Nadwatul Ulema, Lucknow, Darul Uloom, Deoband, Saharanpur, Darul Uloom Khalila, Tonk, Rajasthan, Madrasa Ameeniah, Delhi and many more. The number of such Madrasas of excellence can be counted on tips but there are large and growing numbers of smaller Madrasas that have been set up generally by those who have education from famous ones, offer education up to primary or middle levels only. These smaller Madrasas are the cause of concern as they are assuming the place of mainstream education among Muslims. These smaller Madrasas are also not registered making it difficult to know their numbers. The Madrasa system generally offers the following levels of courses.

Standard of Education offered by the Madrasas

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Class Level</i>	<i>Equivalent to</i>
1.	Tahtania	Up to class V	Primary
2.	Faukania	VI to VIII	Junior High School
<b>Alia classes</b>			
3.	Munshi/Maulvi		
	(i) Munshi (Persian)	IX to X	High School
	(ii) Maulvi (Arabic)		
<b>Alim</b>			
4.	(i) Alim (Persian)	XI to XII	Intermediate
	(ii) Alim (Arabic)		
5.	Kamil	B.A.	Graduate
6.	Fazil	M.A.	Post Graduate

## V

### Madrasa Education and Muslims

The growth of Madrasas during 70's and thereafter has given rise to a stereotype and mindset that Muslims in India prefer Madrasa education to mainstream education and this is the sole reason for the educational backwardness of Muslims. The need of the hour is to examine this myth on the basis of ground realities because the eloquent crying over the communalities of Madrasa education has heightened to spread hatred against Muslims and brandishing the entire community as backward looking. The issue can be examined in three ways. One is to carry out a census of Muslim households to find out the schooling pattern. The other option is to estimate the number of children studying in Madrasas by taking the number of Madrasas reported by the government and multiplying with the average number of students generally found to be enrolled in Madrasa institution. The third option is to understand the schooling pattern of Muslim families whose children are studying in Madrasas because such families are mainly of poor Muslims who represent the majority of Indian Muslims. We have tried to examine the issue on the basis of second and third options.

The government has declared that a total number of 43,303 Madrasas were imparting education all through India by March, 2002. On an average, 100 students have been found to be studying in each Madrasa, taking into account the average enrollment in smaller as



well as large Madrasas together. If the average number of students enrolled is multiplied by the number of Madrasas, it becomes evident that more than 43 lakh students were getting Madrasa education during 2002. Certainly this estimate, if relied to be realistic to any extent, is mind boggling and baffling for any sensible person who is concerned about the educational development of Muslims. The figures also disclaim and discredit the popular belief of a large section of Muslims that only a small segment of Muslims children go for Madrasa education.

Let us further try to find out the schooling pattern in Muslim households whose children are studying in Madrasas. The analysis as given in Table 1 is based on the data collected from 502 households whose children were enrolled in Madrasas. The table reveals that around 36 per cent of all school going children in the age groups from 'below 6 years to 18 years and above' are found to be studying in Madrasas while 34 per cent are enrolled in mainstream schools/colleges. It is distressing to note that around 30 per cent of total boys and girls in the same age group do not study at all either in Madrasas or in mainstream schools. During initial years of schooling, more than half of the Muslim children have been found to be going to Madrasas. As the age increases, the number shows vertically a more declining tendency. It comes down to as low as of 7 per cent after attaining the age of 18 years. The percentage of Muslim students going to schools/colleges has shown variation from 31 per cent to 40 per cent up to the age of 18 years i.e., the age to complete intermediate level of mainstream education. Henceforth, percentage of students going to colleges declines to around 21 per cent. The trend further indicates that around 30 per cent of total Muslim children below six years of age do not go to Madrasas or schools at all. The proportion of such children remains around 11 to 16 per cent up to the age of 14 years. Beyond the age of 14 years, non-studying Muslim children increase substantially to the level of 72 per cent at the age of 18 years and above. The situation is such that Muslim girls lag far behind the boys in attending Madrasas as well as schools as the share of non-studying girls was found to be 88 per cent of total girls in the age group of 18 years and above while it is 66 per cent in case of boys. Thus, the existing status of schooling pattern in poor Muslim families indicates that (i) substantial number of their children are going to Madrasas for their education; (ii) sizeable number of their school-age children are not studying at all and (iii) vast majority of Muslim girls are being deprived of getting education. No doubt, these factors are likely to turn young Indian Muslims to be less knowledgeable and less competent in future. If this pattern is not reversed, Muslims will continue to remain trapped in catastrophe of vicious circle of educational backwardness and poverty and also there is no hope of improvement in the status of Muslim women in future as compared to their counterpart of other social groups in India.

## VI

### **Retention and Drop-out in Madrasa Education**

There can be no denying the fact that Madrasa education provides good grounding in Islamic theology, Arabic, Persian and Urdu to a student if he/she completes his/her education.



However, the existing status reveals that large numbers of Madrasa students are found to have left their education without completing even primary or secondary level. The enrolment of boys and girls in class I in 1989 to class VIII in 1996 in case of sample Madrasas was considered to examine the rate of retention and dropout. The calculation has been at the level of each class against the enrolment in class I. The analysis has been presented in Table 2. The table shows that retention is only 20 per cent and dropout is as high as 80 per cent at the aggregate level (boys and girls both) in the Madrasas that have come under the modernization programme of Govt. of India. The girls' retention is found to be five percentage points lower than of the boys. However, retention of boys remains lower than of girls in class-II and III but as the class level increases, more girls' dropout than boys. Thus, the system fails to provide a complete cycle of education to most of its students. The plausible reason may be the fact that Madrasa students lack the spirit of ambition and aim to make Madrasa education as their career goal. They join Madrasas mainly to learn the Quran and Islamic instructions. As soon as students learn basics of both, they find it not worthwhile to carry on their education and quit the system to learn some crafts or to do petty business. This observation gets corroboration from Table 2, which reveals sharp dropout after class-V in Madrasas.

## VII

### Syllabus In Madrasas

The general prejudice prevails that Madrasa curriculum is old, outdated and lacks awareness of the modern world. There can be no denying of the fact that curriculum in religion based institutions remains quite slow to adopt the social, economic and intellectual dynamism of the world because needed reforms are prohibited by the walls of religion. However, the emerging human needs in contemporary society bring about changes in a natural way, though the possibility remains that reforms may fall short off the required standard and system may remain obsolete and isolated. Such a natural phenomenon seems to have brought changes in Madrasa curriculum from time to time in India.

According to Ahmad (1996), development of Madrasa curriculum can be divided into four periods in India. In the first period between the 13th and 14th century A.D., great emphasis was laid on *Sarf-o-Nahu*, *Balaghat*, *Fiqh*, *Usule-Fiqh*, *Mantiq*, *Kalam*, *Tasawwuf*, *Tafseer* and *Hadith*. In the second phase starting from 15th century A.D., greater attention was given to teaching of Hadith. Physiology, Physics and Mathematics were added to the Madrasa curriculum before early eighteen century. Thereafter, Dars-i-Nizami system based on traditional rational sciences was introduced. With the passage of time, Dars-i-Nizami system lost its relevance. The curriculum remained unchanged for about next two decades till the late nineteenth century when a prominent Madrasa Darul Ulum Deoband introduced Social Sciences and English in its curriculum. The Madrasa syllabi remained stationary for many years after independence till recently when many Muslim organizations like All India Deeni Teleemi Council, the Milli Council, Jamait-ul-Ulema etc. came to the forefront of Madrasa education and for its revitalization. However, the situation as exists today reveals



that no significant reform could be brought about in the syllabus of Madrasas. The survey of sample Madrasas in Uttar Pradesh that received financial support from the Govt. of India in 1993-94 and onwards for modernization of curriculum indicated that emphasis continued on the teachings of Islamic doctrines and linguistics. It becomes evident from Table-3 that only 42 per cent of total sample Madrasa students were found to be studying Science followed by 57 per cent English, 62 per cent Hindi and 70 per cent Mathematics. In this way, much less than half of total Madrasa students were found to be studying Science that is the core of modern subjects. This is the situation in case of Madrasas that received financial assistance from the government. What will be the focus of teachings in case of non-registered smaller Madrasas can be well understood. It has been observed that emphasis is given on religious teachings at the initial levels of Madrasa education. The preceding analysis has revealed that large number of Madrasa students' dropout during initial years. Therefore, majority of the Madrasa students learn only basics of Islam and only a few of them who do not drop-out get the opportunity to learn modern subjects. Quite a few of the girls students get a chance to learn modern subjects in comparison with the boys as the rate of drop-out in case of girl students has been found to be higher as against boys. Thus, it becomes clear that with the teaching of current curriculum, Madrasa students are bound to remain short of skills, isolated and marginalized from the mainstream of Indian society.

### VIII

#### **Madrasas As 'Centres of Terrorists'**

There has been a well-orchestrated campaign in India at present to dub Madrasas as centres of Islamic fundamentalism to breed, harbor and train the terrorists. The emergence of dreaded terrorists from Madrasas like Taliban in Afghanistan, the so called Mujahideen in Kashmir and Islamic zealots in Chechnya and at other places on the globe acts as an endorsement of distrust and suspicion to sustained propaganda that is being conveyed to general public. To give credence to such fanciful hypothesis based on mistaken assumptions and misplaced emphasis is highly dangerous to the survival of secular fabric of our society. No Madrasa has ever been named or taken to court, no terrorist has ever been found in their premises; no text has been found which teaches terrorism. Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, Ex. Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the state of largest Muslim population in India, despite his allegation that several Madrasas were being used as ISI base, failed to name even a single such Madrasa. The top police officials of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, from time to time, acknowledged that Madrasas in border areas are neither the centres of ISI nor they have ever participated till date in any anti-national activities. While taking over charge as the Director General of Uttar Pradesh Police, Mr. VKV Nair in a Press Conference on June 29, 2003 replied to a question of a Journalist on the alleged role of Madrasas serving as training camps for ISI agents that "during the year long stint as ADG intelligence, I did not come across a single instance where any such activity at a Madrasa would have come to light." The linking of Madrasa with terrorism and anti-nationalism is certainly a political ploy with an unmistakably political objective. The charges are absolutely untenable. Those who understand the Madrasa



system know that it has become the institution of Muslims, for the Muslims and by the Muslims with focus on Islamic teachings in a centuries old fashion. The Madrasa students may remain naïve, ignorant and indifferent to the happenings of contemporary society. More so when a Madrasa is established in any area, non-Muslims generally look down upon it as a mysterious place with mysterious students wearing uncommon dress, sometimes with an alien cap and headgears/ scarves. Since non-Muslims do not study, work or interact there, bias is developed into stereotype and mindset against the Madrasa system that assumes political overtone while reality remains shrouded. Given the nature of Madrasas, these could be accused of being the enclaves of ignorance and isolation from the view point of Western education and culture. During the course of study –Evaluation of Madrasas modernization programme in U.P.—the author visited many Madrasas located in different parts of U.P. and spent considerable time during teaching hours to observe the on goings therein. No instance of communal instigation or hatred was noticed when *Mudarris* or *Imams* gave vocation. They were found to be wayward and inept as far as oration on different issues of Muslims were concerned. Another, misleading and mischievous campaign of comparing the Madrasas of India with their counterparts in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been floated recently with political stridency. Perhaps the rhetoric requires clarification here. The aim and role of Islamic teachings in India are largely to safeguard and sustain the Muslim identity in the midst of expectation and fear of majority cultural onslaught. On the contrary radical Islamic doctrines have been taught to students in Afghanistan and Pakistan to arouse sentiments to capture state power in their own country and export radical Islamic ideology to other countries. The logical corollary of situation in both the countries is the fact that Madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan bred Taliban who captured State power in Afghanistan and led to its destruction. Lakhs of students studying in Pakistani Madrasas are being brain washed with dry and rambling discourses to establish a Taliban model of State in Pakistan and arouse anti-India sentiments. Even the Pakistan President in his interviews has admitted that some Madrasas in Pakistan have indeed become breeding grounds of extremists. Thus, the comparison of Madrasas in India with that of Pakistan and Afghanistan is logically false and seems to have been fabricated to defame the Indian Muslim community. The Madrasas in India are serving the religious educational needs of Muslims while Madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan have degenerated into political contraposition.

## IX

### What the above Revealed?

The gist of the above findings indicate that Madrasa education has assumed the place of mainstream education for substantial number of Muslims in India. The core of Madrasa education is still religious. The system has been a failure to provide complete cycle of education to sizeable number of its students. No truth has been found in Central Government's propaganda of mushrooming of Madrasas in border areas of the country. The Central government's claim of Madrasas becoming the centres of anti-India activities



have, time and again, been refuted by the police official's of states where Muslims population is sizeable. Thus, the efforts of the Muslim community in sustaining the system seem to be going down the drain but the rationales extended by the Central government to intervene in the system for its modernization are absolutely unfounded and baseless. Therefore, Muslims have become skeptical to accept the Central government's moves. The experience so far reveals that neither the Madrasa management nor Muslims in general accepted and approved the government largesse in the name of modernization. Rather, the Central government's initiatives have evoked strong resistance from Muslim leaders. The refusal of Madrasas to accept grants-in-aid under its Modernization Programme is also the testimony of rejection of Government mode of intervention in the name of modernization. Though the fact is absolutely true that there is utmost need to overhaul Madrasa education to make it equally efficient like that of mainstream education but the Central government's efforts in this direction have done more harm than good so far.

## X

### Understanding Modernization of Madrasas

Now it is time for Muslims in India to introspect, soul searching and stock taking the situation that necessitates modernization of Madrasas. The short sightedness, aversion and apathy of Ulemas and a few of Muslim leaders to modernization and secularization have kept the issue of qualitative restructuring of Madrasa education elusive and inconclusive over the decades. One of the crucial reasons has been the fact that those who oppose reforms in Madrasa education seem to have not given serious thought to the problem. They have misunderstood the meaning, scope and purpose of such modernization and failed to learn the reforms brought about by the scholars of their own community in the past and take lessons from the reformist movements in several North African, West Asian and South East Asian Muslim countries like Turkey etc. The Muslims should understand that prescription of Madrasa modernization does not recommend complete replacement of curriculum of all existing Madrasas with mainstream subjects. The existing Madrasas in India are to be classified in three categories. (i) Primary Madrasas which offer basic education, (ii) senior secondary Madrasas, offering education equivalent to 10+2 level and (iii) Madrasas or Jamias of higher learning. The Jamias are big and famous institution of higher Islamic teachings equivalent to a University like Dar-ul-ulum, Deoband, Dar-ul-ulum Nadwat-ul-ulema, Lucknow, Madrasa Islamiya Shams-ul-Huda, Patna, Jamia Niazamiya, Hyderabad, Madrasa-i-Aliya, Rampur and several others in different parts of the country. Such Jamias are the symbol of our national pride and have been internationally acknowledged as Indian institutions of repute in Islamic theology. The role these large Madrasas play to preserve and pass on the great Islamic knowledge to the coming generation of Muslims to sustain their religion and cultural identity is unquestionably great. Their role in freedom struggle of the country has been well recognized and documented. There is absolutely no sense and need to intervene in such great centers of Islamic learning. But there are thousands of smaller Madrasas below Jamia level across the country. These smaller



Madrasas are not to be allowed to follow the lines of Jamias or bigger Madrasas in terms of curriculum and teachings because while Jamias offer specialized Islamic education to relatively smaller number of students, Madrasas below Jamias cater to the lakhs of Muslim students and over a period of time, has assumed the role of alternative or substitute of mainstream schools for Muslim children. Therefore, the plan of Madrasas modernization should cover all those smaller Madrasas that have emerged as an important alternative to mainstream schools for the Muslims in India.

## XI

### **Plan of Madrasa Modernization**

Let us be clear that what is to be modernized in Madrasas. The general understanding is that curriculum prescribed in Madrasas is needed to be replaced with the curriculum prescribed in mainstream schools to include modern subjects like science, mathematics, social studies, general knowledge etc. meaning thereby that a uniformity in curriculum is to be ensured between Madrasa and mainstream education. However, the replacement of curriculum and books of Madrasas with mainstream schools has been strongly opposed by the Ulemas and Muslim leaders on the ground that in school textbooks particularly those of history and general knowledge anti Islamic sentiments are advocated. The lessons are based on Hindu mythology, which a Muslim child need not know. During the course of study, author had extensive discussion with the office bearers of the Deeni Taleem Council, a Lucknow based organization of Muslims, with the aim to establish and organize Madrasas in U.P. They strongly resented and opposed any move by the government to prescribe mainstream books in Madrasas on the pretext of modernization. They reported that Deeni Taleem Council is trying to evolve its own curriculum for Madrasas. No doubt, such efforts of Muslim organizations are to be appreciated and be taken in positive form, but too much emphasis to develop a new and abstract curriculum for Madrasas may not make the Madrasa students as enlightened as they are required to be for career opportunities and worldly wisdom. Muslim children are to be made to face the ground realities and cold facts of life and Muslims should abandon the fixed ideas that nothing is to be taken from non-believers and even the good of non-Muslims, should be avoided. Muslim need to adopt, modify and tamper with pragmatism, own ideas as well as the knowledge of others. Therefore, it seems relevant and rational to adopt the curriculum of mainstream education system while going for modernization of Madrasas. Madrasa education should be rejuvenated in such a form that it should not remain reserved for Muslims alone but Hindu, Sikh and Christian children may also study therein. The perception that Madrasas are religious institutions is to be given a back stage. We may learn the lesson from a Madrasa in Gopalganj, Bihar where about 70 Hindu children are studying at present. It is this Madrasa, which created headlines last year when a Samajwadi Party member Vidya Bhushan Singh sent two of his grandsons to study in this Madrasa of Gopalganj. The Muslims must also draw lessons and inspiration from the Christian community in India who has pioneered in the establishment of convent schools all through the country. These convent schools have become the first choice for



most of the non-Christian parents because of the quality of education provided there. The fact is that these convents are managed by Churches. The priest of the Church is generally made principal of these Convents/Schools. These convents also provide a substantial knowledge of Christianity to its students but no one objects simply because the education provided therein is perfectly relevant according to the needs of the time. The same should also happen in case of Madrasa education all over India. It can be so when Muslims understand the need of the hour, i.e. when circumstances change, we must also change.

Given the predominant status of Madrasa education among Muslims in India and the nature of its old and outdated curriculum, the task of modernization of Madrasas should no longer be delayed and deferred. But the core question is how wishful thinking can be transformed into reality. Should the plan of modernization be prepared and implemented by the Central Government or the respective state governments should take initiative in this regard? The initiative may also be collaborated with the management of famous Madrasas or (Jamias), Muslim organizations, and Muslim religious and political leaders. As far the present move of central government to intervene in Madrasa education under the pretext of its modernization is concerned, it is precluded with mistrust and suspicion of the system itself. Therefore, Muslims will remain skeptical to endorse and accept the present central government initiatives in this regard. The experience so far suggests that neither the Madrasa management nor the Muslims in general have accepted and approved the central government largesse in the name of modernization. Rather, the central government initiatives have evoked strong resistance from Muslim leaders. The recent proposal of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India to constitute a Central Madrasa Board will serve no purpose. Besides the problem is that many of the religious and political leaders of Muslims do not seem to be ready to relent on the core issue of restructuring the self-conceived objectives of Madrasas i.e. providing mainly the religious instructions to Muslim children as well as preparing the religious functionaries that the Muslim community may need tomorrow. Though they fail to understand and refuse to concede that Muslims do not require such a large number of religious functionaries that are being produced in Madrasas.

Therefore, in the given circumstances, state governments are in a better position to step in for the Modernization of Madrasa education in their respective states. The state governments can be very effective in this matter because of their proximity with the Madrasa system and the people who manage it. The involvement of State Government sounds reasonable as education comes under the State's jurisdiction. The best course of action on the part of the state governments would be to bring a legislation to take over all the Madrasas offering education up to intermediate level and prescribe the curriculum of the mainstream education. The curriculum should also include Islamic studies in each class, providing opportunity to those students who wish to pursue higher studies in Islamic theology but at the same time majority of the Madrasa students would be made educationally competent at par with the mainstream students. However, in the present political scenario any political party in power may not dare to take such a step. The other course of action could be, which seems rational, that state governments should take initiative in this regard in consultation



and co-operation with liberal and progressive Muslim intelligentsia/organizations with pious proposals and not with any elusive or hidden motives. The State Government may constitute a committee comprising of enlightened intellectuals of Muslim Community, members of prominent Madrasas (Jamias), representatives of Organizations associated with Madrasa education, scholars of the Islamic Studies Departments of prominent universities and from the management of Madrasas that are to be modernized. The committee may be given a time frame to review the existing curriculum and suggest suitable modifications. All such Madrasas, which offer education up to and equivalent to senior secondary level (10+2 level), must be asked to register with the Madrasa Boards of respective states. It should be made mandatory for all such Madrasas to implement newly designed curriculum.

The Government of Uttar Pradesh has taken a very positive and practical step for modernization of Madrasa education in the state. It has set up a committee of experts under the chairmanship of Delhi's Jamia Hamdard Vice-chancellor Mr. Siraj Hussain, a U.P. cadre IAS officer to revise and bring uniformity in the curriculum of Madrasas under State's Arabic/Persian Madrasa Examination Board, Allahabad. The committee is to seek suggestions from experts and scholars of prestigious institutions like Aligarh Muslim University, Banaras Hindu University, Lucknow and Allahabad Universities besides Dar-ul-ulum, Nadwatul-ulema, Lucknow and Darul-uloom, Deoband. Let us wait and watch the outcome. However, the efforts should continue in the direction till the Madrasa education is reformed. The efforts are to be intensified that Madrasa education emerges as an alternative or substitute of formal education but in no way inferior to mainstream system.

## XI

### **Modernization of Madrasas: Why Oppostion?**

Some of the present day vocal Muslim ideologists and leaders are burdened with the legacy of Islamic fundamentalism and their move to equip Muslim community to confront contemporary socio-economic realities are generally short sighted and lack long term perspective. They refuse to sense and accept the compelling needs of their own community to modernize and what is conducive to the welfare of Muslim masses such as the expansion of bounds of science, technology and learning. For them, core of Madrasa modernization must remain religious and its modernization or secularization within a measurable limit. According to their doctrine, modernization of Madrasa education only means introduction of some elementary courses in languages/subjects like Hindi, English, Arithmetic, Geography, History and Social Studies so that if a Madrasa students wishes to leave in midstream, he may do so to join mainstream educational institutions. The logical corollary is the fact that even today Muslim leaders who become champions to show the path to their community are not willing to traverse beyond the trajectories of Islamic fundamentalism and centuries held mind sets. Let us put a question to these leaders how a Madrasa student can join mainstream school if he/she has studied only elementary or limited course in mainstream subjects? Moreover, why any mainstream institution will enroll such half-



baked students? How can a large number of Muslim children who study in Madrasas become engineers, doctors, scientists, computer professionals etc., if they do not study the core subject of science that does not figure in Madrasa restructuring plan of these leaders? Indeed, propagation of such ideology is as dangerous as that of majority communalism and the need of the hour is to make serious introspection over the issue, lest the Muslims are pushed further into socio-economic catastrophe and beleaguement.

While several of such Muslim politicians and reformers propose rejuvenation of Madrasa education in such a biased and fixed manner, they fail to comprehend the mood of their own community which aspires to see Madrasa education being modernized in such a form that becomes capable of enabling the Muslims to compete with non-Muslims. The author during the course of the study Evaluation of Madrasa Modernization Programme in U.P., had organized Focus Group Discussions (FGD's) with several Muslims to solicit their opinions about the issue of Madrasa modernization. Their views as reported in the study are: (i) modernization of Madrasa education is very essential and all out efforts are required in this direction, (ii) while learning theology, it is essential to learn science and technology also, (iii) Madrasa education should be restructured in such a way that Madrasa students become capable of getting admission in schools and vice-versa, (iv) there is need of emphasis on those subjects like science etc. which are relevant from the view point of today's needs.

The feelings of the Muslim community emerging from the above indicate the fact that Muslims masses are in favor of modernization of Madrasa education and they seem to be supportive and aspirant of it. Moreover, some of the Madrasa teachers were also interviewed to understand their mind on the issue. The views expressed by them were classified according to the rank of importance assigned by the respondents. The views in order are (i) Madrasa education should be modernized, (ii) science laboratories and sports facilities should be provided to Madrasas, (iii) library facility should be increased, (iv) salaries of Madrasa teachers should be enhanced to the level of Government school teachers and (v) technical/vocational courses should be added. Similarly, a total of 380 Madrasa students were also interviewed to get their viewpoint on the modernization of the system. Out of the total, 48 per cent reported that curriculum needs to be changed in Madrasas to match with that of mainstream schools. 22 per cent and 27 per cent expressed the view that academic session and books should be similar. A very high proportion of around 86 per cent of the total students desired for inclusion of professional courses in Madrasa curriculum. On the whole, the desire to reform the system reflects from the views of Madrasa students. Hence modernization of Madrasa education, as field realities indicate, is being desired, approved and aspired by the Muslim community, Madrasa teachers and its students while some of the Muslim leaders still disapprove and dispel it. The time has come that Muslims must endeavor to change all that have lost relevance with the passage of time. The need of the hour is that Muslims must ponder over what Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has said, "greatest hindrance to human intellectual progress is unquestioning acceptance of traditional beliefs and the foundations of beliefs should be on knowledge not on *taqlid* (blind faith) and inheritance". Is it not the Quran, which declared: 'God changes not what is in people, until

they change what is in them' and why the Prophet called for the Muslims to go as far as China to acquire knowledge?

**Table 1**  
**Schooling Pattern of Muslim Boys and Girls**

Age Group (Year)	Studying in Madrasas			Studying in Schools			Non-Studying		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Below 6	41.12	30.30	35.92	22.43	40.40	31.07	36.45	29.30	30.01
6-10	58.45	43.21	51.20	32.88	43.21	37.79	8.67	13.58	11.01
11-14	51.40	41.91	46.96	38.07	36.79	37.47	10.53	21.24	15.57
15-18	35.42	14.65	28.65	40.00	41.38	40.45	24.58	43.97	30.90
18 & Above	9.09	1.15	6.76	25.36	10.34	20.94	65.55	88.51	72.30
Total	39.07	30.98	35.74	33.03	36.60	34.50	37.90	32.42	29.76

N.B.: Total Sample of Students=502 including 277 boys and 225 girls.

Source: Based on the data obtained from the sample Madrasas.

**Table 2**  
**Retention and Dropouts in Madrasas**

Class	Retention against Class I			Drop-out Against Class I		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
I	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
II	83.80	92.16	87.07	16.20	7.84	12.93
III	75.59	79.03	76.95	24.41	20.97	23.05
IV	70.66	70.35	70.54	29.34	29.65	29.46
V	65.01	63.93	64.59	34.99	36.07	35.41
VI	30.63	30.72	30.67	69.37	69.28	69.33
VII	27.43	25.19	26.55	72.57	74.81	73.45
VIII	22.35	17.41	20.41	77.65	82.59	79.59

Source: Based on the data obtained from sample Madrasas.

**Table 3**  
**Madrasa Students Studying Modern Subjects**

Subjects	Boys	Girls	All
Science	45.55	37.68	42.26
Mathematics	84.21	49.39	69.64
English	63.90	47.25	56.94
Hindi	74.69	44.73	62.15

Source: Based on the data obtained from sample Madrasas.



## NOTES

[I feel highly obliged to Mr. Noor Mohammad of the Indian Administrative Services for sharing his views on the issue of Madrasa Modernisation. However, I am alone responsible for the views expressed in this paper]

The author was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India to conduct an evaluation of Madrasa Modernization Programme in Uttar Pradesh in 1998.

Mr. Syed Shahabuddin, Ex-M.P. has expressed his serious concern over the recent Central Government initiative to bring Madrasas under Government regulation. He expresses apprehension that Government is trying to throttle Madrasas in the name of National Security. For detail, download his article from [www.milligazette.com/file:/IA:\16.htm](http://www.milligazette.com/file:/IA:\16.htm)

It is believed that the first Madrasa was established by Ziya-ul-Mulk Tusi in 1019 AD. However, other scholars also argued that Madrasa movement began in second half of tenth century AD in the Islamic World.

A study conducted by Dr. S. Navalakha of the Institute of Economic Growth has estimated that the proportion of elite Muslims in the total population of Muslims in India during 1971 was 11.2 per cent.

*Balaghat* means rhetoric

*Fiqh*-The term means Islamic jurisprudence. The term is used to denote knowledge, understanding or comprehension.

*Usule-Fiqh* means the principles of Islamic jurisprudence or law.

*Mantiq* means logic or reasoning.

*Kalam* is used as Islamic scholastic theology on dialectics.

*Tasawwuf*-The term used to denote Islamic doctrines.

*Tafseer*: Exegesis of Holy Quran.

*Hadith*: Sayings of Prophet not available in Quran but accepted as a source of Islamic Law.

*Dars-e-Nizami* was Madrasa curriculum prepared by Mulla Nizamuddin in 1748. The curriculum comprised of grammar and etymology, syntax rhetoric, logic, philosophy, mathematics, Islamic Law and other sciences. The curriculum comprised of selective studies of authoritative texts and remained very popular for a very long period.

*Deeni Talim* means religious education.

After 9/11, WTC attack, the President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf hesitantly admitted that some Madrasas in Pakistan have indeed become breeding ground of extremists.

Many scholars have attempted to prove that there is absolutely a dissimilarity between the Madrasas in India and Pakistan because of the type of society and priorities in both the countries. For more detailed explanation see Wasim Ahmad's Article, *Psychology of Education*, EPW, March 25-31, 2000. Qamaruddin, Director (Projects), Hamdard Education Society and former Reader at NCERT has argued the point logically which has been quoted by Abhishek G. Bhaya in his article entitled "Modernizing Madrasas" in the *Times of India*, October 5, 2001, Lucknow.

M.J. Akhtar has outlined the State Government of U.P.'s Scheme of Madrasa Modernization. For detail, download the website: [www.milligazette.com/Archives/01-10-2000/Art 11.htm](http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/01-10-2000/Art 11.htm).

Mr. Kartikeya Sharma in *The Weekly* news magazine has tried to prove in vain that large number of Madrasas particularly in border areas have become the centres of terrorists.

The editorial of the Magazine 'The Muslim News' dated 1-15 June, 2002 has well documented the efforts of the Central Government and Sangh Parivar to malign and defame Madrasas in the country.

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# ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF NIZAMUL MULK TUSI

Amir M. Nasrullah

**Abstract:** *This paper deals with the historical background and administrative and political philosophy of Nizamul Mulk Tusi. He belongs to a school which combined the Turko-Persian political wisdom with the Islamic ideals. Credit also goes to him for discovering the general laws of socio-political organization on the basis of human nature and social, economic and spiritual dynamics of group life. The paper also attempts to compare his ideas with those of some other European and Muslim philosophers.*

## Introduction

It may be recalled that the early republican spirit of Islam was superseded by dynastic monarchies and during the Umayyad and Abbasid rule the absolute monarchs had usurped the office of the *Khilafat* or *Imamat*<sup>1</sup>. Under this new situation Muslim intellectuals thought more about securing a good government, which may be ready *Shariah*<sup>2</sup> into practice rather than exerting themselves or setting up a legitimate *Imam* or *Khilafat* as demanded by the Republican democratic spirit of the classical Islam. This general trend of Muslim political thinking gradually crystallized during the early Abbasid period and displayed a spirit of accommodation and compromise. Modern oriental scholars, such as Rosenthal claim that at least three such trends can be delineated in the medieval period of Islamic history. The first was represented by the philosopher, such as *Ibn Sina*<sup>3</sup>, *Ibn Abu Bajja*<sup>4</sup> and *Ibn Abu Rushd*<sup>5</sup> who tried to combine the Greek utopia of an ideal state with that of the Islamic concept of *Khilafat*. The second trend was brought out by the Muslim jurist-theologians, such as *Imam Abu Yusuf*<sup>6</sup>, *Al-Mawardi*<sup>7</sup>, *Al-Baghdadi*<sup>8</sup>, *Al-Ghazzali*<sup>9</sup> and *Ibn Abu-Taimiyah*<sup>10</sup>, which emphasized the need of putting the law or *Shariah* into practice and experimental willingness to recognize as *Imam* whoever reasonably fulfilled the requirements of understanding the law and was ready to put in to the practice as demanded of the *Shariah*. The prominent Turkish-Persian administrators and statesmen to combine Turko-Persian political wisdom with the Islamic ideals advocated the third trend. It is represented by Kai-

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kaus<sup>11</sup>, Nizamul Mulk Tusi and others, whereas in later times Ibn Khaldun<sup>12</sup> and Shah Wali Ullah<sup>13</sup> tried to discover the general laws of socio-political organizations on the basis of human nature, social, economic and spiritual dynamics of group life.

This article tries to discuss critically the political and administrative philosophy of Nizamul Mulk Tusi. It also attempts to compare his thinking with the thinking of some other European and Muslim philosophers.

### **Brief life history of Nizamul Mulk Tusi**

It was the reign of Alp Arslan and Sultan Malik Shah who ruled from 1074 to 1092 that the Empire was really governed by one of the greatest men of the century and that is Nizamul Mulk. His full name is Khwaja Abu Ali Hasan b. Ali. b. Ishaq, better known in the history as Nizamul Mulk Tusi. He was born at Nuqan a suburb of Tus in 1017. At school Tusi had two fellow students who later became two of the most prominent men of his time, the great poet and savant of Persia, Umar Khayyam and the founder of the *Batiniyah* sect of the *Hashshashin* or the Assassins, Hassan Ibn Sabbah al Humairi al Qummi. Tusi got his first job at Ghaznavi's court. But he flew from Ghazni due to some reasons and worked with Seljuqs. Alp Arslan's father, Chaghri Beg Dawud, first appointed him as *Katib* or writer; after that he raised step by step till he became joint-Minister and after the death of Hamidul-Mulk he succeeded the latter.

After the death of the chief Minister Hamidul Mulk he was appointed the prime Minister of the Seljuq Empire. And one of the ornaments of political history of Islam, Ibn Khalikan says that for the twenty years of Malik Shah's reign he had all the power concentrated in his hand whilst the sultan had nothing to do but sit on the throne or enjoy the chase.

Besides being one of the most successful administrators and statesman, he was also a great patron of learning. In his early years of *Wazarat* or ministership, he founded the famous Nizamiyah University of Baghdad (1065-67) and similar seminaries at Nishapur and other towns of the empire. After a long and successful career he died in 1092 as one of the first great victims of the assassin's knife.

### **The Famous Works of Nizamul Mulk Tusi**

In 1082, Kai-kaus wrote *Qabus Namah* or *Nasihah Namah* on the line of Jahily's *Kitab al-Taj* in the form of apprehension or pithy maxims. Tusi's work *Siyasat Namah* written 10 years later, brought the same trend to combinations. This remarkable work was composed in reply to a question raised and circulated by Nizamul Mulk's master Malik Shah requesting the statesmen of his empire to apprise him of as to the essentials of the good government and any means needed to realize it in the actual human life.

Among the works attributed to him are two political realities, one *Siyasat Namah* or *Siyarul Muluk* and the other is *Majmaul-Wasaya* or *Dasturul-Wazara*, which was probably compiled long after his death, but which has been judged representative of his opinions on administration. The first one was written for his master Malik Shah and the other is addressed to his son Fakhrul Mulk. Both are written in the familiar style of the time, in which each principle is stated in aphorism and then illustrated with a large number of anecdotes.



The *Siyasat Namah* consists of 50 chapters in which the opening few sentences of each chapter contains his actual advice, the bulk of the rest consists of anecdotes where are as often the great kings of pre-Islamic Persia as also Muslim Caliphs, *Amirs* and Sultans. These are then buttressed by Prophetic tradition and *Quranic* verses suitable to the topics under discussion. In this work the main problem before him being harmonizing Islamic principles with Perso-Turkish political thought and practice, the whole is permeated with Islam, and its specific religious color as such more marked than the *Qabus Namah*. His implicit faith in Islam and deep respect for the ability of the Perso-Turkish practical wisdom sometimes lead him to self-contradiction.

Nevertheless, drawing on his store of thirty years of experience as the chief government executive of an extensive empire and his exploit of rulers, statesmen and servants, he sets out elaborately and entertainingly what good government should be like”.

### ***Nizamul Mulk Tusi* and his views on Administration and Politics**

*Nizamul Mulk Tusi* gave his opinion on administration and politics in the above writings. He wrote about sovereignty, characteristics of a good administrator, organizational structure of government, recruitment of the government officials, espionage system, ambassadors, influence of women on politics and administration and duties of the ministers etc. that are discussed elaborately below.

### **Sovereignty or Headship of the State**

It may be remembered that the power and glory of the Abbasid *khilafat* had expended itself long before the arrival of the Seljuk's on the political scene of Baghdad. Far from being the protector of the Muslim community, the caliph had become a mere bearer of name, a symbol of the unity of the Muslim community, to be protected by the powerful Sultans. Like their predecessor Bawayhids, the Seljuk's came to Baghdad to protect the *khilafat*. The first two Seljuk Sultans did not live in Baghdad but exercised their authority through a military resident. Malik Shah had moved his capital to Baghdad in the winter of 1091, which reduced the caliphate more than ever into a perphat that moved at the will of the sultan, a puppet beducked in all the regalia of high office. The name of the Sultan was mentioned in the *khutba* with that of the caliph. In other words, when *Nizamul Mulk* wrote his *Siyasat Namah* in 1091-92, the Sultan had completely clipped the caliph and exercised all the real powers of the state. The office of the caliph had become a pious institution bearing a glorious name full of empty sounds.

Moreover *Nizamul Mulk* wrote the *Siyasat Namah* in response to a questionnaire circulated by Sultan Malik Shah among his leading Umara requesting them to give him the benefit of their experience and wisdom in perfecting the administration of his realm.

In writing this book, *Nizamul Mulk* was therefore neither required to indulge in the luxury of abstract thought like that of *al Farabi* nor was he called upon to justify the legitimacy of the *khilafat* like *al-Mawardi*, but to give concrete suggestions to improve the administration of the sultanate especially that of Malik Shah under the prevailing



circumstances of his time. In his eyes therefore it was the Seljuk Sultan and not the Abbasid caliph, who was defender of the faith and the ruler of the realm.

Hence the question of sovereignty was a simple matter for him. He says, "God selects some one from among the men and gives over to him the charge of the well-being of the world and for comfort and tranquility of the human race after duly furnishing him with the arts of government. He also makes him responsible for the peace and security of the land and endows him with all the necessary prestige in order that God's creation may live in peace and plenty and that justice and security may become order of the day". Thus to both Malik Shah and *Nizamul Mulk*, sovereignty is a trust bestowed by God Almighty to which it is the duty of mankind to pay allegiance. But it is also a duty, which the sovereign must accomplish towards his subjects.

Deeply concerned with the age of violence which overwhelmed Asia in the 11th and 12th centuries *Nizamul Mulk* viewed kingship as a directly chosen office for the protection and well being of mankind, which calls for general obedience under the duress of divine wrath. He therefore deals with the question of kingship or sovereignty as a most natural process which is its own justification and which needs no further argument.

But as he was principally concerned with good government after a few remarks on sovereignty he passes talks on to its functional aspects and says in the line of *Mawardi's* arguments that "it is the duty of a leader to repose confidence on such of his subjects as deserve it and to delegate them a part of his duties in proportion to their merit and worth". This delegation of authority, however, should not divide the ruler from the power rather for saving the country from troubles and chaos he must always stand guard as the repository of all powers. He is therefore advised that while delegating powers to his subordinates, he should issue instructions to all high officers of the state and enjoin them to treat the people well and extract only the dues prescribed by the law of the land.

For only such kings have been successful in their administration that have not given up the principles bequeathed to them by their predecessors. Here he virtually anticipated *Jean Bodin*<sup>14</sup>, *Hobbes*<sup>15</sup> and other modern European thinkers who, five hundred years later, insisted on endowing the sovereign with full powers for saving the country from troubles and turmoil.

### Characteristics of a Good Administrator

He warns against the facile idea of his time that a man becomes less responsible for his acts after he has been crowned a king. For he should remember that, "God is pleased with a king only when he treats his people with kindness and justice". In the same way, he should make his officials treat the people likewise and make them ever careful for the good of the state.

Turning to the courtiers he reproduces the saying of the famous saint Sufian al Thauri that the best of kings is he who keeps company with the learned and the worst of the learned is he who keeps company with the kings.

As to the legislation he clearly states that the ruler should try to rule in accordance with the laws laid down in the *Quran* and *Sunnah*. But besides (in the best Turkish and Persian tradition) the king is empowered to issue proclamation or *farman* according to the need of the hour and anyone who shows disregarded or disrespect to these proclamations, should



be punished forthwith whether he is a prince or a commoner. Such proclamations should not, however, be based on personal whims of the king but should be based on the advice of man possessing sound views and wide experience.

### **Organizational Structure of Government**

The sovereign should always be engaged in building up security and prosperity of the state which immortalise his name in this world, brings him reward in the next world and keeps the people happy.

And as sovereignty is a great gift of God, it is incumbent on the rulers to seek pleasure of God and in this matter of sovereignty the pleasure of God lies in the welfare of the creature and establishment of justice and equity among them. Moreover the spring of ruler's strength and prosperity lie in the happiness of the people alone.

Furthermore the ruler must remember that on the Day of Judgment he will be called to account for his dealings with the people who were put under his charge. So it is necessary that the sovereign should keep two days in the week for hearing complaints of the people with his own ears without any intermediary.

When he entrust any work to the revenue officers he should instruct them to treat the people well, not realize more than the due and not to demand anything in advance.

He must also keep himself aware of the activities of ministers and to see that they are performing their duties in the right manner. Because, the welfare of the king and that of the country depends upon the goodness and badness of the ministers. It is on account of the treachery of the ministers of Dara that Alexander defeated him.

The fief-holders should be made fully aware that they have no power over the people except realizing the rightful duties. The people should be allowed to go to their government heads and directly to the kingdom of the Sultan and not theirs.

The king should always uphold the rights of the weak and transfer the fief-holders and revenue officers from place to place every two or three years.

### **Recruitment of the Government Officials**

According to *Tusi*, the king must follow the following instructions at the time of recruiting the government officials to smoothen his administration.

#### ***Qudi***

*Qudi* should be appointed from among those people who are learned, God fearing and innocent. Their all needs should be fulfilled so that there remains no reason for corruption because they have power over life and property of the people. The king should keep himself abreast of the behavior of all the *Qudi*'s and the officers, and influential people must strengthen the hand of the *Qudi* and must make everyone appear before the *Qudi* whenever summoned.

#### ***Imam***

The king must also take care of appointing learned and capable men as Imam of the *Jammi* mosques.



***Muhtasib***

Only capable and trustworthy persons should be appointed as *Muhtasib* in every town. *Muhtasib* was also known as *Sahib-as-saq*, custodian of public morals; the market inspector or supervisor whose task was to promote good and prevent evil as outlined in the Islamic ethical code.

***Informers***

Informers are appointed who should watch over the activities of the officers and send report to the sovereign.

***Treasurer***

Only the capable and fully trustworthy persons should be appointed as treasurer.

***Director of Postal Department***

The king should keep him fully aware of everything that occurs in his kingdom through the postal organization. Appointment of a director of postal service is therefore necessary in order to get fresh news from everywhere.

***Espionage System***

Like the postal department, *Nizamul Mulk* regards an efficient secret service and network of espionage as of great importance. He says whenever a ruler gives the charge of an important office to somebody he should appoint another person unknown to that official to be always at his side in order that he might be able to inform him as to how the official is doing his work. Four networks of such unknown persons should be spread out throughout the country and they should dress themselves as merchants, travelers, sufis and chemists as they get access everywhere. *Nizamul Mulk* says that the greatest benefit, which the state draws from this department, is that the executive head keeps him informed of the conduct, or any evil or any conspiracy of his officials that he may be able immediately to put an end to such evils, which may arise, in the working of various departments.

***Ambassadors***

Regarding ambassadors he says that the real object of foreign envoys is not merely exchange of messages, but often go much beyond that. For they wish to know the position of roads, path and valleys, economic conditions of the country, strategic points and about such other conditions which may be useful at any time, if their own country have to fight with the country to which they are accredited. In other words, their interest often coincides with those of the spies. It is therefore necessary that very good care should be taken to escort them cleverly and honorably by means of protocol officers and conducting their parties from place to place till returning to their countries up to the frontiers.

According to *Nizamul Mulk* the ruler should remember that capable and honest officers are a boon to the state and he should regard a worthy servant or an able slave as superior even to his own sons. Because indolent and dishonest officials lead the country to ruins,

however, well-meaning good and dutiful officials would bring prosperity to the country even if the ruler may be incapable or idle.

### **Influence of Women on Politics and Administration**

Another important point to which he draws the attention of the ruler is the evils of Harem influence on the government. *Nizamul Mulk* warns the king not to be prone to petticoat government, for, in his opinion, the women are inferior to man in the field of administration and politics. He also advises the ruler not to act in haste. For hasty actions often lead to precipitation of consequences which is of no use.

### **Duties of the Ministers**

At length in the second part of his *Dastarul Wazara*, he discusses the functions and duties of the ministers. A minister should defend the dictates of God, act in accordance with the orders of the sovereign, has due regard for the nobles who are in daily communication with the ruler and keep the interest of the people always before him- indeed a very difficult task to serve so many masters at a time. Besides, he must be self-critical, a man of strong character, just, conscientious and truthful, because without these qualities he will never prove to be well-wisher of his master and his country. He must have special regard for the men of the sword without whom no throne can be stable, and for the men of the pen without whom a ministry cannot be successful.

### **Comparison with other Muslim Thinkers**

Although they were contemporary writers, the great difference between *Mawardi* and *Kaikaus* consists in the fact that one was nearly always looking back on religious precepts and towards the south, while the other was influenced more by his own environments with his eyes towards the east, one was an academician and an idealist the other is a statesman; one addressed the whole world while the object of the other was to make his own son successful in life; one's main source of inspiration was the authoritative tradition of Islam while the other drew on all kinds of stories current in his own days.

*Mawardi* died barely thirty-five years before *Nizamul Mulk*'s death while *Kikaus* was born four years after his martyrdom, so that both the authors compiled their works in his lifetime. When we peruse the political writings of *Nizamul Mulk* we would find that he sometimes addressed his sovereign, while he bases his arguments both on the early history of Islam like *Mawardi* and on the history of the Turks, the Iranians and other nations like *Kaikaus*.

As a matter of fact *Mawardi*, *Kaikaus* and *Nizamul Mulk* all demonstrate the conflict that was going on between the Arabian and the non-Arabian culture in the eleventh century C.E. which was to end finally in the comparative downfall of the former at least in its outward manifestations.

### **Comparison with European Political Thinkers**

The great difference between *Nizamul Mulk* and some of those Europeans who wrote in political science lies in the fact that *Nizamul Mulk* was himself a great and a successful



administrator, while as a rule western political theorists have little actual experience of practical politics. Moreover, it is often noticed that the government of the country of which these writers are citizens view their work with diffidence and even antipathy.

One of the first Europeans to write on political matters was *Plato*<sup>16</sup>, but the theories he has propounded are such that they can hardly ever be put in serious practice. Then comes *Aristotle*<sup>17</sup>, who seems to argue from the constitutions of various City-States, but it must be remembered that the Greece of the City-States was already a thing of the past at his time, and Athens and Sparta had already disappeared as independent political entities before the might of Macedon.

The case of subsequent European writers on politics is not much different; the author of *Leviathan* is exiled, *Rousseau*<sup>18</sup> ends his days in a far off land, unwept, un-honored and unsung, and even after his death his countrymen treat his ashes with scant respect; and when *Bentham*<sup>19</sup> seeks to influence his contemporaries by his novel theory of law, no one seems to take much notice of him. On the other hand, like most other political scientists of Asia, *Nizamul Mulk* was himself the most prominent member of the government of the day to the extent that he is said to be "in all but name a monarch", and while perusing his book we must bear in mind that whatever he has written has passed the acid test of experience.

## Conclusion

The period during which *Nizamul Mulk* lived and worked was one of great conflict between the accepted ideas of Islamic polity and the Perso-Turkish notions, which were slowly creeping into the body politic of the caliphate. The Islamic principle of political conduct was, that the ruler should not be a super-legal person free to act as he willed, but that he should definitely and without doubt under divine law as laid down by the Apostle of Islam. Circumstances had no doubt, changed since this great principle was laid down and the shifting of the capital from Medina to Damascus and from Damascus to Baghdad had made the caliphate an absolute monarchy in all but name. While Iranian culture and principles attacked the sanctuary of Baghdad in the west, it converted the nomadic Turks of central Asia in the east to their own way of thought, and when the *Seljuqs* reached the center of the caliphate they had already become thoroughly Persianized. *Nizamul Mulk Tusi* is the man, whose philosophy on administration and politics played a great role by this time.

## NOTES

1. *Khilafat* or *Imamat* is Muslim state ruled by the *shariah*, the ideal state of Islam. Also known, as Caliph or Khilafah is an Arabic term, meaning the office of Khalifah, the successor, lieutenant, a vicegerent or deputy. The word is used in the *Quran* for Adam as the vicegerent of the Almighty Allah on earth. But in simple meaning in the political literature of Islam, it refers to the institutions in which there is one central Khalifah, the ruler, governor, president etc. to take care of the political and religious as well as economic, social, educational, cultural affairs of the Muslim community.
2. *Shariah* is divinely revealed prophetic law of Islam. This law bound and united all Muslims. The main sources of *Shariah* are *Quran* and *Sunnah*. The *Shariah* is the core of Islamic ideology.



and in modern times, constitutes one of the four sources of comparative international law, namely French law, German law, British law, and Islamic law. It embodies all the general laws both public and private laws which apply to all Muslims and the non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic state.

3. *Ibn Sina* also known as Avicenna was born in Bokhara in 980 and died in Isfahan in 1037. He was a master in medicine, jurisprudence and philosophy. Possessed of a rare intellect and fired by a consuming zeal for knowledge he aspired to and achieved in the most original form that synthesis between the divine law and human reason. His medical encyclopedia, the *Qamun*, remained the textbook for centuries in Europe, partly through translations. Similarly his Philosophical *Summa*, the *Shifa*, exerted a lasting influence on Jews and Christians alike. His style is sparkling as the wine which he enjoyed and matches the profundity of his religious insight and philosophical understanding. We are concerned with his political ideas as they are embedded in his philosophical and theological writings.
4. *Ibn Abu Bajja*: Born in Saragossa towards the end of eleventh century, Ibn Abu Bajja is said to have died of poison at the hands of his personal enemies in 1138. He was for many years vizier of a brother in law of the Almoravid ruler of Muslim Spain. We basically got the comprehensive account of his philosophy from the Hebrew translations of the *Tadbir al-mutwahhid* and the *Riasat al-wada* (in his classic *Melanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, Paris, 1859).
5. *Ibn Abu Rushd* was born at Cordoba of Spain in 1126 CE. Both his father and grandfather of the same name Abu Al Walid were jurists and held office as *Qadi*. Ibn Rushd was also Grand *Qadi* of Cordoba. He was equally trained in theology, philosophy and medicine. He wrote many books like *Fals-al-Maqal* in which the Muslim Philosophers attempts to reconcile revelation and philosophy. He died in 1198 at the court at Marrakesh. It is said that with his passing away philosophy in Muslim Spain declined.
6. *Abu Yusuf* Yaqub b. Ibrahim was born in 731 and died in 798. He was great Muslim philosopher. Professor J. Schacht states in one his book that Caliph Harun-ur-Rashid conferred upon Abu Yusuf the title of Grand *Qadi* for the first time in Islam. *Kitab al-Kharaj* is one his famous writings.
7. *Al-Mawardi* Abu-I-Hasan Ali b. Muhammad b. Habib al-Mawardi was born at Basra in 973. He was a prominent representative of the school of al-Shafi'I and as such his treatise on government is of special interest for our problem. He wrote on many topics. He was appointed as *Qadi* of Baghdad. *Kitab al-Habi*, *Kitab al-Ikna*, *Siasat al-Mulk*, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultania* etc are his famous writings. He died in 1058.
8. *Al-Baghdadi*: Abu Mansur Abd al-Qahir b. Tahir al-Baghdadi was a great Muslim philosopher. He was contemporary to Ibn Taimiyah and al-Mawardi. He died in 1037.
9. *Al-Ghazzali*: Abdul hamid Muhammad Ibn Al-Ghazzali was born at Tush of Khorashan in 1058. He studied ethics, Quran, Hadith and philosophy etc. He was well received and highly respected at the court of Nizamul Mulk, the all-powerful vizier of the Abbasid Caliph and appointed as a Professor at the age of only 34 at the Nizamiya University of Nishapur. His famous writings are *Yahia a-Ulum al-Din*, *Maqasis al-Falasifa*, *al-Iqtisad al-Itiqad*, *al-Mujatahiri* etc. He died in 1111.
10. *Ibn Abu-Taimiyah*: Taqi al-Din Ibn Taimiyah who was a great Muslim philosopher, born in 1263 at Harran of Damascus. He died in prison in 1328. His famous writings are *As-Siasatus as-Shariah*, *Minhaj as-Sunnah*, and *Al Hisbah* etc. In these books we got his philosophical thinking and ideas on administration and politics.



11. *Kai-kaus* was the author of *Qabus-Nama*. He was a prince of the Ziyarid dynasty, which ruled part of the southern Caspian region as vassals of the Seljuk's sultans. He wrote down his own experiences for the guidance of his son. Professor R. Levy translated his Persian text *Qabus-nama* into English entitled *Kai-Kaus, A Mirror for Princes*, London, 1951.
12. *Ibn Khaldun* was born on 27 May 1332 at Tunis into an old family of Hadramaut, which had immigrated to Spain then to Morocco and finally settled in Tunisia. He received a thorough education in the theological and philosophical disciplines taught at the University of Tunis. He wrote on many topics. His famous writing is *al-Muqaddima*. He died in 1406 at Cairo.
13. *Shah Wali Ullah*: Shaikul Hind Shah Wali Ullah was the last representative of scholastic ethnologists. He was born in 1703 in an old Sufi family of Delhi. He thoroughly studied Arabic and Persian literature, Quran, Hadith and Fikh. He wrote many books. Among them *Fayzul Haramayen*, *Tufhimati Ilahiya* and *Huzzatullahi al-Balaga* are best known. In *Huzzatullahi al-Balaga* he discussed about society-state-science and religion. He was influenced by Ibn Khaldun's thinking. He died in 1762 at Delhi.
14. *Jeon Bodin* was born in 1530 at Angers, studied and taught law at Toulouse and went to Paris to practice. He was an excellent conversationalist and he came to be highly regarded by the king, Henry III. In 1576 he was appointed as the king's attorney at Laon. He made significant contributions to the development of political theory. *Reponse aux paradoxes de M. Malestroit*, *Six Livres de la Republique* were his best-known works. He died in 1596.
15. *Hobbes* Thomas Hobbes was born at Malmesbury on April 5, 1588. His famous work is *Leviathan*, where he supported the principle of absolute government. According to him the diversity of motion is the cause of all things. On this basis he set out to develop three-part philosophy. In one phase he was to explain physical phenomena, in another knowledge and sensation and finally social phenomena, all in terms of motion. The work was completed in three treatises, *De Corpore*, *De Homine*, and *De Cive*. He died in December 4, 1679.
16. *Plato* was born in 427 B.C. in an aristocratic family of Athens. Plato abandoned Athens to travel and to learn but he always carried with him the basic tenet of Socratic thought—virtue is knowledge. Upon this foundation Plato was to build a philosophy that would hold the interest of scholars and statesmen through the ages. In the Greek cities of southern Italy he studied the doctrines of the mystic Pythagorean society, which stressed the class structure and the mathematics that were later to occupy an important position in the curriculum of Plato's Athenian Academy. He died in 347 B.C. *Statesman*, *Laws* and *Republic* are his best-known works.
17. *Aristotle* was born in Stagira on the borders of Macedonia in 384 BC to parents of Ionian origin. His father was a physician. His father's occupation influenced him to direct his interest to the biological science. He came to Plato's Athenian Academy and was influenced by his teacher Plato's interest. Aristotle left Athens at the age of 37 and studied marine biology at Lesbos. He married the niece of Hermias—the ruler of Aterneus. He returned to Athens in 335 BC and established his own school, The Lyceum. He died in 322BC at Athens. *The Politics* is one of his great works.
18. *Rousseau* was born in Geneva in 1712. His mother died when he was born. His father, Issac Rousseau was a watchmaker. He was also influenced by Plato's Republic. His early life was very horrible. The three most important works of Rousseau were *la Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), *The social Contract* (1762) and *Emile* (1762). He died in 1778 of stroke in Ermenonville.

19. *Bentham*: Jeremy Bentham was born in London in February 1748. His father was an attorney. He studied law at Lincoln's Inn. He detested the practice of law and after a brief and unsatisfactory experience with it he retired to a life of study and writings, much to the disappointment of his father. In 1776 he published *Fragment on Government*. His other famous works are *Defense of Usury* in 1785, *Manual of Political Economy*, and *Introduction to the Principle of Morals and Legislation* etc. He died in June 1832 in London and his skeleton is preserved at The University College in London.

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# CURRENCY SYSTEM AND MEANS OF EXCHANGE DURING THE MUGHAL PERIOD

*Bandana Singh*

**Abstract:** *In India, currency had been prevalent since long ago but with the advent of the medieval period many changes took place in the Indian currency. During this period there was a coordination between the rate of economic development, needs of the society and the administrative system established by the state. This paper deals with the various aspects of economic system especially the currency system and means of exchange during the Mughal period. It also brings forth the fact that as a result of the Mughal economic policy the economic disparity was reduced. Due to the flow of liquid currency, poverty was greatly reduced. The development of various economic institutions made significant changes in the economic system on the one hand and affected the various aspects of medieval society on the other.*

During the medieval economy, production was limited to consumption alone and great development in monetary economy had taken place. Many available historical documents have proved the fact that during this period, in a large part of the Mughal Empire, the collection of revenue was done not in kind but in cash. Thus we can safely assume the importance of lending money on interest and the prevalence of the practice of usuary in the large scale transactions of money. The most important change that occurred in North India after the Muslim conquest was in the field of currency.

The revenue policy of the Mughals played a vital role in the growth of money economy. With the growth of money economy food grain sellers started functioning as co-traders (Baniyas, Mahajans and Sarrafs). Another characteristic of the seventeenth century was the growing commercial tendency of rich class. Thus the credit of circulation of authentic and universally acceptable currency in India goes to the Mughals.

In the middle ages due to developed nature of money relations, the credit process had become fully developed. In medieval commercial vocabulary *Dhan Vahan Patra* or *Dhan Maang Patra* were known as *hundies*.

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Money economy grew tremendously during the Mughal period and the rulers facilitated its development. During the reign of Akbar, the land revenue was evaluated and collected in cash. This law could not be enforced uniformly throughout the whole empire. However, in the central areas of the Kingdom i.e., Punjab, Delhi, Agra, Avadh, Allahabad and Gujrat the land revenue was calculated and collected in terms of cash. In fact this new system of land revenue strengthened the position of rural pedlars and traders. The villages became important where the grains were stored and from there it was transmitted to the *Mandis*. On account of this the role of villages became very significant. These *Mandis* were closely connected with big towns and eminent merchants.

With the achievement of money economy the food grain traders started to function in collaboration with other traders of the area as Baniyas, Mahajans and Sarrafs.

Some other forces were also operating in society at this time. During this period the towns of Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Surat and Dhaka expanded considerably. These towns were treated to be equivalent to the other prominent cities of the world. In the 17th century the number of inhabitants of such towns was quite high.

With the advancement of such towns, the peasant class began to migrate to these urban areas. The poverty of the farmers was responsible for such migration. The daily wages and better standard of living in the towns was another cause of shift of population from the rural to urban areas. The growing commercial tendency of the Mughal aristocrats was the second feature of the seventeenth century. In the beginning the Turkish aristocrats looked down upon the commercial activities. It is evident from the comments made in *Ain-e-Akbari* that there was a considerable change in this attitude in the end of 16th century. It is obvious from the study of the European and Persian sources that there was a common practice among the kings, princes, princesses and other women residing in the *harem* to participate in the commercial activities. Thus, Jahangir, Noor Jahan, Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan) and even the widow of Akbar and the mother of Jahangir were the proprietors of the ships, which frequently moved from the seaports of Surat to the ports of Red Sea. When Shah was the viceroy of Gujrat, at that time his ships carried out commercial transactions of banat (black wide cloth), guns, lac, indigo and tobacco.

Upto the middle of the 17th century the commercial transactions of aristocrats had become very common and even the religious preacher Quazi Abdul Shah was quietly involved in such activities. The commercial mentality of the Mughal ruling class was increasing day by day. The income derived from the land was the main economic source. The use of money increased in the villages for the fulfillment of the daily needs. Simultaneously certain areas had expertise in respect of the production of cash crops indigo, cotton, sugarcane and oil seeds etc. There was no uniformity in the organization of village life. As the money economy developed, farmers and artisans of some more developed areas were involved in the world market. There are sound evidences that the capitalist class had adequate money. Vir Ji Bohra was famous as one of the richest merchants of his times. Financial transactions were conducted through the *hundies*.



### Currency in the Mughal Period

The mughals are accredited for the circulation of the authentic and universally accepted currency in India. The Gold metal was used for making the currency attractive and lasting. Their currency was made of pure metal as compared to the currencies of the contemporary countries in which the silver coin of rupee was their original currency. In other words the currency in the form of silver coins was introduced by the Mughals in India. Upto the reign of Shershah Suri the prevalent currency in Northern India was Sikandari. The silver tanka of the Sultanate period was transformed into a copper coin, which was made by mixing silver with copper. Before the introduction of the silver coins (tanka) there were many other coins in which there was no good silver for instance Muzaffarin of Maluga and Muhammadis of Gujrat. The Sultan of Deccan also got minted many coins. On the other hand the kings of Vijay Nagar got minted golden coins based on Huba and Pagoda.

The place of Shershah in the coin minting is very significant because his system of minting coins was considerably superior. During the reign of Akbar these coins could be established finally.

### Silver Coins

The silver coin was the basic mode of exchange for administrative and commercial activities, which were known as *Rupiya* or Rupee. Akbar inherited this system of currency from Shershah Suri which was heavier in quantity, the weight of which was 178 grains in which not more than 40/0 adulteration was allowed.

After ascending the throne, Jahangir increased 20% weight of the coin (Rupiya). He adopted the new weight of the silver coin according to which *Rupiya e-Jahangir* was equal to one tola.

During the fourth year after ascending the throne Jahangir issued the order for circulation of Rupee, which was called "Sawal". It was 25% heavier than that of the Akbar's regime but due to complaints made during the sixth year of his rule he stopped the minting of new coins and allowed to continue the old rupee in circulation. The weight of that rupee remained the same. There was no change in the authenticity and weight of the rupee in the period of Shah Jahan.

### Gold Mohar

Abul Fazal mentioned different names of coins such as Suhasa, Asharfi, Rahas, Alma, Zinsalmoogool, Laljali, Gid, Dahan, Aftabi, Salimi, Ilahi, Chahar Gosa, Aba Gutka, Mohar-e-Gid, Mehrabi, Muini, Rabi, Mannisuf, Samani, Kala, Zarra in *Ain-e-Akbari*. Out of these the round Mohar was used in transactions. Other mohars were either ceremonial or for gift. The weight of the Ashari of Akbar's period was 169 grains. Jahangir altered the weight of the rupee in order to evaluate it, which is reflected in the table 1.

Nur Jahani and Sawai Mohar were 20% and 25% heavier than those of Akbar respectively. He also laid down a new weight for the golden coins. According to this change the weight of Nur Jahani coin weighted one tola. Though he had stopped minting the new

mohar during the sixth year of his reign and reintroduced the mohar of Akbar's period the weight of which was 10 Masha. During the reign of Shahjahan this weight continued to be the same.

### **Daam and Other Copper Coins**

The copper coin i.e., Daam was the common mode of exchange among the public. The weight of the copper coin was 5 'taka' i.e. 1 'tola' 8 'masha' and 7 'surkha'. It was 1/40th part of a rupee. It was also called Bahloli. It was famous as 'Daam' in Mughal period. There was inscribed the name of the mint on one side and the year and the month on the other side of the coin. The officers who kept the accounts divided Daam in 25 parts and each part was known as 'Jital'. This imaginary division was used in laying down the accounts.

Adhela	=	½ of Daam
Pawal	=	¼th of Daam
Damri	=	1/8th of Daam
3 Daam	=	1 Damri
2 Damri	=	1 Daam
2 Daam	=	1 Adhela
2 Adhela	=	1 Paisa
2 Paisa	=	1 Taka

The copper currency was not a symbolic currency like today but just like silver currency its value was equal to the value of the metal used in them. In this way there were 2 (or 3 if gold coins are included) independent standards of coins. The rate of exchange between them varied according to place and time. In the government accounts 40 daams was considered to be equivalent to one rupee. The Mughals used the copper coins for the payment of salary. The Daam was equal to 323 grain.

### **Symbolic Currency**

Kaudi was the basis of exchange in the Indian rural society till the end of 16th century. It was used in the day to day transactions. The value of the Kaudi in comparison to silver and copper depended on its distance from the sea. In Agra and its neighbouring areas 50 or 60 Kaudis were equivalent to ½ daam. The other old unit of exchange Badam (almond) was in prevalence in the province of Gujrat. It was imported from Persia. Kauari was imported from Maldives and was used as currency. It was commonly used in Bengal and Orissa.

### **Change in the Value of Coins**

There was open minting of coins during the Mughal era. Therefore the value of these metal coins differed from time to time. During the rule of Akbar the standard value of Rupiya was 40 daam which could not be maintained by his successors because copper had replaced the Rupee (Rupiya) due to which daam was converted into Rupee which did not relate to the



value of 'daam'. The smallest unit of rupiya was suki which was 1/20th of rupiya. The second smallest unit was 'aana' which was 1/16th of rupiya.

In 1600, the old Mahmudi currency prevalent in the Gujrat became equivalent to rupiya. The Mahmudi was cast in 2-3 mints and it remained in use along with rupiya. With the expansion of the Mughal power, rupiya became more valuable than any other currency in the South. Copper coins were used in small transactions.

### **Mints**

Mughals, during their reign, got many types of coins minted. In 1595 there were 42 mints of copper coins, 14 mints of rupiya, and 4 mints of Mohars. A major achievement of the Mughal administrative system was the increase in the number of mints. The process of minting was open for all and it was possible for anyone to take his raw material to the mint and get it minted in the form of coins and get its value determined. The cost of getting the coins minted was taken as 5 to 6 per cent of the total value. Such coins were known as 'do dammi' This rule was also applicable in the minting of gold and silver coins.

The value of the coin was determined before the minting of the coins on the basis of expenditure incurred, raw material and the cost of minting of the coin. Infact, the cost of the new coins was more than the older ones because it took more time to cast new coins from the raw material. Mughals gave concessions in the cost of coins and this was a defect of the administrative system. The coins that were old had lesser value. The name of the mint and the year of casting the coin were mentioned on each coin. If the coin was the new one, it received full value whereas the value of the coins in circulation was less.

During the earlier administration, the rate of discount on the minted coins known as Khazana was comparatively higher. The rate of discount was not more than the cost of minting. The coins whose weight was less were assessed as whole on the basis of their raw material. During the rule of Akbar the golden coins were minted in the capital Bengal and Ahmadabad and silver and copper coins were minted in Kabul. Silver and copper coins were minted in Allahabad, Agra, Ujjain, Surat, Delhi, Patna, Kashmir, Lahore, Multan, Tanda etc. Ajmer, Awadh, Attack, Alwar, Badayun, Banaras, Mucca, Bachera, Patna, Jaunpur, Jalandhar, Hardwar, Hisar, Ferozabad, Kalpi, Gwalior, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Mandu, Nagaur, Sarhind, Sialkot, Saronj were the famous centers of copper coin minting.

### **The Gold Value of Rupee**

Mughal currency system was based on the use of very pure material for the minting of coins and that is why the market rate of these coins was approximately similar to the market rate of these metals. The value of ordinary rupiya almost remained constant throughout the long Mughal period. The difference in rate depending upon time and place as mentioned in the contemporary account cannot be ignored till the trade routes were safe.

The gold value of the rupee can be ascertained from the table 2 which is based on the value of mohar in circulation.

According to Ain-e-Akbari the value of mohar was equal to rupiya which remained constant for about a decade. In 1626 A.D. the value of mohar was equal to 14 rupiyas. This

can be proved from the value of the foreign gold coins found in Surat. Infact the unexpected devaluation of gold resulted in a crisis in 1628 when a mohar could not be sold for more than 13 rupiyas in Ahmadabad. Later it was sold for 12.75-13 rupiyas.

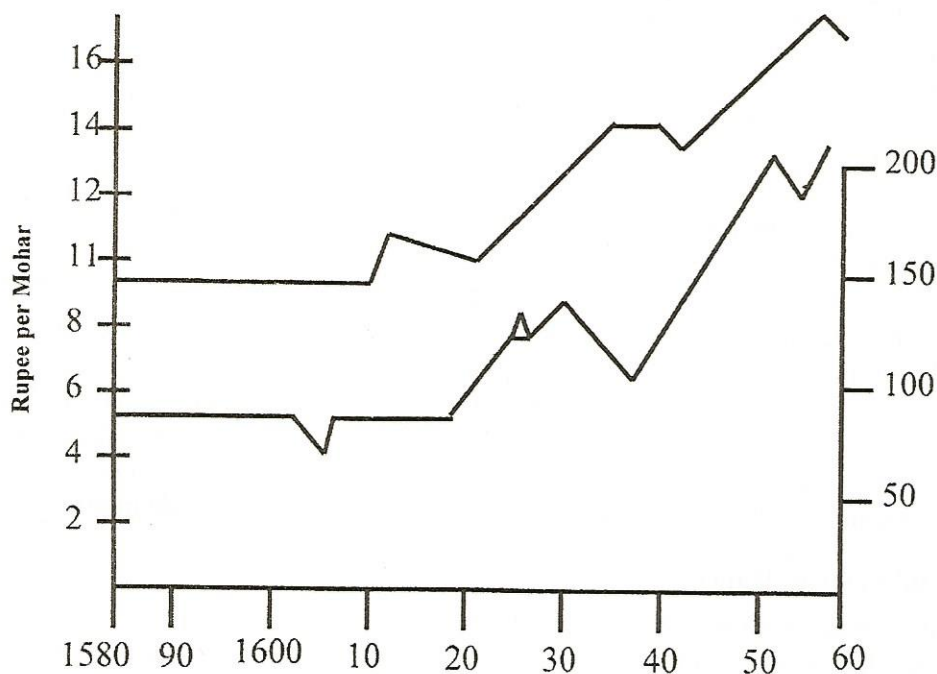
After 1628 the value of gold remained constant on this rate. In 1633, Mohur was sold for 12.50 rupiya in Lahore and in 1640 its value was raised to 13 rupiyas. In 1641-42 mohar regained its old value i.e. 14 rupees. This remained till 1653. In 1658 its value increased to 16.40.

Gold was imported from Europe and Japan. According to Hamilton there was an increase in the purchasing power of gold imported from America and Spain.

The following graph is based on the table given by Irfan Habib in which evaluation of rupiya has been done with gold and copper.

### Evaluation of Rupee in Copper

Copper was mainly supplied by the mines in Sweden, Central Europe, Japan and Rajasthan in India.<sup>1</sup>



Evaluation of Silver in Relation to Gold & Copper

Daam was the standard of the value of copper just as rupee was the standard of the value of silver. During Akbar's time, the government rate of exchange was 40 daam. i.e., for one rupiya it was 80 pai in Gujrat and for one Mahmudi it was 32 Pai. In 1609, according to Finch the real value of Mahmudi was 31 or 32 pai, which varied according to the changes



in the value of copper. In the beginning of 1615, Elphinston has given 34 pai as its value and has also mentioned fluctuation tendency in it. In reality the value remained almost constant throughout the first decade of Jahangir's reign. In fact a great increase in the value of copper is seen in Gujrat in 1619. The lowering of value of copper in Agra is clearly evident from the factory documents and the descriptions of Peter Mundi.

In 1636 A.D. there was an increase in the value of silver and in Gujrat its value was 26-27 daam. In 1640 A.D. the value of rupiya in Raj Mahal was 28 Daam, although there was shortage of copper in Raj Mahal in comparison to Agra. In 1656 the value of rupiya was estimated to be 22.50 daam.<sup>2</sup>

In the earlier decades of the 17th century, the level of prices remained almost constant but in the later decades there was an increase of more than 50%. The value of copper was determined according to the silver value.

Silver was more devalued in comparison to Gold. The rise in the prices of copper was due to less production and lack of import from foreign countries. Therefore it could be said that the general purchasing power of the rupee was considerably reduced because gold was easily available in abundance as compared to silver.

### **Flow of Currency**

In 1600 the silver rupee was the basic currency. All the coins that were minted were circulated on the basis of their value, because one of the major characteristic of Mughal currency was the free minting of the coins. Due to this tendency it was natural to have the impact of the availability of silver and local economic and administrative demands on the minting quantity.

India had no silver mines hence it was imported from foreign countries. In 16th and 17th century the import of silver grew extensively which was procured from the mines.

Aziz Hasan discovered a new and easier system of counting the silver coins. In this system the counting of silver coins was done according to the lipt of the museums. The mohar of mint (Taksal) and the date was inscribed on the coins. This facilitated the counting of silver coins but the list is limited to Northern India only. He proved that the year by year variation in the values of coins was sudden and there was only one reason responsible for this and that was exact statistical flow of the coins minted every year in the mints.<sup>3</sup>

Moreland concluded after a comparative study based on the coins issued by the mints of Ahmedabad and Surat that although the representation of both the mints in currency circulation was similar from Akbar to Aurangzeb yet there was decline in the product of Ahmedabad and rise of Surat production as given in table 4.

On the basis of lists of coin collection and the number of coins issued by the mints of Ahmedabad and Surat it is noticed that there is a clear rise in the production of Surat Mint in comparison to Ahmedabad. The expansion of Surat Mint started during the reign of Shahjahan. Afterwards it became the main mint of Gujrat. From the above data this fact is proved that in Gujrat there was no major change in the inflow of silver from the proportional point of view.

Aziz Hasan has given important information about this through his tables. It is obvious from this that it was the largest circulation of currency in the North West. The 36.7% of the



total currency issued from North India was minted in North West Mints. It is apparent that a large quantity of silver was imported from Middle East. Therefore, the quantity of coin currency issued by these mints was not constant. Among the North West mints the mint of Lahore issued maximum coins.

The provinces of Agra, Awadh, Ajmer, Delhi, Allahabad, and Malwa were included in the internal regions. The number of coins issued in the mints of these regions was different in comparison to the mints of North West. The currency issued between 1578-87 was 42.4% but in the next decade i.e., 1588-97 it was reduced to 6.00%. Between 1636 to 1665, the circulation of currency from here was minimum. The ratio of coins issued from Gujrat mint was 24.7% and it regularly increased till 1595 in comparison to mints of North India.

There was shortage of coins during the period of Akbar's reign in the museums on account of scarcity of mints. Whereas Aziz Hasan is of the view that the contribution of Aurangzeb was higher in this respect due to his large number of mints. So, it is very difficult to identify these coins from the specimen of Aziz Hasan. Therefore, Hasan's technique of evaluation of coins is more appropriate for the coins found from excavations instead of the coins preserved in museums. Musavi has prepared five year histogram like Aziz Hasan on the basis of the reports received from the excavations.

The only difference between the method of Aziz and Musavi is that Musavi had included all those coins in which the dates were mentioned on the basis of the decades. These coins are divided into two equal parts on the basis of five-year evaluation of each decade. Musavi has not ignored the coins which had no dates on it and had the mention of only the period.

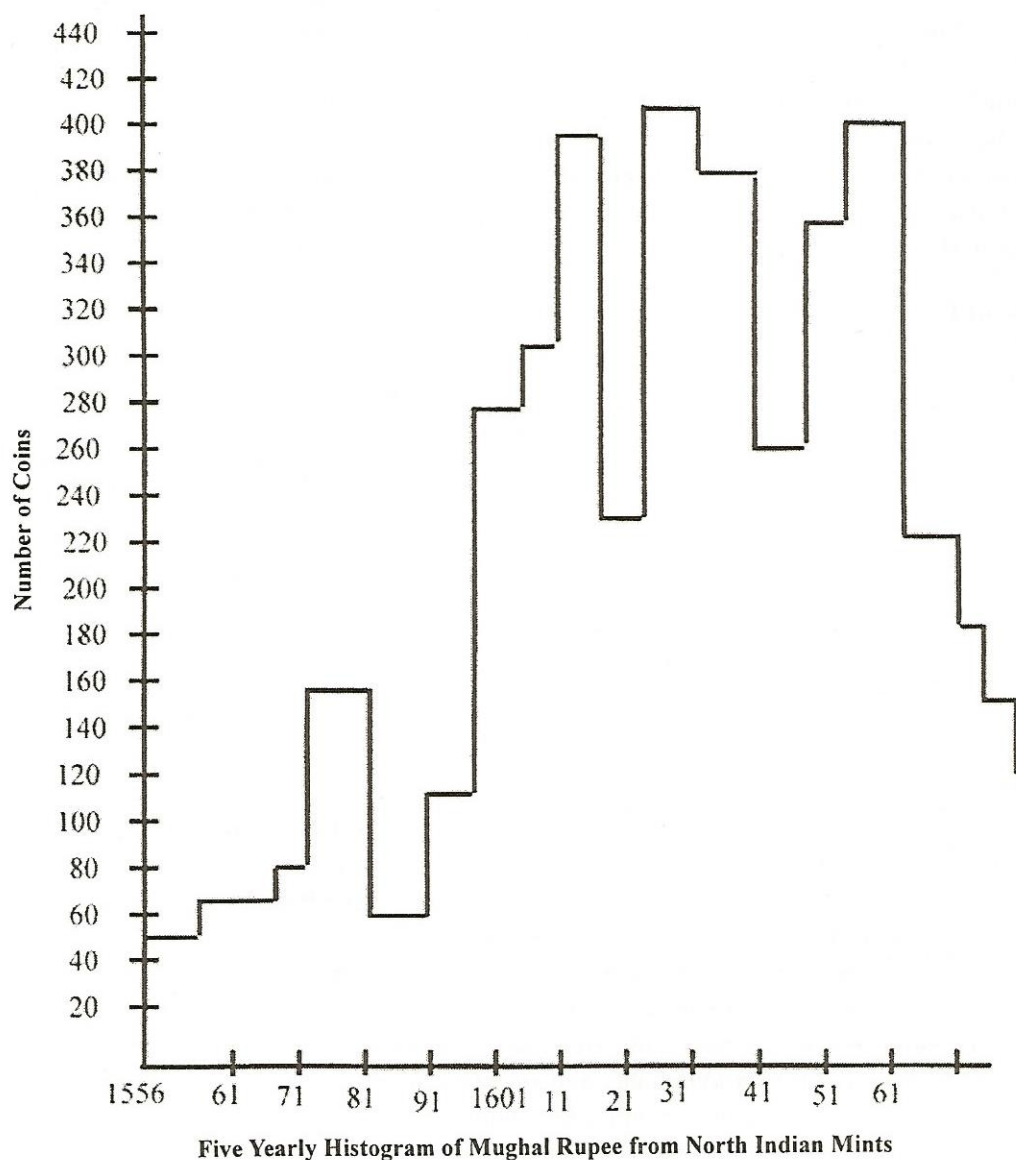
For example 281 undated coins of Jahangir's reign are included which did not present the right picture of evaluation. Shirin Musavi distributed coins without dates in the same ratio as the coins with dates for each period of five years.

On comparison Musavi's histogram partially supports Aziz's histogram. The inclinations of 25 out of 30 in both the histograms are almost the same.

The only reason responsible for the actual rise between 1586-90, 1611-15 and decline during 1606-10, 1621-25 and 1636-40 as revealed by date is the instability in the nature of coins just as it is in the coins recovered from the excavations. All types of coins were placed together and no difference of any kind was found among them. The histogram of Musavi is theoretical through which we may have an idea of mode of supply of silver coins. In the graph all the information is presented converting it into decades from 1556-1635 on one side and the regional nature of all coins is analysed on the other side. In the table 5 the column G means Gujrat which includes the production of Ahmedabad, Surat and Cambay mints. In the mints of North West, Lahore, Multan, Thatta, Kabul and Kandhar are included. Column B means Bengal which includes the mints of Akbar Nagar or Raj Mahal, Muksusabad, Jahagir Nagar and Patna. Apart from this the rest of the mints are grouped under the column Central Mints. The Deccan and South Indian mints are not included in this table.

The table shows a comparative structure of the yearly production of coins in the mints of North India although this list does not show the right measurement. To have the data of the production of mints we will need to take the help of external sources so that we may





have the correct knowledge of the produced coins. It is only possible if we have the knowledge of average production of a particular mint in a particular time period. Fortunately we have such information about Surat Mint for the year 1605.

The statement of English minted factories show that Surat mint normally casted 6000 rupiya per day for the business. Before this, in the year 1634, eight thousand rupiya per day was the daily production of this mint. The Britishers received 9000 rupiya daily from this mint (5000 for British and 3000 for Dutch). From time to time English and Dutch distributed their Gold and Silver slabs. Silver imported from Gulf via Red Sea was converted into coins. These figures indicate that during 1634 to 1636, 8000 rupees were produced daily

in Surat Mint. Now, there are 46 coins available out of the specimen in Surat after the 1634-36. On the basis of the yearly production of Surat mint (8000x365 rupiya) we can say that the 2,53,913 coins found from the excavations of Uttar Pradesh were actually minted.

There was 3% increase in the level of circulation of rupiya between 1591 to 1639 in comparison to the level on 1591. There was decline in this high level increase after 1639 A.D. but again in 1684, it became double of the level of 1591. There is no doubt that in the currency flow there was the import of Silver from foreign countries.

### **Value of Food Grains**

There was no importance of the rate of commodities like glass, mercury or spices for Indian people because there was nothing among these things, which was greatly consumed by common masses. Sufficient data are not available in respect of food grains, oil seeds and cotton. The normal value of food grains at the end of 16th century was preserved by Abul Fazal and we get some information from the Dutch factories. Finch has written that the best rice was available for 8 rial per quintal in Surat in 1609, which is approximately 69 rupiya per pound. The ordinary varieties of rice would have been available at a very low rate. In 1611 rice was purchased for English ships for at the rate of 65.75 pound. Perhaps these rates were much higher than the market rates.

There is no systematic rate list of sugar and there is confusion about the names and varieties of sugar. The description of various types of sugar is given in table 8.

### **Banking System**

In medieval times due to the developed nature of capitalistic relations credit system became fully developed. Perhaps there was no field of economic life where this system had not intruded. These were known as Dhan Wahan Patra/Dhan Maang Patra or Hundi in medieval commercial vocabulary. Credit system had reached the roots of the Indian rural society. Its main reason was the increase in land revenue and the development of cash relations. As a result of supply of rural production to towns and cities, the non-peasant class including craftsman, labourers, small merchants, rich class depended upon them. The people of rich class had to depend on rich merchants and jewelers at the time of military expeditions. Small traders were also dependent on traders, bohras and jewelers.

The various categories of people associated with currency exchange trade like-Mahajan, Bohara, Sahu, Sarraf etc. acted as creditors in one way or the other. The main work of some of these was money exchange, exchange of money through Hundi and to have cash deposits. The money received in the form of pledge and the advance payments of Bills of capital was invested by the banks.

### **Hundi System**

Apart from the trading prices there were such sarrafs who had acquired expertise in the sale and purchase of silver. Many of them had sufficient resources to pay huge amounts by way of cash in lieu of hundies. The hundies issued by the sarrafs were accepted in the big towns of India and Asia. The rate of discount on these hundies was surprisingly low. These



hundies prove the existence of the easy availability of money and highly developed financial system. Sometimes the traders utilized the services of sarrafs in order to transfer the treasure from one place to another. The collection of revenue was also transmitted from one place to another through them.

The use of hundies was prevalent everywhere and was acceptable to all. There was not a single small place in India where Sarrafs and the traders were not available who made payments like the bankers and issued negotiable instruments. On the one hand the hundies were used for the exchange of money in the state and on the other the hundies were also a source of exchanging money in the far off places of the state. As a result of the presence efficiency and reliability of the finances, the transaction of revenue from the remote rural areas to the central treasury was done through the hundies. The use of hundies became very common for the payment of revenue as advance and balance.

The people pledged some articles and deposited these with the money lenders, who granted them loan on the basis of the pledged articles.

### **Credit and Rate of Interest**

The bankers earned commission on the hundies which were used as a means of payment to the State. Some guess may be made regarding the fees charged on the issue of hundies by sarrafs from the records of the English factories. During the 17th century the rate of fees charged on the hundies at different place were as under:

In Surat 1% fees was charged on hundies in 1650, which was decreased to 0.5% and subsequently was enhanced to 0.75%. In Agra till 1745 the monthly rate of interest was 1 to 2.5%, which was reduced to  $\frac{3}{4}\%$ . The rate of interest was the highest in Golconda, which remained 2 to 3% and after 1645 it remained 1.5% or lower. The reason of all this was the rise and fall in the commercial goods.

During the 17th century hundies were also used for the arrangement of loan for a short period. This was mainly done by traders. These hundies were mostly sold by sarrafs. These were purchased from the sarrafs or the owners of the hundies. In this way sarrafs earned profits not only at the time of issuing the hundies but also in particular situations while making payments. Tavernier has given account of the discounts in different cities on the hundies issued from Surat.

<b>State</b>	<b>% of Discount</b>
Lahore	6.25%
Agra	4.25 to 5%
Ahmedabad	1 to 1.5%
Burhanpur	2.5 to 3%
Dhaka	10%
Patna	7.8%

Irfan Habib is of the opinion that the discounts were granted on those hundies which were associated with important traders. The rate of fees and discount varied according to

the debt of Aadesti. There were many kinds of fees in the discount in order to transfer the hundies from one place to another. The interest on the hundies was also levied apart from the fees. The hundies were sold bought and.

### **Musadat**

*Amir* (rich) people also used to advance money as debt. It is evident from the transaction of Shaiste Khan (Subedar of Bengal) who gave 3,00,000 Rupees to Government of Hugli as debt at the rate of 25% interest. Due to high rates on interest Akbar realized the need of lending money to rich people from the royal treasury. There is a mention of giving loans to the rich people in Ain-e-Akbari. This kind of loan was called *Musadat*.

The Government loan was not interest free. Abul Fazal has given an account of the rate of interest charged on the loan given to different classes of rich people.

On the basis of government rate of interest it could be said that the rich people preferred to take loans from the Government. *Musadat* was not granted till the recipient provided appropriate reason.<sup>4</sup> The rate of interest on which money was lent to the East India Company is evident from the following tables in which Surat, Ahmedabad, and Agra are mentioned. This rate of interest persisted till date the last years of Shahjahan's reign i.e., 1658-59.

In fact it is remarkable that on the loans given to the local rulers the Sarrafs took the monthly interest of one rupee per hundred. In Surat, the East India Company was given loan on the rate of 1 or 1.5 rupee per hundred per month.

Between 1624 to 1650, there was a decline in this rate and it was  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{5}{8}\%$  per month. By the middle of 17th century there was decline in the rate of interest in almost all parts of the country.

### **Usury**

The commercial tendency of Mughal rulers was increasing day by day. Although the income from land was the main economic source of it, but the money earned from commercial sources was another source of Income. Further, Mughal emperors confiscated the movable and immovable property of their servants. Probably at least one part of this income was invested in business or given on loan.

The creation of the separate class of commercial money-lenders who gained profit from the business of money lending and increased their property exhibits another facet of economic development. The practice of usury was in vogue in all the civilized nations of the world and India was no exception to it. Naturally, usury system was available to the members of the Vaishya Community.

### **Weight and Measurment**

Variety was the chief characteristic of the weights and measures systems in India during the 16th century. The old system of weight and measures is also exhibited along with the fixed government measures. But Akbar adopted a more modern outlook in this connection. He decided units for the measurement of weights, length and surface.



In Mughal times the local units of measure of weight were known as *man* and *ser*. Usually one *man* was equal to forty *ser*. But the weight of *Ser* varied frequently. There were thirty Daams in a *ser* during the reign of Akbar. After ascending the throne, Jahangir established the new *man*. (*man-e-Jahangir*) in which one *ser* was equivalent to 36 daams. The weight of the *man* was 66 pounds. Shahjahan fixed 40 daams for a *ser* by which the weight of *man* was increased. On the basis of Dutch and English documents the establishment of this new *man* could be traced to 1634 or 1635. *Shahjahani man* touched 74 pounds.

### Conclusion

The administrative system developed by the Muslim rulers acquired stability during the reign of Akbar which, though had the impact of historical objects, was basically Indian because this system was the produce of contemporary political, economic and social circumstances and requirements. The way in which the sources of revenue were decentralized keeping the policy of balance of power between rights and control and the organized process that was developed for the execution of work, succeeded remarkably in influencing the various aspects of economic and social system. The method of collection of land revenue resulted in the popularity of cultivation of cash crops and rise in the rate of money exchange. The development of various economic institutions made significant changes in the economic system and it also affected the various aspects of medieval society. The powerful middle class, disintegration of rural society, rise in the number of trading classes, development of towns and cities as the center of economic exchange and increase in the number of traders and craftsmen etc. emerged as the main characteristics of the medieval society.

Table 1

Coin	Weight (Tola)	Name
Mohar	100	Nur Sultani
Mohar	50	Nur Shahi
Mohar	20	Nur Daulat
Mohar	10	Nur Karam
Mohar	05	Nur Mohar
Mohar	01	Nur Jahani
Mohar	0.5	Nurani
Mohar	0.25	Riwazi

Table 2

Year	Gold value of Rupee A Unit of gold	Year	Gold value of Rupee A Unit of gold
1583	9	1628	12.75; 13
1595	9	1633	12.50
1608-12	10	1640	13
1615	10.70	1641	14
1721	10	1644-45	14
1726	14	1653	14
		1658	16.40

**Table 3**  
**Ratio of Daam with Silver (According to Ain-e-Akbari)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Evaluation of Rupiya in Copper</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Evaluation of Rupiya in Copper</i>	<i>Area</i>
1595	100	Agra	1628	160	Gujrat
1609	100	Gujrat	1633	160	Gujrat
1614	95	Gujrat	1634	166	Sindh
1614	100	Gujrat	1636	148	Gujrat
1626	133	Agra	1637	153	Agra
			1638	138	Agra
			1659	179	Sindh
			1659	167	

**Table 4**

<b>Mint of Ahmedabad</b>					<b>Mints of Surat.</b>			
<i>Reign</i>	<i>Lucknow</i>	<i>Lahore</i>	<i>Calcutta</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Lucknow</i>	<i>Lahore</i>	<i>Calcutta</i>	<i>Total</i>
Akbar	153	51	53	257	0	1	0	1
Jahangir	79	27	32	138	14	4	5	23
Shahjahan	34	09	12	55	88	2	31	141
Auranzeb	21	05	11	37	131	55	91	277
Total	287	92	108	487	233	82	127	442

**Table 5**

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>N.E.E.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>Without mint</i>
1556-65	36.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	25.0	9.0
1566-75	240.5	30.0	13.0	0.0	251.5	46.0
1576-85	466.4	97.5	15.0	0.0	288.0	126.0
1586-93	876.5	294.5	47.0	0.0	320.0	215.0
1596-1605	1034.0	592.0	202.0	43.5	1165.5	31.0
1606-15	516.5	99.0	139.0	28.0	241.0	18.5
1616-25	432.5	37.0	117.0	43.0	155.0	18.5
1626-35	788.0	118.5	221.8	291.5	92.0	34.5

**Table 6**

<i>Name of Commodity</i>	<i>Year 1595</i>	<i>Year 1637</i>	<i>Year 1638</i>
Wheat, flour	0.50	1.09	1.69
Gram	0.27	1.05	1.70
Ghee	3.50	8.53	9.73
Moth	0.40	1.04	1.44



Table 7

<i>Name of Commodity</i>	<i>Year 1595</i>	<i>Year 1637</i>	<i>Year 1658</i>
Wheat, flour	1.00	1.63	1.25
Gram	1.00	1.82	0.95
Ghee	8.57 (23)	8.57	10.00

Table 8

<i>Place</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Price per man</i>		
Agra	C-1593	Clean Sugar	6	0	0
		White Mishri Crystal	5	8	0
		Brown Sugar	1	3	0
		White Sugar	3	5	0
Lahore	1638	White Crystal Sugar	7	0	0
		Second Class	5	12	0 to
			6	0	0
			11	0	0

Table 9

<i>The period of payment in years</i>	<i>Annual rate of interest</i>
1	6.25
2	6.10
3	7.70
4	10.70
5	8.40
6	7.00
7	8.30
8	7.20
9	6.40
10	7.40

Table 10

## Surat

<i>Year</i>	<i>Monthly Interest</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
1624	8%	English factories 1622-23	178
1626	1 % 1/4	Remonstrant transaction	41-2
1630	1 & 1/8	Factories 1630-33	127
1634	1 or 1 & 14	Factories 1634-36	35
1635	1	Factories 1634-36	114
1639	1 & 1/4 to 1 & 1/2	Factories 1639,41	116-17
1642	1 or 1&1/4	Factories 1642, 45	34
1650	1	Factories 1646-50	316
1651	1/2	Factories 1651-54	86
1652	3/4	Aforesaid	

Contd....

Year	Monthly Interest	Source	Page No.
1652	½	Factories 1651-54	109-90
1652	5/8	Aforesaid	119
1654	½ and 5/8	Aforesaid	222
1657	5/8	Factories 1655-60	144-5
1659	5/8 and ½	Aforesaid	158

## Ahmedabad

Year	Monthly Interest	Source	Page No.
1622	1%	Factories 1622-23	
1628	1%	Factories 1624-29	215
1628	%	Factories 1624-29	270
1640	1 & ¼% Approx.	Factories 1637-41	225
1647	¾% Approx.	Factories 1646-50	112
1647	13/16%	Aforesaid	128
1658	¾%	Aforesaid	163
1658	5/8%	Aforesaid 1653	

## Agra

Year	Monthly Interest	Source	Page No.
1626	5/6%	Remonstrant transaction	28-9
1628	2%	Factories 1624-29	239
1645	5/8%	Factories 1642-45	302
1645	1 to 2 & ½%	Aforesaid	
1645	1%	Factories 1642-45	302-3
1645	¾%	Aforesaid	
1645	5/8%	Aforesaid	
1647	¾%	Factories 1646-50	122
1657	¾%	Factories 1651-54	301-2

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## PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

### I

#### IN SEARCH OF CULTURAL FOOT PRINTS—A VISIT TO IRAN

Before embarking upon the anthropological field investigation during the visit of Iran we had a research paradigm that was based upon my two decades of research among the Shia and Sunni Muslim groups inhabiting the *doab* region of northern India. Shi'a Islam is the only major schism in Islam. It is not a recent schism, however, for it dates back right to the foundations of Islam. Shi'ite historians believe that Shi'ism began shortly after the death of Muhammad, when the Khilafat (caliphate), or secular leadership of Islam, was handed to Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakar, rather than Ali, Muhammad's chosen successor. The Muslims who supported Ali called themselves the "Partisans of Ali" (*Shia-te-Ali*); these supporters are the root of Shi'a Islam. Western and Sunni historians date Shi'ism, as a religion, to the death of Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad, in the battle of Karbala. The observance of this martyrdom by the *Shia-te-Ali* represents the first clear instance of a separate religious practice.

Undoubtedly Shi'a Islam is a crucial part of the Islamic tapestry throughout the history of Islam. The minority Shi'ites have played a determining role in Islamic and world history. The foundational figure in Shi'a history is 'Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad. After the death of Muhammad, rival claims were put forth for the Khilafat—the office that was the supreme secular authority in Islam. In Shi'a history, Muhammad designated Ali as his successor. Ali was the first of Muhammed's tribe, the Quraysh, to declare himself an apostle. A total of eleven Imams succeeded 'Ali passing the Imamate down to their sons in hereditary succession. However, the most important Imam of Shi'a was Husain, whose martyrdom at Karbala is the most important event in the Shi'a history of events. Shi'a Islam is divided into several different sects. One of these sects believes that Muhammed al-Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, had hidden him and remains in hiding. This sect was called Asna Ashariya (Twelver) or Imami (Imam) Shi'a, and eventually came to exclusively represent Shi'ism. When you say Shi'a, you really mean Asana Ashariya (Twelver Shi'a).

In India, a new Shi'ite kingdom was established in the eighteenth century, the kingdom of Oudh (Awadh). The first leader of Oudh, Sa'adat Khan, traced his ancestry back to the seventh Imam, Musa. In addition, he and his predecessors served as ministers to the Mughal Emperor, who had originally appointed Sa'adat Khan. The Mughal court itself had become terribly divided between Shia and Sunni and the two factions were constantly at war with one another. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the kingdom of Oudh became independent of the Mughals, but in 1856, the British forced the Oudh king to abdicate and annexed the territory. Only Iran remained as the sole Shia state in the world. During the 13th century a small group of Shias migrated to present day Uttar Pradesh from Neyshabur—a small township in Northeast of Iran, after halting in Kashmir to safeguard their *rites de passage* indoctrinated in Shia Islam. To commemorate their cultural leanings and to preserve



their intangible cultural ethos like mourning during Moharram, burial in open graves, architectural designs of building *Karbala*s in their habitat and keeping their personal graveyards adjacent to their dwellings, role and rites of intensification in socialization process of bringing up female child and lamentations recited in *Farsi*- the language of the group, during observance of *ashura* to mourn the killings of the Imams are some of the vestigial cultural traits deeply embedded in the cultural matrix of this group popularly known as Asna Ashariya.

Our interest in the Shia Muslims inspired us to work on the Shia rural families of Mohan, Bilhaur and Sandilla *kasba* all situated on the banks of river Ganga and in the state of Uttar Pradesh. This work was mainly centered on marriage system and property rights of a few Shia *Khandans*. These khandans traced their origin to Neyshaboor of Khorasan, Iran. The architecture of replicated Karbala in the *kasba*, the temporary graves, observance of Moharram including *noha*, *marsiha*, *majlis*, *matam* on fire, the *Shijra* and *nikahnama* in Persian script and the presence of *mujtahids* trained in Iran all converge to the fact that they were the migrants due to religious persecution. Most of these families were of physicians (*Hakeem*). The ancient Iran, historically known to the West as Persia was once a major empire in its own right. It had been overrun frequently and has had its territory altered throughout the centuries. Invaded by Arabs, Seljuk Turks, Mongols, and others—and often caught up in the affairs of larger powers. Iran has always reasserted its nationhood and has developed as a distinct political and cultural entity. The earliest sedentary cultures date from 18,000-14,000 years ago. The sixth millennium B.C. saw a fairly sophisticated agricultural society and proto-urban population centers. Many dynasties have ruled Iran, the first of which was under the Achaemenians (559-330 B.C.); a dynasty founded by Cyrus the Great. After the Hellenistic period (300-250 B.C.) came the Parthian (250 B.C.-226 A.D.) and the Sassanid (226-651) dynasties.

Medes, Achaemenians, Seleucids, Parthians (256 BC-226AD)

Sassanians (226 AD), Arabs (637 AD), Seljuks (1063-1157)

Mongols (1219-1316), Timurids (1400-1447), Safavid (1500-1736), Afshar (1736-1750), Zands (1750-1794)

Qajars (1787-1921), Pahlavi (1921-1979)

### **Then followed the Islamic Revolution**

In the proposed research paradigm to trace the founder populations the field investigations were conducted in Iran extended up to the place of origin, as claimed, where key persons, men and women, were interviewed and case studies were collected *in situ*. The available literature in various libraries in Iran was consulted to gather secondary data for content analysis in order to relate to the existing marriage system and property rights as prevalent today. Particularly, their present social system and social institutions were observed and noted for comparison with the Indian counterpart to gauge the changes and alterations, which might have had taken place during nine centuries in a changed socio-ecological environment. The original proposed research work was to be substantiated by empirical

data that were to be collected within a time frame. And the time frame was three months of field investigations in Iran. But unfortunately the visit was curtailed to only three weeks and hence compelled to restrict the study and truncate the aims and objectives. The locales that extensively studied were:

- Tehran
- Joban
- Qom
- Abyaneh
- Esfahan
- Shiraz
- Mahan
- Bar
- Mohammadabad
- Neyshabur

### **From the Pages of Tour Diary**

Man lived in Iranian plateau as early as 15000 years ago. The earliest settlers were nomadic hunters who gradually evolved into agriculturist developing permanent settlements. There are records of rule of dynasties for 2000 years. Details of these dynasties are given in Avesta-the sacred scripture of Zoroastrians that has been written on 12000 pieces of cow hides. Apart from Avesta and Shahnama (chronicles of the emperors) names of legendary kings and dynasties are found in Veda and Mahabharata too.

### **Setting**

The surface area of Iran is 16 lakh 48 thousand one hundred and ninety five (1648195) square kilometers. It shares borders with Iraq (1609 kms), on the west and Turkey (486 kms) on the north west republics of Armenia, Azharbaijan, Turkmenistan, as well as Caspian sea (21670 kms) on the north, with Afghanistan (945 kms) on the east, with Pakistan (978 kms) on the southeast, with the Persian gulf (1259 kms) and with sea of Oman (784 kms) on the south regardless of Bahrain as the largest island that belonged to Iran until the early second half of 20th century. Till date Iran has the largest number of islands in the Persian Gulf. Though there are several rivers in Iran yet the only navigable river is Karun (920 kms. long). The high mountain range of Alabroz is situated in the north while the ranges of mountain Zagaros in the west at the southwest as well as the eastern mountains of Iran. Between Alabroz and Zagaroz mountains there are several sacred mountains that have a specific niche in the cultural complex of Iran. In these sacred mountains Sabalan forms an important chain in the tangible cultural heritage. Sabalan is located in the north west of Iran in Azerbaijan province. It has a height of 4820 meters. It forms the highest topographic feature of this region. In local parlance it is referred to as Savalan. Its three peaks are



Soltan, Harma and Kasra. Sabalan is a huge central volcano covering about 1000 sq. kms. Sabalan also has the permanent glaciers thus making itself as one of the most important sources of surface and underground sweet water, rather it is the life line for agricultural activities such as farming, gardening, animal husbandry etc. Its varied flora including abundance of herbal plants are a treasure trove with medicinal properties. Moreover mineral water and hot springs with curative powers are other attractions of Sabalan. These features facilitated the growth of population in its foothills. According to data collected from key persons through open ended interviews it can be deduced that Shashahsavan group of tribes which are about 30 in number have exploited the high territories of these mountains. These tribes subsist on animal husbandry and the vast patches of pastureland between the altitudes of 1500 meters and 3500 meters that are intrinsic for the survival of their cattle.

Settled agriculturists occupy the lowlands and their subsistence depends upon farming besides the valley is dotted with orchards. Even poets of Iran such as Khaqani who composed poems in praise of Sabalan in 12th century compare Sabalan's sacredness with the sanctity of Kaaba and Qibla. People believe that Sabalan is one among seven mountains of Heaven. According to local traditions, "on the place where Sabalan stands, there was a city full of sinners who often engaged in internecine wars. God sent a Messenger to bring discipline amongst them and establish codes of morality. But the people remained disobedient. So God commanded one of his archangels to put a heavenly mountain on the city. Among the mountains of heaven it was Sabalan who volunteered. The angel brought it down to the earth over his wings and placed it on the city. And then His messenger and disciples went out to pray. It is believed that there is a shrine of a Prophet on top of Sabalan and this prophet popularly believed to be Zarathustra. Ancient Persian scriptures support the tradition that Zarathustra went from Shiz (a town besides Urumia lake) to Sabalan. Here the Holy book Avesta was composed. In the seclusion he prayed to Ahura Mazda in silence. The Shia believe that Sabalan is the place where Ali (the fourth Khalifa and first Imam of Shia) met Khezr (alias The Prophet). They further add that Imam Ali tied all the wicked things together and buried them here. It is surmised that the distant memory of volcanic eruption from Sabalan could incite the fertile mind of people and stories were woven and legends formed that are now abound to explain this natural phenomenon of volcanic eruption.

In the last census (1996) Iran's population is adjudged approximately 6 crore. Population density is 35.26 persons per sq.km. Approximately 60% people live in cities. It is interesting to note that almost half of its population that is 44% of the people are less than 15 years of age. Population growth rate has dropped to 1.7%. Life expectancy is 68 years and infant mortality is 4.2%. The major ethnic groups, which live in this country, are Turks, Kurds. Baloch, Lur, Turkman, Arabs (major tribes being Kaab, Tamim and Khami), Armenian, Assyrian, Gilak, Qashqais, Nomads (mostly Bakhtiari and Kashkai). The country is divided into 28 provinces. The main religions are Shiiism, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Mahichaeism, Mazdakism. 98.5 percent are believers in Shiiism and the rest are Christian, Jew, Zoroastrian and of other religions.



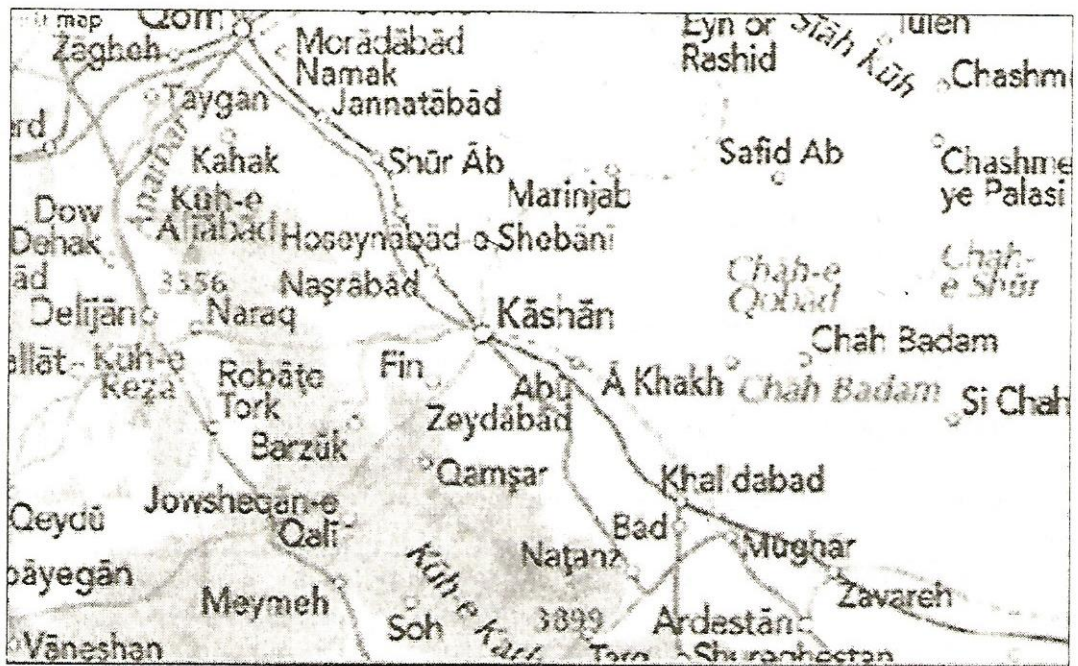
## Esfahan

The city of Esfahan was referred to as Aspadana. It is the capital of the province with the same name for last 900 years. The city is located at the foothills of Zagros Mountain. This city in Persian literature of 16th century has been described as *Esfahan nesf-e jahan* meaning "Isfahan is half of the world". Its grandeur and glory has been the hallmark of Persian art and craft. Its Chahar Bagh (four gardens) built in 1597 is landmark in Safavid architecture. Lucknow Railway Station's original name is also Chahar Bagh which has transformed into Charbagh over years. Besides the royal palaces, gardens, Esfahan houses some of the famous madarsas and mausoleums of Imamzade (sons of Imam). 8 kilometers to the west of Esfahan–Najafabad road, there is a fire temple (aatishgah) that has been most active during Sassanian rule.

Kashan is located on an altitude of 1600 meters above sea level, which is well known for its famous silk carpets, glazed earthenware tiles called Kashi after its place of manufacture. The rose fields of Qamsar has a most important archaeological site dating

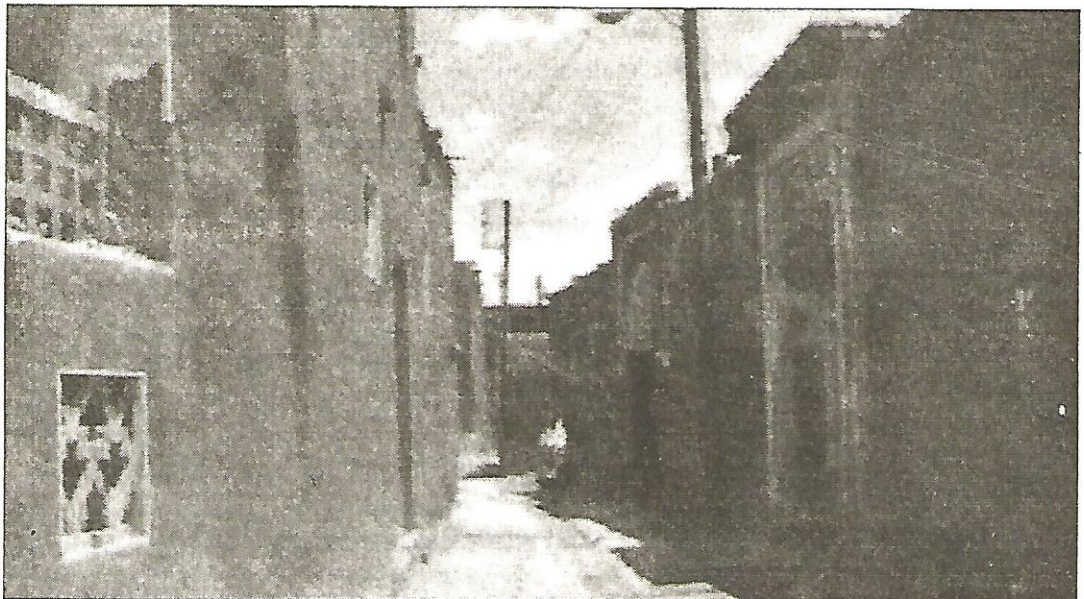






back to 7000 years. Its Buzurg Bazar is a historic complex erected in the Safavid era. It is nearly 1100 years old. In this complex mosques, inns, and different quarters for artisans speaks volumes regarding its antiquity.

In this province intensive field work was conducted in Abyaneh. This is a historic village at the foothills of Kaskaas Mountain. This is referred to as village of living traditions.





Its architectural style (all in red clay) and probably it is the most interesting example of human adaptation to nature wherein one can transcend the boundaries of time and space and experience the ancient civilization and culture of Iran. The village layout is compact and precise with narrow and sloped lanes cross cutting it. The residential houses are located on the slopes of the hill as if each dollhouse has been placed on a stairway. Here the roofs of adjoining houses are used as courtyards that are always situated on higher elevation.

The language spoken by the literate residents is Parthian Pahalvi. They are maintaining their tradition with pride, dignity and zeal. Irrespective of high education residents of village drapes the traditional attire on returning to their village. The attire is colorful and conditioned for the local weather. The women's dress consists of a huge woolen scarf reaching till the waist covering the arms. It has bright pink and red floral design on cream and white background. The blouse is made of colorful silk or cotton edged with gold or silver piping. The skirt is a flared pleated black satin reaching till the ankles. The seam of the skirt has golden piping. The scarf is tied below the chin with a safety pin. The jewelry is of broad silver bracelet with big precious stones studded on them. The girls below the age of seven do not use the scarf. Shoes and socks are an essential part of the dress code. The men wear shirt while their pajama are made of black satin with widely flared bottom having embroidery with black thread. The women's dress reminded me of the western region of India stretching from Haryana down to the Runn of Kutch crossing through the desert of Rajasthan where Meena tribal women put on skirts and short kurti. The striking similarity is witnessed in the cut of the blouse that was exactly like that of the Irani women's blouses. The women of the Irani villages as a tradition maintained the wedding gowns, which they inherit from their mothers to pass the same to their daughters. In addition to aatishgah, that is fire temple, there are three castles and a pilgrimage site. There are three mosques with pulpits (mimber) bearing inscriptions similar to the inscriptions found in pillar heads of Persepolis.

### **Mashhad**

Mashhad was the next locale. It is the capital of geographically the largest province of Khorasan (213335 sq.kms). The province is called Khorasan Razawi. A significant portion of my study is confined to this region since this area was significant in terms of locating the founder population that we were searching. Throughout history this area had harbored important trade centers and junction points on famous Silk Road Caravan routes and highways connecting India to Iran and from north to south between Turkmenistan towns and sea of Oman. Mashhad—the capital is also referred to as *Mashhad-e-muqaddas*, that is Holy Mashhad, literally meaning place of martyrdom. Apart from being the holiest city of Shiism Mashhad boasts of hundred of thousands of pilgrims coming from all over the world including Yemanis, Iraqis, Indians, Afghanis and Pakistanis. The city grew around the legendary martyrdom of Imam Reza—the heir to Abbasid khalifat as well as eighth of the Shia Imam who died in 817 after eating grapes. Shias claim that he was poisoned on the instruction of Khalifa Mamum.

The latter buried him near the tomb of his father the famous Harun-al Rashid. Since then the burial place is attracting Shia pilgrims. The wealth and splendor of the mausoleum



attracted many plunderers who since 9th century had ravaged the place many a times. However every instance of plundering was followed by reconstruction and addition to the main structure. Sultan Mahmood of Gazni rebuilt it in 1009 but it was severely damaged by Mongol in the 12th century. In early 11th century Sharokh son of Tamarlane enlarged the shrine. The shrine in spite of later invasion of Uzbek remained a vibrant nerve center of religious activities. In the early 18th century the shrine was firmly established as the leading Shia pilgrimage center in Iran. Nader Shah, though a Sunni, had displayed a missionary zeal by generously donating for the shrine. Eventually he was buried in the city. It is said *that visiting Iran and not going to the shrine is like going to Italy and missing the Vatican*. The shrine itself is strictly closed to non-Muslims save under exceptional circumstances with the special permission of the religious authorities approached through the government's tourist office. There is a strict dress code with regards to the entry in the shrine the dress code applies only to women. On top of *hizab* and *montu* the four meters *chadar* (*rida*) is to be draped covering the women's body from head to toe. And this is along with expectation of extremely conservative impeccable behavior. The tourist guide books warn the tourists not to visit the complex during late June to mid July as the religious gatherings from different parts of the world makes the place extremely crowded that to reach the inner quarters it takes a couple of days. All the roads in the city of Mashhad lead to holy shrine of Imam Reza. All the public transport radiates from the ring road that delineates the boundary of the shrine. A huge gold dome with two gold minarets on each side and huge gold Ivan, massive silver and gilt doors makes the shrine as the most opulent structure. The Qadamgah representing the footmark of Imam Reza and the fresh water stream that had sprung by his touch is another pilgrimage center of Mashhad.

### Neyshabur

This place is claimed to be the homeland of Saadat Asna Ashariya living in Hardoi, Unnao, Kanpur, and Lucknow districts of Uttar Pradesh. This is also the capital of Khorasan Razawi located 112 kms away. The western part of Mashhad has been a thriving literary, artistic and academic center. This was the home of the poet-philosopher Hakim Omar Khayyam. The city was founded in Sassanian period and named after Shahpur. It became the capital of Khorasan Razawi after the Arab conquest. It rose to great importance during the 10th century. It is one of the main sources of period pottery. An earthquake damaged the city in 1145 followed by invasion of Ghuzz Turkmans in 1153. It was rebuilt by the time Yaqoot, the famous traveler, visited it in 1216. The city was plundered and damaged during Mongol invasions of 1221. In spite of Mongol invasions again in 1269 followed by earthquake in 1281 the city flourished and grew and developed its past glory by 14th century. During 1722 the Afghans plundered it. Lord Curzon had commented that Neyshaboer has certainly been destroyed and rebuilt more times than any other city in the world. And he is probably right. Omar Khayyam who died in 1125 was most popular outside Iran due to his poetic compositions called Rubaiyat. These were brought to the attention of the world through the translation in 11th century. The poet is buried in this city. His treatise can be equated with modern times academic qualification as prevalent in Iran wherein the Muslim Hakims



prepare dissertations to obtain a Ph.D. Most experts agree that Khayyam was a great mathematician and also an astronomer. He is buried in the garden of shrine of Imamzade Mohammad Marookh built around 1570. Besides Omar Khayyam Neyshaboor had been the home of many literary personalities such as Fariddudin Attar the great and 12th to 13th century mystic poet, Kamalomulk Ghaffari—a versatile Iranian painter.

This tradition of producing well known Hakims and poets is also witnessed in Mohan of District Unnao wherein amongst the population claiming migration from Neyshabur we come across Hasrat Mohani a well known Hakim and poet who was also an active member of India's freedom movement, Bekhud Mohani another famous poet who obtained a Ph.D. in the study of works of Ghalib.

Most importantly Neyshaboor had been one of the important center of mining for turquoise (hydrated phosphate of aluminum and copper) and till date major chunk of Iranian turquoises is sent to various business centers. Further Mashhad and Neyshaboor are famous for their saffron cultivation the quality of which is assessed to be the best in the world. It is the costliest condiment used in cooking. The city also continues with the traditional method of extraction of natural oil/essence from various natural products like mint, rose, olive, berries and blending of various essences that produce perfume for daily use.

## **Qum**

The time constraint did not allow us to devote more time for certain locales. One of them is Qum. The latter falls en route to Kashan. It lies in a hot sandy hollow between the mountain of Kashan and the great salt desert. It has been a leading center of Shia theology. Countless clerics and other teachers are the product of this city, It also played a pivotal role during the Islamic revolution. Around 300 Imamzade are buried here besides presence of the shrine of Hazrat-e-Masooma daughter of seventh Imam and sister of Imam Reza. It holds the same reverence for the Shias as shrine of Imam Reza. Further it houses the famous seminaries that are cradle of many spiritual heads who not only come from distant part of Iran but other countries as well. The traditional architecture is dotted with Badgirs (air ducts) and *aab anbaars* that are water storage buildings built under ground to keep the water cool. In the literature distributed to the visitors it is mentioned that non Muslim visitors should visit only in groups.

## **Shiraz**

Visit to Shiraz was one of the most exhilarating experiences. This is the capital of Faras province, the heartland of Iran. It is a city with immense historicity substantiated by monuments, poets, philosophers, warriors, and kings and dotted with orchards, orangeries rose gardens anodize and fragrant blossoms that abound southern Iran. One can witness 8 kms. long uninterrupted rose gardens on both sides of the highways connecting Shiraz airport to the city. It is located on an altitude of 1600 meters and is 895 kilometers from south of Tehran. With a population of about 9 lakhs it lies in a green valley surrounded by high mountains. This is the home of Saadi and Haafiz—the literary luminaries who were the founders of ghazal in Persian literature and because of them it is popularly known as the



poetic capital of Persia. Saadi (1209-1291) was the patron poet of travelers. He had wandered from Iran to India traversing Turkey, Lebanon, Ethiopia and Arabia. Some of his best works are Gulistan (rose garden) and Goostan (orchard).

Haafiz (1324-1391) was one of the great masters of Persian lyrical poetry and literary genius of 14th century. He was born in Shiraz and lived all through his life here. Haafiz is well known for his ghazals. Haafiz is the pen name of Shamsuddin Mohammad. Haafiz literally means the one who knows Quran by heart. 60 kilometers away from Shiraz lies the center of great Persian empire of the Achaemenians and the finest piece of Achaemenians arts.

### **Perspolis**

The city of 'Persepolis' (literary meaning in Greek the capital of Persia) gave name to Iranians as it has the Takht-e-Jamshed, that is, the throne of Jamshed-the first ruler of Iran. The entire complex bears testimony to the civilization that flourished in the ancient past. The archaeological excavation has unearthed palaces, audience halls, treasury, storerooms, stables etc. that were built during the reign of Darius (521-486 BC) and further additions made during the rule of Xerxes (336-331 BC). Alexander (331 BC) as a great symbol of supremacy torched the entire complex. He was instrumental in the destruction of Persian imperial power. Yet the impressive ruins still relate to the greatness of the time period. The archaeologists have guided and helped to restore fairly and accurately the complete structure in its original shape. The roof and most of the pillars being of wood had been reduced to ashes and the mud walls had also been wiped out. What remains are the stone columns and walls along the staircases. The palaces were probably used to organize the reception for the visiting delegations of people who came to register their grievances that were forwarded to the kings for his decisions. The approach to these palaces were built on high platform with double rammed ceremonial staircases shallow enough to allow the important guests to be able to ride up on their horses. "The Gateway of All Nations" impresses the visitors with its massiveness exhibited in 100 columned palaces. The stone structure had been built without cement. One stone was hinged with the other and these have remained connected over centuries.

The Apadana staircase has intricately carved figurines depicting 23 scenes in three rows depicting representatives of various countries in the achaemenian empire carrying or escorting presentations preceded by court officials. Each section is separated from the next by a symbolic tree of life with the trunk taken from the palm tree and the top having rows of petals. . The entire carving forming a virtual filmstrip showing the visitors exactly how the people of the vast empire dressed in their finest ornaments, weaponries, hairstyle and footwear, and those came with the treasures of their homeland. In one of the rows we find depiction of Hindush (Indian) wearing dhoti one of them carrying basket of vases and double headed axes. Below Persepolis there are traces of a tent city that was erected to mark 2500th anniversary of Persian empire in 1971 attended by an array of ambassadors and international royalty to relive the achaemenians of the Persepolis.



### Cultural Foot Prints

The ritualistic contribution associated the Sun and Fire in solar monotheism of the Divine Faith (Deen-e-Ilahi) propounded by Mughal Emperor Akbar was on the whole more Sufistic and Zoroastrian than Hindu. Nevertheless the Hindu influence cannot be denied. However the place of Fire and Sun held by Shia *ghulat* (extremists) had more far reaching impact on the minds of Sufi missionaries who claim origin in Persia (modern day Iran). Analogous to recital of one thousand names of Sun in Hinduism is the Sufi emphasis on the Divine names and Emperor Akbar's preoccupation with the number 1000—the symbol of Alfi movements. Similarly in oudh (present day central part of Uttar Pradesh) the Nawabs who were followers of Shiasm borrowed the institution of the celebration of New Year's day (Nauroz). This was the single largest cultural permeation between India and Iran. Akbar preoccupied with fire, light and Sun received visitors from the Parsi *dastur* of Gujarat and he later invited Zoroastrian scholars like Ardeshir and Azar Kavyan from Persia. It is established by historiographers that Persian queens married to Mughal kings of India had a lasting influence on the state policy about religion as practiced by commoner and also nobles of the kingdoms. I need not elaborate upon a number of Hindu social ceremonies such as *rakhi*, *deepawali* (corresponding to Shab-e-barat) and practice such as wearing of sacred thread (*zunnar*) and submitting to a saffron mark (*qashqa*) daubed on the forehead been followed by Mughal royal quarters. Here my focus is on the observance of festival Nauroz—a festival of Persian origin still being observed by Asna Ashariya Shias of Uttar Pradesh. It is more than thousands years that Nauroz is celebrated in the vast geographical territory of Iran besides being observed by communities living from Mesopotamia and Kurdish communities of Western Asia. Nauroz festival coupled with the mourning of *Ashura* in Moharram is the cultural trait that identifies a Shia from a Sunni, and Wahabi. It is living intangible cultural heritage. According to Shia Islamic beliefs Nauroz is the day of Gabriel's descending to enlighten Prophet Muhammad, the day of Imam Mehdi's appearance (who like Krishna had promised to return to salvage his followers from misery and sins), the day when God finished the Creation of world and the final day of creation of human being. This festival is key to solidarity among many communities that live in Iran such as Afshars, Shahsevans, Kaab, Tamim, Khamis, Bakhtiaris, Baluch, and Arab tribes, Guilaks, Kurds, Lurs, Qashqais and Turkmans. It has assumed the significance of a national festival of Iran.

The anthropologists agree that it is a pre-Islamic tradition that continued unabated even after conversion. Islam did not dissuade people to rejoice since it is the day when Imam Ali (cousin and son-in-law of Prophet) was elected as Khalifa (the governor of state). In Safavid dynasty this festival became a Shiite motto. In one particular year Nauroz and Ashura (the day of martyrdom of Imam Hussain at Karbala) were on the same day so Safavid king declared that day as Ashura and the next day was declared as Nawroz. In ancient times when Sun worshippers were living the day of Nauroz started with prayers addressed to Magus. In Zoroastrian fire temples the prayers are addressed to Ahura Mazda and now on this day in present times Quran's *ayat* are recited in addition to eulogies rendered in praise of Ali and Ali's governorship. During my discussion with scholars of Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization the host institution—I deduced that Nauroz, the festival to



welcome the Spring season is the single most significant instance of intangible living cultural trait laced with oral traditions. It is the largest Iranian festival that lasts for two weeks. The major highlights of the festival are *Khane takani*-cleaning, polishing, whitewashing of homes and growing a plate of sprouted wheat with the intention of good harvest and seek blessings, *Charshambe souri*-day of alms giving in the name of deceased members of the family, visiting cemetery, preparing haft seen-new clothes, offering prayers of New Year, visiting relatives and performing *sijd-e-bedas* (literally meaning 'thirteenth day outside') symbolically throwing off the demon of coldness from city and villages.

Another characteristic feature is the role women play in these ceremonies that indicate their important position in the otherwise patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal society. In historical perspective although Nauroz is not mentioned in written records of Achaemeneans, Persepolis is the ideal manifestation of Nauroz ceremonies. Persepolis was the capital city where Nauroz and Mehrgan festivals were held. All the ambassadors of neighboring countries took part in this festival. These countries expanded from the border of Seyhoon to Ethiopia and Libya in Africa and from Doab in India to Bosfor in Europe. The inscriptions of figurines on the relief of huge stone slabs (parts of massive staircase) among the ruins of Persepolis have, besides others ambassadors, an ambassador wearing dhoti and carrying gifts on back of the donkey representing Hindush (India). Persepolis ruins of king Jamshed's (may be equated with king Surya) capital city is mute witness to the festivities of Nauroz. The festival was a ceremony of prayers and worship for almighty God to seek his blessings to bring peace and tranquility among the people..

In India the AsnaAshariya traditions indicate unabated practice of observance of Nauroz. It coincides with Holi festival of Doab. In AsnaAshariya homes wheat is soaked in advance and on the day of Nauroz the sprouted wheat are thrown in a small fire lit in the middle of open courtyards. The members put on new clothes and colored water, sanctified with recitation of Quran verses, are sprinkled. This is followed by preparation of sweetmeats and exchange of gifts between relatives. The most favored item that is distributed is fans made of dried palm leaves and decorated with frills of colored cloth attached on the edges. This is followed with feasting and rejoicing.

The scholars with whom we discussed at length on the issue of shared intangible cultural heritage between Islamic communities of Doab (India) and Iran the consensus emerged that uninterrupted observance of the festival cutting across the culturally distinct groups is testimony to the consolidation of social unity of those people who though belong to different tribes and profess different religions but share a common cultural heritage. Now this common cultural trait is the driving force in strengthening the national integration in Iran.

### **Anthropological input**

The prevailing socio-ecological conditions in Iran and its neighborhood, where in different seasons are nature's manifestations the change, particularly in revival of life with the onset of spring, has always been ushered and received by the inhabitants with humility and gaiety. This is evident by the various customs and ceremonies that evolved to welcome



the change from cold season to warmer conditions of the earth. This universality of culture is reflected in the observance of Nauroz festival. 6000 years ago the Iranian plateau was mostly covered with green foliage due to presence of plentiful water. The slopes of Alabaroz Mountain in North and Zagros mountains in South had thick green foliage-the area that today is covered by Sahara (dessert). It is observed that in this backdrop and in the light of oral history, myths, legends, customs and ceremonies we find meeting of Sumerian culture along Arvand River in South East. Those people immigrated years ago and beyond Zagros Mountain to settle in the plains along Karopun to Arvand Rivers all over southern highlands in Mesopotamia. Here spring begins with particular customs and ceremonies. New year festivals are related to marriages in Sumerian land. The same people entered Central parts of Iranian plateau. The comparative study on mythology of Sumerian culture and communities living in central parts of Iranian plateau conclude about rites and ceremonies that these cultural practices demonstrate the continuum of ancient myth of death and revival of plant God. *Mir-e-Nawroz Kous-e-gardi and Pir-e-Babu* ceremonies are examples to substantiate the above conclusion. However these festivals are not observed in Mesopotamian territory. Hence the New Year festival may have a common universal base but the myth of Nauroz and Mesopotamia are local and native. The consensus among the academia of Iran indicate that 4000 years ago Aryan began to immigrate from north of Iranian plateau, in other words, from cold lands where winter lasted for nine months and summer three months. The enculturation between Aryan and native residents of Iranian plateau resulted in adoption of customs and practices that suited to changed environs. The oldest reference to this migration is Avesta when Ahura Mazda addresses Jamshed. Later in Iranian history Jamshed (Jam) turns into a mythical king and the founder of Nauroz.

There are many narrations of splendor of Nauroz festival and its related customs and ceremonies among the common people and Sassanid courts from existing texts in Pahlavi, Persian and Arabic languages. During Islamic period Omari and Abbasi Khalifa accepted Nauroz as a socio-economic manifestation. Poems and historic prose mention it. Solar calendar was arranged with Khayyam's challenges during Malik Shah Saljanghai. Thus Nauroz got stable with exact date. Later in the courts of Safavid kings and Usman as well as Indian kings there was an obvious and hidden competition to hold Nauroz festival with more splendor than the others. In Safavid period Shiism became the Iranian official religion. This festival reached to other countries through Iranian immigrants. For example the Manavi Iranian brought it to China. They settled in Sinkiang or Khotan region. Zoroastrian Iranian known as Parsi immigrated to India, brought it to the western coast of India. AsnaAshariya -a Shia group migrated to Oudh in 12th century brought it to Uttar Pradesh. Some Iranian people immigrated to Zanzibar and even Algeria. All these people took Nauroz along with observance of Ashura.

In an anecdote of Shah Abbas, one of the famous rulers of Iran, the importance of this festival is described:

*# I eat rice with satisfaction only one night in the year and that is Nauroz night.  
Because I know everyone in the country eats the same food #*



This indicates that in Nauroz night in every household fireplaces are alighted and all around there is rejoicing and partaking of food. It is a time of family reunion around Nauroz *sofre* (lighted fire). Those who sit around this fire should be clean, attired in fancy clothes, polite and should have mirrors, water, candle, Holy Book and icon (sprouting grain) in readiness to usher the New Year, thus creating a mysterious and spiritual ambience that lasts for ever in a child's memory who curiously watches all the proceedings.

Some cultural variations are observed in the manners in which this festival is celebrated:

- People gather in Holy places to usher the New Year. The most revered shrines are Mausoleum of Imam Raza, Hazrate Masooma shrine in Qom, Shah Cheraq in Shiraz and Imamzade shrines in other cities and villages.

A holy flag is hoisted for 40 days with the name of Ali inscribed on it. In Gilan, the would be bride visits her future in-laws to attend ceremony of *Ghab Zani*. She is accompanied by other girls of her age. In this ceremony she sprinkles *Golab* (rose water) on members congregated for the occasion. In return she receives New Year gifts. In Kermanshah and Gouran village youth go to nearby hills to collect wood to make bonfire for Nauroz evening. (Doesn't it resemble the manner in which Hindu youth and children go and collect wood to put around the pole erected to make bonfire on the event of Holi festival). In Gharave the children paint eggs and then exchange these among friends. In Kashan the residents prepare drink of Chahe Yasin and partake from the single bowl. On thirteenth day everyone eat together by arranging the party outside their homes.

The preliminary analysis of data strongly corroborate the claim of AsnaAshariya of Mohan, Bilhaur and Sandila that they are offshoots of a parent population that originally migrated from Neyshabur of Iran . The cultural imprints that are discernible have been dealt in detail in the preceding pages. Since time constraint was a handicap nevertheless the cultural traits exhibited in founder populations in conjunction with the present population living in the *Do-ab* region strongly indicate a vibrant and versatile cultural link between Iran and India in time and space.

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## II

### DISPATCHES FROM THE MUSLIM WORLD

#### Reflections from East Asia

*The West and the Muslim world stand on the brink of what seems to be an impenetrable divide. The war in Iraq, American Muslims' fear of racial profiling, and desecration of the Qur'an at Guantanamo have alienated many Muslims. Yet many other Americans and Muslims believe they can still build a strong relationship.*

*With this in mind, Islamic scholar Akbar Ahmed, who wrote the foreward to "The Beliefnet Guide to Islam," traveled for two months throughout the Muslim world with*

*two of his students—Hailey Woldt and Frankie Martin and research assistant Hadia Mubarak—to learn what Muslims think, and how they really view America. Below is an edited travelogue sent to this journal by Akbar Ahmed.*

—Editor

## **The Rise of “Arab Islam”**

*Bali, Indonesia, April 7, 2006*

We're in the third phase of our journey—in East Asia, where Islam came not through warriors, not through conquerors, but through Sufis and traders and scholars. So traditionally, it's a much more gentle form of Islam. Islam here is more about Sufi-influences and tolerance and moderation, about balancing between faith and worldly aspirations. And the Muslims here are interactive with the other world civilizations, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, and Confucian philosophy.

So you can see it's a very different atmosphere for Islam than that of the Middle East, an environment of openness to Eastern faiths and cultures. The giants of this region are China, Japan, and Indonesia—the largest Muslim nation in the world with a population of 220 million people. It's an extremely important country to monitor in terms of feelings, philosophies, and interpretations of the Islamic faith.

In recent years tension has been mounting in this part of the world between two quite distinct ideologies: There is a sharp confrontation between locals, and those who want to practice an Islam that many locals feel is imported. They call it “Arab Islam.” The locals say, “Our own Islam is much more accepting and much more progressive.” They say “Arab Islam” has been influenced by some of the more literalist interpretation of the religion and is alien to them.

The example they give of that confrontation is the 2005 terror attack in Bali—the perpetrators were people who were influenced by this new form of “Arab Islam”, according to Bali locals. Now intellectuals in Indonesia are speaking out against this form of Islam.

For example, I gave a talk at a large university in Jakarta, attended by the former Indonesian minister of religious affairs, Dr. Maulana Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddique. He took the opportunity of my lecture to launch an attack against “Arab Islam.” He said, “We have our own culture, and we're proud of our culture. This Arab Islam makes us very uncomfortable, because it's alien to us.”

## **America's Role in the Fight for Islam**

*Bali, Indonesia, April 7, 2006*

The big proverbial \$64,000 question that came from this part of my journey was which type of Islam will prevail—the more aggressive type that is fueled by events like the prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib and the Iraqi war, or the more moderate, compassionate Islam.

The answer will depend to a large degree on the United States, and it's truly important for Americans to understand this. If America is able to help and promote those Muslims who want dialogue and who want called confrontationalists, or followers of “Arab Islam”,



by constantly seeming to provoke and attack Islam, then America reinforces the position of Islamic literalists and marginalizes those who want dialogue.

This is the equation that the United States needs to understand. There is an intense debate—a kind of a battle for faith—in the Muslim world. The so-called “moderates” are absolutely marginalized, as in the case of the Muslim intellectuals in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta who are trying to promote a pluralistic society with dialogue and good faith. They’ve been receiving death threats through *fatwas*.

If America is able to reinforce the position (of the moderate Muslims of the world) through respect, seminars, conferences, actions that will strengthen them in society, then in the long term they will prevail. Because Islam essentially is the religion of balance and good faith and compassion. But if America continues with abuses such as those at Abu Ghraib and fails to improve the situation for Iraqis, then the literalists will prevail because they will have the ammunition to argue that America is on the warpath against Islam, and therefore we must support a jihad against the enemy of Islam—the United States.

### Three Schools of Thought

#### *New Delhi, India, April 1, 2006*

The Islamic debate regarding a moderate versus orthodox Islam was personified here in a very unique way through visits to three places: Aligarh Muslim University, which was founded under British traditions; Ajmer, a city rich in Sufi tradition; and the university in Deoband, which is the center of conservative Islamic thought in India.

Aligarh has always been dear to me because it follows in the traditions of Pakistan founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah—the students there are quite Westernized, wear coats and ties, and have a very modern education as well as moderate Islamic studies. Deoband is the complete opposite—more like a madrassa education, with all male students wearing traditional Islamic dress. Until very recently, English was banned at Deoband, and only religious studies was offered. Now they do have some non-religious courses, like computer science, and also offer English.

Visiting Deoband after Aligarh was quite a revelation because I found the students at Aligarh more frustrated with their situation. With all their modern education, they were having trouble getting jobs. They also felt not of the Islamic world or of the Western one. Then in visiting Deoband, I found the students there very comfortable in their conservative setting. They had a positive outlook for their future. They were relaxed, secure, and forward-thinking.

And so, in thinking that the Aligarh representation of a balanced Western and Islamic education was the right model for Muslims, I learned that the Deoband model of conservative but positive thinking may be a better situation. The Deoband students were very interested in my lectures on dialogue, compassion and building friendships with people of other faiths. So if these orthodox students are willing to reach out to the rest of the world, then the lesson here is that a dialogue with all types of Muslims is possible, and necessary.

—Akbar Ahmed



### A Young American in the Muslim World

*Hailey Woldt, a sophomore at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., went on a 10-week, eight-country, trip as an assistant to Islamic scholar Professor Akbar S. Ahmed, who was gathering data for his upcoming book, "Islam in the Age of Globalization."*

*As they traveled through Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia, Woldt used her status as a young American to promote dialogue and friendship with Muslims in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Far East.*

Sitting in Indonesia as we near the end of our tour of the Muslim world, I'm reminded of the poem "Ulysses", which my favorite professor read to me two months back to explain the nature of an epic journey in search of truth. The poem speaks of an "untraveled world whose margin fades forever..." Back then when I was beginning this life-changing experience, I foolishly thought I was mentally and emotionally prepared for every margin I was to encounter.

This trip really began in Washington, D.C. as a student in Prof. Akbar Ahmed's "Clash or Dialogue of Civilization" class at American University. He had inspired me to reach out and understand the Muslim world as a necessary step toward peace and understanding. I began to do research for his project, and then he offered me the chance of a lifetime: A spot on his research team traveling through the Muslim world for his project.

I jumped at the chance before I thought about finding funds, time, and consent from my parents. But I knew this was *the* chance to expand my horizons and challenge my inner strength.

My parents objected on the basis of safety, of course. A young American girl in the Muslim world? Then they objected on the basis of my college career. But I was firm, and I promised to pay for the trip myself.

Now here I am at the last stage of our exhausting but exhilarating journey, with two parents proud of me at home and a world of inconceivable adventures under my belt. I have many stories to tell—things that I cannot myself believe I have experienced.

Perhaps my greatest test and most important lesson came during our stay in India, when we traveled to Deoband. Deoband is the center for conservative Islamic thinking, dating back to the nineteenth century when it led the *jihad* against the British. Today that perspective—and Deoband's university—are flourishing despite the "war on terror" and globalization.

Prof. Ahmed assured us that there was no danger in traveling there for research, but our Deoband tour guide, who was a leading Indian-Muslim radical, began our four-hour journey by describing his latest, best-selling book, "Jihad and Terrorism." I asked him about the nature of the book, and he then looked away to describe his thesis, as it is custom in his orthodox tradition not to look directly at a woman.

He said that it was a justification of the usually un-Islamic fighting tactics such as those used by Osama bin Laden and other terrorists in response to what he called "American barbarism." He argued that because America's tactics against his people—like those seen in Abu Gharib—were so horrific, "freedom fighters" could use extraordinary measures to combat them.



This was an unsettling conversation. But I settled in for a long journey to Deoband, passing through villages many miles from India's capital of New Delhi and finally bumping along a rough road to our destination. We were received by the head cleric himself upon our arrival and were immediately escorted to the front of the mosque for Prof. Ahmed's speech. I sat in the front, in the place of honor rarely given to a woman, much less a foreign, non-Muslim woman. My head was respectfully covered in a white veil, and I avoided eye contact with the hundred or so boys facing us from the audience.

Our work bore fruit when a radical Muslim changed his thinking.

—Hailey Woldt

### The Challenge of the Moderates

*Jonathan Hayden is an assistant to Professor Akbar Ahmed. Hayden spent more than a year organizing Ahmed's 10-week, eight-country trip through the Middle East, South Asia, and the Far East, and is conducting research for Ahmed's forthcoming book, "Islam in the Age of Globalization."*

*Hayden joined Ahmed on the last stage of his journey in Malaysia and Indonesia, during which he learned first-hand about the complex realities for moderate Muslims. Here he offers advice and chronicles his experiences.*

In Jakarta, Indonesia, I handed out a questionnaire to a class of 50 college students at an Islamic University that was designed to reveal their feelings toward the West, globalization, and changes within Islam. The class was about 70 percent women, ages 19-23. Their *hijab* was mandatory, but if the women were to take it off, they would've looked like any college class in America.

They were sweet, funny kids who wanted to take pictures afterward and ask questions about the U.S., Why, then, did roughly 75 percent of them list as their role models people like Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini, Yousef al-Qardawi (of Al-Jazeera), Yassir Arafat, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? We obviously have problem.

If these young students are choosing as heroes people who are hostile to the U.S., what can we do to change this? What has led to this? Who can help us? And where are the moderate Muslims? We must try to answer these questions if we are to build bridges with countries with a largely Muslim population and avert the "clash of civilization."

The answers obviously do not come easily and will take much time to answer. But one of the things I noticed in Malaysia and Indonesia is the vital role that moderate Muslims will play. I hesitate to use the word "moderate" because of its negative connotations. From what I've gathered, moderates are viewed as people who are unwilling to stand up for anything.

But the people that I am talking about when I use the term "moderate Muslim" are those who are standing up for the true identity of Islam while actively living in this "age of globalization." From what I've learned in this trip, moderate Muslims are practicing the



compassionate and just Islam that is taught in the Qu'ran without rejecting modernity and the West. They are, as I learned, hardly weak.

There were two people that I met who were particularly impressive. Through them I began to understand the challenge that moderate Muslims are up against: Dr. Ismail Noor of Kuala Lumpur and Dr. M. Syafi'i Anwar of Jakarta are Muslims fighting against formidable odds to create a dialogue between Islam and the West. They are facing a monumental task with their hands tied behind their backs. And I am ashamed to say, we are not helping them.

The strong anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world is fueled by such things like the U.S.'s hawkish foreign policy, incidents like the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, the desecration of The Qu'ran at Guantánamo, our relationship with Israel, and the fact that (accurately or not) we are seen as nascent imperial. Coupled with poverty, joblessness, and hopelessness—which affect Muslims in many Islamic countries—these factors create the possibility for any Muslim to turn radical.

Why are more Muslims looking to extremists as their leaders?

We must realize that each mistake directly marginalizes moderate Muslims throughout the world who are arguing for interfaith understanding, pluralism, modernity, and democracy. So which group will the masses follow after their religion, or their Prophet is attacked—the ones talking about peace and reconciliation or the ones fighting back? This may seem like a simple point, but it is essential in understanding why more Muslims are looking to the extremists as their leaders.

This point was driven home for me as we conducted our interviews in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. When we asked Muslims to identify a role model from the past, the name Omar frequently emerged. Omar, a fierce warrior, initially fought against the Prophet Muhammad before he converted to Islam. He became the second Caliph after the Prophet's death.

When asked why Omar was the choice, the response always was "because of his strength and because he fights for justice." It stands to reason that when Muslims feel attacked, they will gravitate to the Omar-like leaders—not so much for their extremist rhetoric, but because they are fighting for them and some kind of justice.

In Washington, D.C., where I work with Prof. Akbar Ahmed, who is considered the foremost moderate Muslim in the U.S., we receive threats, complaints, and pressure from all sides. Muslims look to Prof. Ahmed to stand up for them and defend Islam when he is called on for knowledge and advice by the State Department, Department of Homeland Security, policy makers, or leaders from all religions. Similarly, the government looks to Prof. Ahmed to calm Muslims when any incident occurs. How is he to walk this line?

The radicalization of Islam has been slow and steady. The response will take time. We cannot bomb the problem away. This only exacerbates the problem. We have to meet the enemy, face to face. We have to rediscover the art of diplomacy and realize that everything we do as a nation matters on a global scale.

The West must support moderates. They may be our only hope of isolating the extremists. They have something that American diplomats do not have: legitimacy within the Muslim



world. They can reach people through the teachings of Islam. They can remind Muslims that Omar was not only a strong and just defender of Islam, he was also the one who, after capturing Jerusalem, banned Muslims from destroying the church and ordered the respect of all houses of worship.

Since 9/11, the United States government has spent billions of dollars trying to defeat the enemy. Meanwhile, the people who can really change the minds of the Muslims on the brink—like those students who admire Osama Bin Laden—do with no support.

With world seemingly poised on the threshold of disaster, there are people who can make a real change with the right kind of support. After meeting college students and moderate Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia, I see the situation much more clearly. There is hope. And a big part of hope lies with the warrior Muslim moderates and our ability to support them.

—Jonathan Hayden

### III

#### **AGAINST THE GRAIN: PAKISTAN, ISLAM AND INDIAN MEDIA STEREOTYPES**

Contrary to Indian media representations, the average Pakistani is just about as religious or otherwise as the average Indian. The average Pakistani is certainly not the wild-eyed fanatic baying for non-Muslim blood or waging violent jihad to establish global Islamic hegemony that our media would have us believe. Like the average Indian, he is emotionally attached to and culturally rooted in his religion, but he does not wear it on his sleeve and nor does it dictate every thought or act of his. In fact, the thing that first strikes the Indian visitor to Pakistan is how almost identical the average Pakistani is, looks and behaves to the average north Indian.

Almost all the many people I met in the course of a recent month-long visit to Pakistan that took me to several places in Punjab and Sindh do not even remotely fit the description of the average Pakistani peddled by our media. Islamist radical groups undeniably do have an important presence in parts of Pakistan, but they certainly do not command widespread popular support all over the country. This explains the continual dismal performance of religious parties in every successive Pakistani election. Despite concerted efforts by Islamist and mullah-based parties to establish a theocracy in the country, Pakistani politics is not dominated by religion as much as by economic, ethnic and regional concerns. It is, therefore, crucial not to exaggerate the influence of radical religious outfits in Pakistan, as the Indian media generally does.

Indian media descriptions about Pakistan tend to portray Islam in the country as a seamless monolith. The variety of local expressions of Islam are consistently overlooked so as to reinforce the image of a single version of Islam that is defined by the most radical of Islamist groups. The fact, however, is, that most Punjabis and Sindhis, that is to say a majority of Pakistanis, ascribe to or are associated with the traditions of the Sufi



saints, which are anathema for such Islamists. Popular Sufism is deeply-rooted in Pakistani soil and provides a strong counter to radical Islamist groups and their exclusivist agenda. Many Sufis were folk heroes, radicals in their own right, bitterly critiquing tyrannical rulers as well as Muslim and Hindu priests. This is why they exercised a powerful influence on the masses, irrespective of religion. This explains, in part, why Islamist radicals are so fiercely opposed to the traditions that have developed over the centuries around such figures.

The popular Sufi tradition in large parts of Pakistan thus limits the appeal of radical Islamists, making the chances of an Islamist take-over of the country a remote possibility. In recent years, it is true, these groups have gained particular salience and strength, but this is said to be less a reflection of a growing popular commitment to the Islamist cause than to other factors. One of these is the role of the state. Although the ideological founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, envisaged Pakistan as a secular Muslim state, successive Pakistani governments have used Islam to bolster their own frail support base, exactly in the same manner as the Congress and the BJP have done with Hinduism in the Indian case. Islam has also been used to wield together a number of the country's ethnic groups that have little in common other than their profession of Islam, in the same way in which advocates of both 'soft' Hindutva, such as the Congress, and 'hard' Hindutva, such as the BJP, have sought to invoke Brahminical Hinduism to define the Indian nation-state. Hindutva ideologues propagate a form of Hindu 'nationalism' that has no space for Indians of other faiths, and is, in fact, based on an unrelenting hatred of non-Hindu 'others'. Creating a Hindu identity in this fashion is predicated on excising all elements of culture and tradition that Hindus are seen to share with others. The same has happened with the case of official as well radical versions of Islam in Pakistan. Yet, it is important to remember that this is not the only, and certainly not the dominant, form of Islam in Pakistan, as my interaction with numerous Pakistanis from different walks of life revealed to me.

'Radical Islamist groups are not a true reflection or representative of Pakistani Islam', a social activist friend of mine from Sindh explains. 'State manipulation of religion', he argues, 'has had a major role to play in promoting radical Islamism in Pakistan', which, he says, 'is largely an expression of elite politics and Western imperialist manipulation'. 'To add to state patronage of such groups', he points out, 'is the fact of mounting economic and social inequalities, sustained military rule, the continued stranglehold of feudal lords and the absence of mechanisms for expressing democratic dissent, all of which have enabled radical Islamist groups to assert the claim of representing normative Islam against other competing versions and visions of the faith'. In some parts of Pakistan, such as Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province, he says, electoral support for Islamists 'reflects anti-American sentiments rather than popular demands for theocratic rule'. Such groups, he says, have gained added strength from the ongoing conflict in Kashmir by 'tapping into Pakistani nationalist sentiments on this issue in the same way as Hindutva groups used the Kashmir conflict in India, both seeking to present the issue in religious terms'. 'In short', he claims, 'the limited support that radical Islamist groups enjoy in Pakistan reflects less a fierce commitment to their ultimate agenda of strict Islamist rule than a protest against the system which, ironically, has abetted such groups for its own purposes'.



'The task before Indians and Pakistanis seriously concerned about the future of our common subcontinent', says another friend of mine, a journalist from Lahore, 'is to rescue our religious traditions from the monopolistic claims of the radicals. Islamism in Pakistan and Hindutva in India feed on each other while claiming to be vociferous foes. We need to revive popular forms of religion, such as Sufism and Bhakti, that are accepting of other faiths and that at the same time are socially engaged and critique the system of domination that produces radicalism as a reaction while at the same time using it as a means of stifling challenges to it'.

**Yoginder Sikand**

## NEWS

### HOLY NAMES AND MILITANT OUTFITS

Muslim clerics in different parts of India have issued fatwas against targeting places of worship in the name of Islam or naming militant outfits after Allah or Prophet Muhammad.

The fatwas asking militants not to link violent acts with Islam came in response to the bomb blasts in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi where 23 people were killed. One of the two blasts took place in a temple. "There is absolutely no room for terrorism in Islam and the murder of one innocent person amounts to the murder of the entire humanity," said the fatwa by Maulana Khalid Rasheed, chief of the 400-year-old Darul-Ifta Firangi Mahal seminary in Lucknow. Quoting lines from the Quran, the fatwa added: "If any Muslim causes harm to any place of worship or indulges in the killing of innocent people, Islam would regard it as the worst possible crime and the Shariah would consider it absolutely unlawful." Rasheed, who also heads one of the main mosques in Lucknow, issued the fatwa on an application moved by a local businessman Sajjid Umar who had sought the seminary's verdict on the issue.

"Using holy names against peace is disrespectful to Islam. The religion, which does not even allow harming a tree or animal, cannot condone killing innocent people in the name of jihad (holy war)," said Syed Shah Badruddin Qadri al-Jeelani, president of the Jamiat Mushaiqal-Hind and the All-India Sunni Ulema Board.

"Through the fatwa our organisations want to send a message that Islam in no way supports violence. The religion is being branded with terrorism just because of a few people," he said.

"If they can't shun the path of violence, they must at least drop the names so that the entire Muslim community is not blamed," said Maulana Mastan Ali, director of Jamait-ul Mominath, one of the oldest Islamic institutions for women based in Hyderabad. A militant group calling itself Lashkar-e-Qahar had claimed responsibility for the Varanasi blast. Many of the terror groups operating in India use similar names that try and derive legitimacy from religion. They include the Jaish-e-Mohamed and the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

All India Muslim Personal Law Board, general secretary Abdur Rahim Qureshi also condemned the use of attributes of Allah and the Prophet for "activities which go against the very spirit of Islam."

Concerned over Muslim youth falling prey to the propaganda of terrorist groups, Qureshi, who heads Tameer-e-Millat, said they planned to launch a campaign to create awareness among youth.

—(Courtesy: Islamic Voice)



## ISSUES/DISCUSSION

### I

#### TWO THEORIES OF IJTIHAD

As tensions between the Muslim and Western worlds continue to grow, there is one largely overlooked area of activity that may play a role in building bridges: *ijtihad*. While *ijtihad* can be a tool for understanding Islamic principles in a way that fits the needs and challenges of individuals and societies, there is no universal agreement on its proper role.

The Islamic tradition has two conceptions of *ijtihad*. One is a very narrow, legalistic notion of it as a process of juristic reasoning employed to determine the permissibility of an action when primary sources, namely the Koran and Sunnah (Tradition of the Prophet), are silent and earlier scholars of *shari'a* (Islamic law) had not ruled on the matter. For those who hold this view of *ijtihad*, who can perform *ijtihad* is often more important than the need for *ijtihad*.

In reality, this view is designed to stifle independent thought among Muslims and to confine the right to understand and explain Islam to Muslim jurists. It is also opposed to reasoning, because it essentially says that reason shall be employed only when the texts are silent and no medieval scholar has addressed the issue under scrutiny. Reason, according to this viewpoint, is the last resort for understanding the will of God. For those who hold this view, opening the doors of *ijtihad* would make no difference, since their very conception of it is impoverished and limited.

The second view, often espoused by non-jurists and particularly by those who advocate some form of Islamic modernism and liberalism, envisions *ijtihad* more broadly. For modernist Muslims—and I believe that Islamic modernism deeply influences all “moderate” Muslim thinking—*ijtihad* is about freedom of thought, rational thinking and the quest for truth through an epistemology covering science, rationalism, human experience, critical thinking and so on.

When modernist Muslims claim that the door of *ijtihad* has been closed, they are lamenting the loss of the spirit of inquiry that was so spectacularly demonstrated by classical Islamic civilization at its peak. They are, in a sense, nostalgic for Ibn Sina' (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), for al-Farabi, al-Biruni and al-Haytham—scientists, philosophers and jurists of Islam's “Golden Age”. Thus, modernist Muslims see *ijtihad* as the spirit of inquiry and desire for all forms of knowledge, not just religious and juristic, that needs to be revived to revitalize and restore Islamic civilization.

As long as a majority of Muslims equates Islam with *shari'a*, Islamic scholarship with *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and real knowledge with juristic knowledge, *ijtihad* will remain a limited jurisprudential tool and closed minds will never open. Islamic modernists have been trying, since the time of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the great Muslim reformer of the 19th century, to re-instill a sense of the value of knowledge and an appreciation for science and



philosophical inquiry. Yet, as a Muslim, I acknowledge that there is no research institution worthy of recognition in this way in the entire Muslim world.

Muslims must go back and read Ibn Rushd (Fasl al-Maqaal, The Decisive Treatise), and learn how he bridged science and religion, in order to understand that Islam has nothing to fear from reason and so to open their hearts and minds to rational thought. This is the goal that Ibn Khaldun, the great 14th century Arab historian and philosopher, would have called the "engine of civilization." Modernist Muslims subscribe to and advocate this spirit of Islam.

Islamic reformation can be understood in two different ways. It can mean the reform of society to bring it back to what have been considered Islamic norms and values: most Islamic and Islamist reformers are pursuing this type of reform. The other reform strategy is to question the existing understanding of Islam and seek to articulate a reformed understanding of Islam: this is where Islamic modernists and rationalists have always plied their trade.

Here, *ijtihad* is employed as an instrument to critique prevalent understanding and articulate a more compassionate, more modern and, perhaps, even a more liberal understanding (which some would call the truly-traditional understanding). The rethinking of Islam vis-à-vis democracy is an area in which Islamic reformist thinking is taking place.

In my opinion, Muslims can modernize without de-Islamizing or de-traditionalizing. India and Japan have shown that societies can modernize without losing their traditional cultures. Muslim societies today have to distinguish between Islam and culture, retain their Islamic essence and reform dysfunctional cultural habits that hinder development, progress, equality and prosperity.

Without holding fast to revelation, Muslims will lose their connection with the divine, which would cause life to lose meaning and purpose for many. The challenge for Muslims today is to latch on to the currents of democracy, modernity and globalization without cutting the umbilical cord to the heavens. I believe that we can do it. American Muslims are demonstrating this in their lives.

When it comes to the modern practice of *ijtihad*, American Muslims are miles ahead of other Muslim communities. Not only are there a large number of scholars pushing for *ijtihad* in the U.S., but there are also national organizations and prominent Islamic centers that are, in principle, willing to put initiatives advanced by *ijtihad* into practice.

An excellent practical example of this is the adoption of guidelines for women-friendly mosques by many Islamic centers. An outstanding theoretical example is the now widespread acceptance in the U.S., and to some extent in Europe, of the idea of *Fiqh al Aqliyaat* (minority jurisprudence), which is the idea that Muslims who live as minorities need to revisit and rearticulate Islamic legal positions, keeping in mind their minority status. We can see the product of American *ijtihad* in the progressive role that women play in the American-Muslim community and in Islamic scholarship. Another important indicator is the absence of embedded radicalism in American Islam and the enormous appetite that American Muslims and their organizations express for democracy, civil rights, pluralism and civic engagement.



Thus, a broad vision of *ijtihad* ensures that Islam and Muslim communities continue to reform in positive ways without losing the connection to Divine revelation and traditional culture. Muslims must continue to embrace this spirit of inquiry and desire for all forms of knowledge in order to revitalize and restore Islamic civilization.

—M.A. Muqtedar Khan

## II

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL HIJAB

The issue of "Hijab", its various implications and the politics surrounding it, has become a globally polarizing issue. Whether in France or in Turkey, between Muslims and others and between liberal Muslims and traditional Muslims, the Hijab has become a site for the cultural struggle between Islam and modernity and between contemporary and traditional interpretations of Islam.

The Hijab is to some a symbol of Islam's ascendance in the world, while for others it is a reminder of the intransigent Muslim resistance to things that first emerge in the West—modernity, secularism, feminism, liberalism and globalism. For some Muslims in France, it is a symbol of their resistance to French cultural occupation over Arabs and Muslims in France. For Islamists in Turkey, it is an important means to preserving the Islamic heritage of Turkey from secular fundamentalism. For non-Muslim observers, it is often an introduction to an Islam that has misogynistic proclivities.

No matter what the perspective one employs, the fact remains that the Hijab is an instrument of segregation and containment.

The Hijab in its philosophical sense marks the Muslim woman for separation and for "different" treatment in all aspects of life; the most egregious being the moral differentiation it engenders. Muslims who claim that Hijab is an instrument that compels society to treat women in a special, even exalted way (in terms of security and respect) do not work to ensure that the society has special affirmative laws in place that will guarantee equal outcomes for women, since the Hijab ultimately undermines equal opportunity.

But the sartorial Hijab, and its attendant social practices of segregation, disenfranchisement and marginalization of women, is but a symptom of a more profound and civilizationally debilitating form of Hijab that is practiced by contemporary Muslim society. What is significant and must be confronted with vigor is the *Epistemological Hijab* that "good" Muslims insist on imposing on "good" Muslim women. The *Epistemological Hijab* is the traditional barrier that exists between women and Islamic sources. Women have played a marginal role in the interpretation of Islam and articulation of the laws and rules that are forced upon them. The *Epistemological Hijab* - the barrier between women and Islamic sources - has fundamentally rendered the articulation and enforcement of Islamic laws undemocratic. This undemocratic tradition privileges men and exploits women. Its reconstitution is important and more so now than before.



In the postcolonial era, a strange paradox has captivated the global Muslim community. The nearly hundred-year-old Islamic revivalist movement that is singularly responsible for the global significance of Islam, has been driven by lay intellectuals. Consider the following key figures of Islamic revival; Jamaluddin Afghani, Hassan Al Banna, Syed Qutb, Ali Shariata, Muhammad Iqbal, Abul A'la Maududi, Khurshid Ahmed, Malik Bin Nabi, Rashid Ghannoushi were all lay intellectuals, many educated in the West. Many of them were of course exposed to traditional Islamic sciences, but none of them was an Islamic jurist.

But for some inexplicable reason, the ascendant Islam today is highly legalistic and Shariah-obsessed. Islam in the mind of many Muslims is nothing but Shariah-what it really means in operational terms is that the beauty, the virtues and the meaning of Islam is confined to the rather mundane domain of medieval Islamic legalist discourse-Fiqh-which lacks the intellectual depth of *Falsafa* (Islamic philosophy), the aesthetics and the mystery of *Kalam* (Islamic theology) and the spirituality and charisma of *Tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism).

We live today in an era of Islamic banking - Shariah-compliant transactions - and Halal hamburgers; we ponder over the legality of eating marshmallows, and deliberate over the propriety of women shaking hands with men. Mind you, all serious legal matters, such as for example state-military relations, international transactions, have very little input from Islam or Muslim jurists, since the Muslim world merely follows the conventions of Western/international laws. Islamic legalism is itself confined primarily to issues of personal matters only.

This peculiar legalism, which has colonized Islam and the Muslim conscience, is a product of the vulnerabilities of the Muslim man who has tried to cope with his own insecurities in a world dominated by other men. Muslim men today are not sovereign beings. Other men dominate their world. The only area where they exercise absolute sovereignty is over the tiny domain called Islamic law. Here they realize their manhood. They glorify themselves, grant themselves exotic privileges and assure themselves of their power by exercising it on their women. This exercise of power is realized by complete exclusion of women from participating in the process of deriving and interpreting Islamic rulings from the sources.

There is perhaps no other legal tradition extant today where one has no say in the articulation of laws that govern one's entire life. Muslim women have very little if no role in the process of developing Islamic Fiqh. Even historically, men and men alone have developed all the Madhahib-legal schools, and legal principles, even those that deal with the most private aspects of female existence. Thus Islamic legalism has descended as a shroud on the Muslim women, covering her very essence from the world, disconnecting her from her own reality, depriving her of the right to understand and interpret her own being and disabling her from being able to navigate her own life. Islamic legalism fundamentality veils the Muslim woman's consciousness. Frankly it dehumanizes women.

Muslims scholars and philosophers of every tradition maintain that the essence of humanity is either our moral compass or our reason or both. By preventing Muslim women



from exercising their reason to derive the moral laws by which they live, Islamic legalism denies them the most human of all exercises using our reason to become capable of making moral judgments. In a way Islamic legalism steals women's God given humanity from them.

Islamists are fond of repeating that in Islam, God is sovereign since He and He alone has the right to make laws. Unfortunately, this is a very superficial understanding of Islam and fails to recognize the distinction between revealed principles (Wahy), human product (Fiqh). They obfuscate the distinctions between the two and call it law (Shariah). By insisting that the opinions and arguments of long dead medieval jurists are actually divine law, Islamists make jurists the God of Muslim women and introduce a new and oppressive partition/veil between the women and her real God. In some cultures this divine status of men over women is recognized since men are sometimes referred to as the "majazi khuda" (manifest God) of women.

If Muslim women wish to regain their humanity and gain an equal moral status with men, which is not denied to them in principle but only in practice [within Islamic society], they must tear the partition that separates them from their right to understand and interpret Islamic sources and act upon their own understanding.

They must tear asunder this *Epistemological Hijab* imposed by Islamic legalism that stands between them and their God. Until then all discussions about the cultural and physical will remain superficial and contained within the context of the masculine logic that currently exercises such supreme sovereignty over Islamic principles and its derivative laws.

—M.A. Muqtedar Khan

### III

#### THE POLITICAL MISFORTUNES OF INDIAN MUSLIMS

Indian Muslims, comprising so large a segment of the population that they can top the polls in any one of a hundred constituencies, are in a position to tip the political balance of the entire country.

Yet, paradoxically, it is the Muslim community, more than any other, which is suffering from political deprivation. Individually certain Muslims have managed, as a matter of chance, to secure an insignificant number of political posts, but the Muslim community as a whole enjoys no political pre-eminence on the national scene. Nor does it, at the international level, have any share in establishing political relations with Muslim countries. Even in so relatively small a country as Sri Lanka, the Muslim minority has greater political standing than its Indian counterpart.

It is common for Muslim writers and speakers to lay the blame for this at the door of the Hindus. But this view is entirely without foundation. In this world, by the very law laid down by God, gain and loss are not external but internal in their origins. Any explanation seeking to hold others responsible for our deprivation must be rejected *prima facie*, since it in no way accords with the law of nature.



If the truth be told, it is the incompetence of Muslim leaders which has given rise to this unfortunate situation. And Muslims, in actual fact, are now being made to pay for the crass inaptitude of leaders who launched movements based on shallow politics instead of creating among their followers a balanced political awareness-something for which there was a crying need.

If you go around any Indian city during the elections, you will find greater fervor for the elections in Muslim localities than in Hindu conclaves. This is a symbolic indication of the error which has led Muslims into their present state of political neglect. Misguided by incompetent leaders, they have come to feel that in simply empathizing with the national election fever, they are making an adequate contribution to the political scenario. They have stopped short of understanding that taking a real part in politics means full participation in the political processes of the country.

Muslims may display great zeal for *sehri* (food taken before dawn during the fasting of Ramadan) and *iftar* (the breaking of a fast in the evening after fasting all day during Ramadan), and for sermonizing on loudspeakers during the month of Ramadan, but they cannot be credited with *taqwa* (piety) if throughout the year they have not lead pious lives. Similarly, the mere display of enthusiasm for election activities on a few specified days will not bring them any significant political position in the country. They must realize that, for this, they must engage themselves fully and unremittingly in constructive national activity.

From 1947 till today, I have attended innumerable meetings without coming across any notable Muslim gathering which had been convened specifically to discuss the problems of the Indian nation. National issues simply do not figure on Muslim agendas. At Muslim meetings, communal issues, or more often, communal grudges are the favorite subjects of discussion. It would seem that national issues are of no concern to Muslims. I have often found, moreover, that Muslim speakers, invited to Hindu gatherings, give vent even there to the grudges of the Muslim community against the Hindus. This makes it abundantly obvious that Muslims have in no way identified themselves with the political mainstream of the country.

Muslims need seriously to consider the necessity to make their community an integral factor in the political system. For a start, their mode of entry into it could be an indirect one. For instance, Muslims could launch the publication of such newspapers as would be read throughout the country; they could play an effective role in trade unions and other such institutions which have a considerable influence on politics. But there is no significant Muslim presence in these organizations. And Muslim newspapers, if they are worth the name, are little better than communal complaint bulletins, bearing no relation to national Journalism. So far as trade unionism is concerned, Muslims are barely aware of it as a concept. And so on.

Over the last fifty years, under the guidance of self-styled Muslim leaders, what Muslims have largely done in the name of political activity is to vote for Congress. Yet, throughout this period they have never felt the need to become part of the administrative structure of the Congress Party. Now, frustrated with the Congress, they tread the path of negative voting. At present, any party claiming to oppose Congress policies can have the Muslim



vote for the asking. To my way of thinking, if Muslims want to have what is politically their due, they should first of all establish their own viability *visa-vis* mainstream politics. Only then will they be in a position to chalk out any real election program and secure benefits which at the moment seem beyond their reach.

For this to become a reality, Muslims must develop a strong journalistic network which is decidedly national in character. This will establish the *bona fides* of their patriotism and provide an acceptable base from which to project a positive Muslim identity with a wholesome political stance. However, a brand of Muslim journalism which is genuinely national in character cannot come into existence simply by calling some publication a 'national newspaper' and placing it on the news stands. In order to launch and sustain such a venture, Muslims will be obliged to enter the field of industry. For, in the world of today, industry is the institution which 'feeds' the national press. So long as Muslims have no appreciable share in large scale industry, they will not bring into existence any journalism worth the name.

But it is not just the lack of their own nationwide press that helps to perpetuate the Muslims' political under-representation. Even journalistic opportunities in the existing national press are not availed of by them because of their own backwardness. Major national issues may be regularly thrashed out in the national dailies, but whenever there is a Muslim contribution, it may be taken for granted that it is about some narrow communal issue and takes the form of a demand or a protest. Letters and articles by Muslims (and I have seen this in several major national dailies), far from urging Muslim participation in national political processes, are mere expressions of Muslim reactions against others in restricted local sphere.

Muslims need to be roused to a proper political awareness. They must be led to understand that politics, far from being just another name for reaction or negative voting, is actually the science and art of government. They must realize that inflicting defeat on one party in order to make another party victorious is only one aspect of politics. And it is nothing more than a kind of political somersault. If such somersaults have not improved the Muslims' situation in the past, they are even less likely to do so in the future.

Muslims will have to make their presence felt-in a positive sense-in the political environment of the country, they will have to participate actively in the ongoing political processes. And they will have to prove at the national level that such participation on their part is of vital significance. For instance they can provide an important link in establishing good relations between India and West Asian Muslim countries to the Indian State, etc.

It is regrettable that present circumstances and current attitudes rule out hopes of any such activity. For instance, whenever our Muslim leaders, both religious and secular, visit Muslim or Arab countries, they present a negative picture of India, projecting it as an anti-Muslim country. Due to this unwise approach, it is not possible to secure the kind of contribution from Muslim countries which would significantly enhance the religion to reach the point of a great status of Indian Muslims. If Muslims, on the other hand, were to play a positive international role-which is certainly possible-they would see a sudden and radical improvement in their image throughout the country. No longer would they be regarded



as liabilities, but as national and political assets. The day this happens will mark the beginning of a brighter future for Muslims all over India.

There is no doubt that India offers every possibility for the construction of a great political future for Muslims. But the secret of securing such a future lies not in the ability to make or break political parties at election time, but in the reform of the community at the political level and in an increased political awareness. The secret, in fact, is not external to the Muslims but within them. At present, everywhere among the educated classes of Muslims, discussions of the national Muslim agenda are going on. Meetings are being held. A whole spate of articles is appearing in the Hindi and English press. Books on the subject are being published. But nowhere do Muslims figure in their activities. They are almost entirely isolated from the whole issue.

The Muslim role in politics is the subject of much oratory and features regularly in the press. But the founding of a political party on the basis of a single community is more likely than not to exacerbate Muslim problems. The need of the hour is for Muslims to join national political parties and, by becoming part of their organizational structure, make themselves effective at the stage where political decisions are taken.

At present, Muslims in this country are viewed as a group with a grievance. Nowhere do they assume the stature of political entities, either in intellectual discussions or in practical activities. The best way for Muslims to resolve this identity crisis would be to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the political processes of the country. I am certain that, in filling this great vacuum, they would become a political asset to the country—to the point where, one day, one of their numbers might ultimately become the nation's prime minister. One country and one country alone.

—Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

#### IV

#### **ARMED FORCES ARE NOT A HOLY COW**

It is extremely unfortunate that the government has dropped the move to collate data on the status of Muslims in the armed forces. This follows an uproar over the steps taken by the Prime Minister's High-Level Committee—PMHC—on the social economic and educational status of the Muslim community headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar to approach the defence forces for such data.

The Bharatiya Janata Party sought the President's intervention in his capacity as the Supreme Commander of the armed forces to stop this 'misguided' survey. Former army officers held dharnas against the 'divisive' move, which they believe, would weaken a robustly secular institution. And former defence minister George Fernandes termed the PMHC's work a 'seditious act' aimed at 'communalising' the armed forces!

#### **Muslims in the Army: A Dangerous Census**

After this, much of the media simply renamed the PMHC the Sachar Committee. The Congress defensively pleaded that its survey would be 'purely a data-gathering and fact-



finding exercise.' The Prime Minister's Office quickly distanced itself from the committee. Chief of Army Staff General J.J. Singh said: 'It is not the army's philosophy to disseminate or maintain (community-wise) information'; 'we are not concerned with the faith or language' of the people employed or 'where they come from.' And the defence ministry, which had sought the relevant data from the armed services, assured them it won't forward it to the PMHC. In the heat of emotion, it was all but forgotten that in our Parliamentary system, the President is not the court of last resort. He is the defence services' Supreme Commander in a figurative sense. He does not possess the executive authority to start or stop a survey. Since then, former Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General R.S. Kadyan has approached the Supreme Court to ask that the survey be stayed. He argues the survey would help to 'sow the seed of communalism in the defence forces.'

Numerous arguments were advanced by opponents of the move. These old that the very conduct of the survey would tarnish the armed forces' image as a professional force; that words like caste, creed, religion and reservation are unheard of in regimental messes; that the army is one of the few reliably secular institutions in India, which is fully trusted by the religious minorities—unlike the police or paramilitary forces; it has an enviable record of protecting the lives of the minorities in communally charged situations.

Some of these arguments are undoubtedly valid. For instance, no one can seriously question the army's secular credentials and its impartial role in protecting the life and property of the minorities when called upon to do so. The Indian Army represents a remarkable achievement. It is one of the few apolitical militaries in the Third World to function fully under civilian control.

And yet, the anti-survey arguments miss one essential paradox: namely, that the army does not fully reflect the rich diversity and plurality of Indian society. It suffers from under-representation of certain ethnic, religious and social groups, and from over-representation of some others, most notably the so-called "martial races" favoured under the colonial system of recruitment, including Sikhs, Gorkhas, Dogras, Jats, Rajputs, etc.

We are an apolitical and secular force: Army chief Among the under-represented groups are people from the Northeast, Dalits, OBCs, and Muslims. We know from a note sent on January 9 by the army to the defence ministry that in 2004 it had only 29,093 Muslims among a total of 1.1 million personnel—a ratio of 2.6 percent, which compares poorly with the Muslims' 13 percent share in the Indian population. Similarly, there have been complaints of under-representation from Dalit and Adivasi leaders and smaller linguistic groups.

To demand that their recruitment be increased is not to advance an anti-national, communal or divisive agenda, but to ask for diversity and balance. None other than then defence minister Jagjivan Ram raised the demand for greater Dalit recruitment in 1971.

Indeed, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's greatest prime minister, who cannot even be remotely accused of a communal bias, noted in 1953 that 'in our Defence Services, there are hardly any Muslims left. What concerns me most is that there is no effort being made to improve this situation, which is likely to grow worse unless checked.' This concern was reiterated by Mahavir Tyagi, then minister of state for defence, who disclosed that 'the percentage



of Muslims in the armed forces, which was 32 per cent at the time of Partition has come down to two. I have instructed that due regard should be paid to their recruitment.' The PMHC was not being wayward in asking for information about the recruitment and status of Muslims in the army. It's vital to collect 'authentic information about the social, economic and educational status' of Muslims in different government departments. Without such a data bank, we won't know whether there is under-representation of different groups, what its extent is, and what its causes might be. Collating such information is also the best way of countering prejudices about 'minority appeasement'.

True, such information is relevant not just for Muslims; it is necessary for other groups too. But the PMHC's brief pertains to Muslims. It was perfectly legitimate for it to solicit information about Muslims. This is in keeping with the National Common Minimum Programme of the UPA, which promised to promote the welfare of socially and economically backward sections among religious and linguistic minorities.

### Soldiers' God

The issue of Muslim under-representation in the defence forces must be situated in context. As MIT-based scholar Omar Khalidi argues in his *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India* (Three Essays, New Delhi, 2003), the army embraced the discredited colonial 'martial races' theory which favoured certain 'Fixed Classes' like Gorkhas, Sikhs, Dogras and Rajputs in recruitment. Muslims were excluded from these, except for groups such as the Qaimkhani community of Rajasthan and UP, and units like the Grenadiers, Armoured Corps, Bombay Engineers Group and the J & K Light Infantry. It is only in 1984, after the 'revolt' by some soldiers of the Sikh Regiment following Operation Bluestar, that the army adopted a better mix in what's called the 'All-India Class.'

Yet, the proportion of Muslims in the army remains under 3 per cent. In the case of officers, this may be explained by educational backwardness among Muslims. But this cannot explain the community's low representation among Other Ranks. We need to know whether this is because of a reluctance of Muslims to join the army, skewed distribution of recruitment, or because of unacknowledged barriers to entry, including prejudices.

General Kadyan's petition is wrong to allege that if such information is collated, 'it will create very illogical and unnecessary data which might create... in the mind of the minority communities... a feeling of their being less in number in the defence forces giving them cause for... fear of the majority community.' This presumption is fundamentally mistaken. There's nothing 'illogical' about documenting the status of different communities in national institutions. The United States army, for instance, regularly compiles publicly available data on Muslims, Blacks, and other ethnic groups.

More generally, the armed forces cannot be an exception to the concept of citizenship in a multi-ethnic society. Nor can they demand to be shielded from scrutiny just because they perform a role in India's defence. All citizens have a valid role to play in our national life. Real security derives not just from military defence, but other things including human security, justice, social cohesion and human rights. The armed forces are not a Holy Cow.



A data bank on the ethnic-religious composition of all our public institutions is a precondition for measures to promote the welfare of citizens, including affirmative action in favour of the underprivileged and under-recruited. It goes without saying that this should not take the form of quotas and job reservations. But that's not an argument against diversifying recruitment or promoting equality of opportunity. There's no reason why the government cannot unilaterally announce that it will endeavour to recruit more and more under-represented groups without embracing a quota system. A caring-and-sharing society must have adequate room for such measures.

Two other points are in order. In many countries, promotion of inclusive multi-cultural policies and diversity became possible only when they abandoned ostrich-like attitudes and confronted reality. For instance, the British police began an internal evaluation after the race riots of the early 1980s. An extensive survey was undertaken of the ethnic composition of the force and prevalence of race and ethnicity-related biases. This prepared the ground for diversity sensitisation programmes, retraining, and positive discrimination.

Second, there is disturbing evidence that certain Indian security and intelligence-related agencies simply don't recruit Muslims. These include the Research & Analysis Wing, Intelligence Bureau and National Security Guard. This is totally unacceptable and unworthy of a plural society that aspires to a degree of equity. Even the CIA would be embarrassed if it were to exclude African-Americans. The PMHC should thoroughly probe such institutions. Exclusion, and attitudes that rationalise it in the name of 'security', are the surest recipe for alienation of our own citizens. We cannot afford this if we want a minimally decent and self-confident India.

—Praful Bidwai

*Courtesy: Rediff.com*

## V

### SC STATUS FOR DALIT MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS

Some weeks ago, newspapers reported the case of a Dalit woman, Rima Singh, whose husband, Mukesh Kumar, had converted to Islam and taken the name of Muhammad Sadiq. The woman had recently been elected as a sarpanch on a reserved seat in a village in Uttar Pradesh and wanted to follow her husband and become a Muslim. However, if she did so, she would have to resign from her post, because, as the law stands today, Dalit Muslims, as well as Christians, are not considered Scheduled Castes (SCs) by the state. A bench of the Supreme Court issued a notice in response to the writ petition filed by the couple asking the Government of India to explain why Dalit Muslims are denied reservation benefits.

The continued denial by the state of SC status to Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians despite consistent demands on the part of these communities is a patently anti-democratic and anti-secular stance and a gross violation of the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution. Receiving official SC status is not simply to do with reserved government jobs and representation in state legislatures and Parliament, although these, too, are



important. Dalit Muslim and Christian leaders point out that SC status brings various other benefits, which they are denied simply because of their religion. These include special development programmes, scholarships and hostels for students, reserved seats in educational institutions, special laws against atrocities on Dalits and so on, all of which do not apply to Dalit Muslims and Christians.

In 1950, a Presidential Order was passed declaring that the status of Scheduled Caste for official purposes was applicable only to those Dalits who professed to be 'Hindus'. Under pressure from Ambedkarite and Sikh organizations, this was later amended to include Dalits who profess Buddhism and Sikhism. The law restricting SC status to Dalits who profess the Hindu religion, and now Sikhism and Buddhism, has been critiqued by numerous Dalit ideologues, who argue that this is essentially a means to inflate Hindu numbers and create the notion of a Hindu majority, and, based on the logic of Hindu majoritarianism, to justify and strengthen the hegemony of the 'upper' castes, who claim to be representatives of the all 'Hindus'. They point out that, technically, all the major Hindu or Brahminical scriptures consider the Dalits as outcastes, outside the four-fold varna system, ranking below even the Shudras, and hence as non-Hindus. This argument is supported by the numerous references in the Brahminical scriptures to 'Chandals', 'Doms' and other such 'low' castes, using extremely derogatory language to describe them. Hence, Dalit critics argue, technically, Dalits cannot be considered Hindus, and the rule that restricts SC status to those Dalits who claim to profess the Hindu religion is bad not only in law but also in theology.

As many Dalit activists see it, the religion bar to SC status is a means to prevent Dalits from converting to other religions in search of emancipation from caste Hindu hegemony and for gaining self-respect based on a new religious and cultural identity. It is thus, they argue, a means to promote caste Hindu domination. Historically, they point out, in India conversion to non-Hindu faiths, including Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam, has been a means for Dalits and other oppressed castes to challenge caste Hindu oppression. That this has indeed been the case is obvious from the fact that the majority of India's Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims are descendants of converts from these castes. Seeking to stop conversion as a means of social protest by placing a religion bar, they argue, is not just anti-secular. It is also a means to stem Dalit revolt and, by Hinduising the Dalits under caste Hindu tutelage, it works to further solidify their dependence on the Savarna castes. Conversion to a non-Hindu and egalitarian religion, as Dr. Ambedkar himself realized and insisted, was a principal means for the Dalits to challenge caste Hindu oppression and to fashion a new identity based on self-respect, which the Hindu religion denies them.

Defenders of the religion bar seek to justify the restriction of SC status to Dalits who profess the Hindu religion by claiming that this is because the Hindu religion alone sanctions untouchability, unlike egalitarian faiths like Christianity and Islam. Hence, they say, only 'Hindu' Dalits should be treated specially by the state. This argument is specious, to say the least. For one, it goes against the repeated claims by caste Hindu apologists, including both Gandhians and Hindutva ideologues, that the Hindu religion has no room for



untouchability. Yet, ironically, when it comes to extending SC status to Dalit Muslims and Christians these very same apologists use the argument that since Hinduism sanctions untouchability, only 'Hindu' Dalits should benefit from such status.

Defenders of the religion clause also claim that only 'Hindu' Dalits face social discrimination because the Hindu religion sanctions it, and that, therefore, they alone should benefit from SC status. This argument, too, is faulty. It is completely blind to the fact that Dalit Christians and Muslims also face various similar forms of discrimination, from both their co-religionists as well as from caste Hindus. In the case of Dalit Muslims, this discrimination may be even more acute than what non-Muslim Dalits face, given the fact of widespread anti-Muslim sentiments and violence directed against Muslims, in which most of the victims are probably of 'low' caste origin. Caste prejudices directed against Dalits run so deep in Indian society that the mere fact of conversion alone does not remove it. In fact, today, given the enormous clout of the anti-conversion and Hindutva lobbies, a Dalit who converts to Islam or Christianity will probably be worse off than before than prior to his or her conversion, being subject to harassment, boycott and sometimes even physical attacks. All the more reason, then, for such Dalits to also receive SC status.

Given the fact that a section of 'Hindu' Dalits has received special status for decades and benefits from the state flowing from that status, it is obvious that their conditions are better than most Muslim and Christian Dalits. This means that Muslim and Christian Dalits are equally, or even, in a sense, more deserving of SC status in order to help them come up at least to the level of 'Hindu' Dalits. The argument that the religion bar is obviously unfair and untenable is further strengthened by the fact that there is no such bar mandated in case of the Scheduled Tribes. Surely, then, the patently anti-secular and anti-democratic religious bar against which Dalit Muslim and Christian leaders are protesting needs to be removed forthwith.

—Yoginder Sikand

## VI

### BEYOND BORDERS: SHARED TRADITIONS IN GUJARAT CHALLENGE THE COMMUNAL DIVIDE

Exactly three years ago, Gujarat witnessed a state-sponsored genocide that culminated in the deaths of some three thousand Muslims and led to a complete breakdown of inter-community relations, the scars of which have still not healed. Yet, despite the relentless assault of Hindutva forces in Gujarat, all is not lost. As a recent study by the noted anthropologist J.J. Roy Burman, titled, "The Other Gujarat: Hindu-Muslim Syncretism and Humanistic Forays" shows, there are still numerous spaces and religious traditions in Gujarat that defy the Hindutva onslaught and its hate-filled agenda.

Talk of a complete communal polarisation in Gujarat, Burman writes, is somewhat exaggerated. In fact, it can be dangerous if it leads to despair and capitulation before the Hindutva juggernaut. Even at the peak of the genocidal attacks, as Burman documents, numerous Hindus and Dalits saved Muslim lives. Burman provides interesting details of



some of these brave heroes, based on personal interactions with them. He also highlights cases of Muslim traders supporting poor Hindus in violence-affected areas, and, drawing on personal observations in small towns and villages across Gujarat, mentions examples of close cultural, religious as well as personal relations and bonding between Dalits, Hindus and Muslims, particularly among the poor.

An intriguing aspect of Gujarati society that Burman highlights are the significant number of religious traditions and sacred spaces across Gujarat which bring Hindus, Dalits and Muslims in common worship and ritual participation. Thus, Burman writes of some Muslim groups in Kutch who regularly pray at local temples, of the Gupti Momins of Bhavnagar who appear outwardly as Hindus but are actually Muslims, keeping their faith 'gupt' or secret (and hence their name) and of Hindu Khatri weavers participating in Muharram mourning rituals for Imam Husain. Other similar groups are the Maul-e Salaam Girasis, the Jams and Jaths of Kutch and the Mirs of Sabarkantha, who, while nominally 'Muslim', still practice many 'Hindu' customs. Some of these shared religious traditions and their adherents cannot, Burman says, be classified as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' but as somewhat in-between, giving rise to liminal community identities that defy the logic of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' being two homogenous, monolithic and completely separate community that is so integral to Hindutva as well as Islamist discourse. Burman mentions the Pranamis, to which sect Gandhi's mother belonged, who claim to follow 'true' Sanatan Dharma and 'true' Islam, seeing both as synonymous. Another such intriguing community in Gujarat he mentions are the Nizari Ismaili Shias, who believe that Islam is the fulfilment of Hinduism, and whose leading missionaries had both Hindu and Muslim names and dual identities. Among the pioneers of the Nizari faith in Gujarat were Pir Shams, also known as Shamas Rishi, Hasan Kabiruddin or Anant Jo Dhano, and Rama Pir, a disciple of Pir Shams who still commands a following of several million Dalits in Rajasthan and Gujarat, who is also known as Ram Dev. In addition to the Quran, the Gujarati Ismailis, also known as Satpanthis or 'followers of the True Path', have a holy book, the Das Avatar, in which the nine incarnations of Vishnu are praised and Imam Ali is presented as the final or Nikalanki avatar of Vishnu. The book also describes Adam as Shiva and Fatima, wife of Imam Ali, as Shakti.

The ecumenical potential of these shared religious traditions should not be exaggerated, however, Burman warns. Today, many of them, under pressure from 'orthodox' Hindu and Muslim forces, are undergoing major transformations. In these cases traditions that once brought together people of different caste and religious backgrounds are now hotly contested by groups that insist that they must choose to be either 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' and no longer neither or a little bit of both. Thus, most Pranamis now claim to be full-blooded Hindus and conceal the Islamic aspects of their identity and history. The Pirana Satpanthis, followers of Imam Shah, son of the Ismaili Shia preacher Hasan Kabiruddin, are now almost completely divided into rival 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' factions. Some Satpanthis, egged on by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, have captured the shrine of Imam Shah and have declared it to be a Hindu temple, Prerana Peeth instead of Pirana, the house of the (Muslim) Pir or Sufi saint. At the same time as some shared religious traditions in Gujarat are now coming under severe



attack, there are, Burman points out, numerous other such traditions and spaces where people of different communities come together in ritual worship. Most of these are associated with Muslim Sufi saints, whose dargahs or shrines, which number several hundreds all over Gujarat, attract large numbers of Hindu and Dalit devotees as well. One such dargah is that of Khwaja Didar in Surat, a city that has witnessed numerous communal riots in the recent past. Pilgrims to the dargah first pay their respects to the grave of a local Hindu Raja, Tan Singh, who is said to have converted to Islam at the saint's hands and spent the remainder of his life serving him. Another Sufi shrine in Surat, that of Bala Pir, is tended to by a 'low' caste Hindu. The shrine of Haji Pir in Kutch has many Hindu followers. 'Low' caste Kolis offer free service and keep the shrine clean, and a rich Jain industrialist has paid for constructing its boundary walls. The dargah of Pir Murad, also in Kutch, is located in a village which has only one Muslim family, and is regarded as the patron saint of the pastoralist Bharwad community, who visit his shrine in the hope of curing their animals. The shrine of Faid Pir in Nakhtarana has a Rabari custodian, although the village has a Muslim majority. The dargah of Meeran Datar in Mehsana is, Burman says, hugely popular among local Hindus, who visit it for cures for mental illnesses. The saint is said to have been martyred by a local Raja for opposing the practice of human sacrifice.

Some shared religious traditions in Gujarat, Burman tells us, are also centred on charismatic saints who preached an ethical monotheism transcending communal differences, striving to bring Hindus and Muslims closer together in recognition of their common humanity. Thus, for instance, the mandir-dargah complex of Mekandada in Kutch has shrines of Mekandada Shanker and Fakir Pir. It looks fully 'Hindu' but has Hindu and Islamic religious messages painted on its walls. A similar shrine in Junagadh contains the graves of Sant Devidas and of Dana Pir. On the island of Bet Dwarka, 30 kilometres from the Hindu pilgrimage centre of Dwarka, and inhabited mainly by Muslims, is the dargah of Syed Haji Ali Daud Shah Kirmani, which attracts many Hindu pilgrims, including the pujaris of the local Krishna temple. Interestingly, Muslim singers have for generations performed devotional music at the temple.

Burman admits that these religious traditions and continuing bonds binding Hindus, Muslims and Dalits in parts of Gujarat are vulnerable and, in many places, have proved unable to withstand the relentless challenge posed by Hindutva forces. Yet, he insists that they need to be recovered and highlighted as a powerful resource to combat the politics of fascism parading in the guise of Hinduism and a warped notion of Indian nationalism.

—Yoginder Sikand

## VII

### LIMITS TO RIGHT TO PROTEST

Two incidents involving the Muslim community in India made it to the headlines of national news recently. The first one was related to the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* publishing cartoons caricaturing Prophet Mohammed as a terrorist. The second was the desecration of



the Holy Qur'an in Ladakh region in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Both incidents led to protests by the Muslim community against the disrespect shown to their Prophet and the Holy Qur'an. Nothing wrong with it. In fact the protests were justified. However, what raises doubts is the manner in which these protests were conducted. Lets look at both these incidents separately and see where the demonstrations went off the track.

To begin with, it has to be acknowledged that the cartoons published by Jyllands-Posten were in bad taste and bound to provoke even the least devout Muslim. The argument that the publication of these cartoons falls within the ambit of 'freedom of expression' or 'right to freedom of press' does not hold water. Caricaturing Muslims as terrorists and illiterate, camel-riding morons in films and cartoons is not new. This has been done in the past too, especially in the post-9/11 period. Such depictions never became a cause for demonstrations and street violence of the kind witnessed this time. So what got their goat? This time the cartoonist chose to use the image of Prophet Mohammed instead of the thawb wearing Arab. This depiction went against two very basic beliefs of Muslims across the world. First, Islam forbids any pictorial or facial depiction of the Prophet. Therefore, the cartoon showing the Prophet in human form was nothing but blasphemy for Muslims. Second, according to Islamic beliefs Prophet Mohammed is the 'insaan-i-kaamil' or the 'Perfect Man'. Honesty, justness, gentlemanly conduct, and an impeccable moral make-up characterised the Prophet. He was a spiritual guide who led his followers by example. Today the faithful are exhorted to follow the Prophet's 'path', the sunnah, and lead a life as shown by him. It is this revered figure that the cartoons in Jyllands-Posten depicted in a deprecating manner.

As news about the cartoons spread, Muslims throughout the world, especially in Islamic countries, voiced their protest against this affront to their belief and their Prophet. The expression of these protests took various forms. Several Arab and Islamic nations demanded an apology from the Danish government and some even closed down their embassies in Denmark. The situation turned ugly when the Danish and Norwegian missions in Syria and Beirut were burnt down and death threats issued to the creators of the cartoons. Protests in Nigeria escalated into bloody clashes between Muslims and Christians claiming more than hundred lives. Pakistan and India witnessed their share of protestations, some of which sadly turned violent.

In the meanwhile we had a Muslim cleric in India issuing a fatwa ordering the killing of those who drew the cartoons and a minister in the government of the state of Uttar Pradesh in India instituting a 'reward' of Indian Rupees 51 crores to anyone who beheaded the cartoonist! Violent street protests continue to this day in various parts of the world. However, the question that arises is whether the path taken by some of these demonstrators was acceptable or not? In my humble opinion, they were not. More on it a little later.

Ladakh, like most peripheral regions of India, isn't 'banner headline' material. That's why the news reports about communal clashes between Muslims and Buddhists would have come as a surprise to most of us. However, the fact remains that tension between Muslim and Buddhist communities of Ladakh has been a sad reality of the region for sometime now. Matters reached a flashpoint in 1989 when the Buddhist community under



the leadership of the Ladakh Buddhist Association declared a social boycott of Muslims. Even the Buddhist spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama failed to break the impasse. This boycott went on till 1992. Communal tensions have simmered ever since and minor incidents only aggravate the problem. The incident involving the "tearing of pages of the Holy Qur'an by unidentified people" was provocation enough to bring the Muslim protestors on the streets again. Quite clearly the act was a deliberate one intended to incite the Muslims and create unrest in the region by exploiting the underlying tensions between the two communities. Regrettably, the Muslims of Ladakh couldn't see through it and fell right into the trap. The violence that followed is hard to defend. On what grounds did the Muslim groups attack Buddhist owned establishments and houses? Mere suspicion? Or if they had the proof that certain members of the Buddhist community were involved in the act of desecration of the Holy Qur'an, why didn't they report the matter to the police and let the law take its course?

In a civilised democracy, just as the right to freedom of expression is not absolute and unbridled, so is the right to protest. The moment a peaceful demonstration turns into a violent mob, the word protest loses meaning. Pray, what did the Muslims indulging in violence achieve by setting shops ablaze, damaging public and private property and inconveniencing fellow citizens in their respective countries? Did it in anyway assuage their indignation? Obviously not. In a world where Islam and its followers have been demonised as terrorists, the pictures of Muslim youth rampaging through streets, indulging in arson and violence only go on to strengthen such stereotypes. As a matter of fact, the violence perpetrated by these protestors has only given credence to the message that the Jyllands-Posten cartoons sought to convey—that of a violent Muslim community.

It is high time that the moderate voices from amongst the community make themselves heard and send out a clear message that violence in any form is unacceptable. Saner and more tolerant minds are the need of the hour.

Postscript: The Editor of Jyllands-Posten has apologised for publishing the offensive cartoons. That should effectively put this whole controversy to end.

—Salil Kader

*(The author is doctoral researcher and writes on issues concerning Islam and Indian Muslims)*

## VIII

### WOMEN VICTIMS OF HONOR KILLING

It is estimated by the United Nations Population Fund that as many as 5000 women and girls are murdered by family members each year in so-called "honor killings" around the world (Yemen Observer).

In Yemen, with an estimated population of 16 million, Mohammed Ba Obaid, who heads the department of Women's Studies in Sana'a University, said his surveys found that more than 400 women were killed for reasons of "honor" in 1997.



A report prepared by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) in 2002 states that there is very little information concerning the prevalence of 'honor crimes' in Yemeni society, and while some local non-governmental organizations have reportedly stated that the phenomenon is not widespread, other organizations assert that honor crimes do occur, but that they currently lack evidence to substantiate this claim. In one reported case from 1997, two Yemeni men allegedly bludgeoned their mother to death and threw her body onto a roadside embankment for "practicing immoral acts". It is unknown whether the men were arrested or prosecuted for the murder. Honor killing, as defined by United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF, is an ancient practice in which men kill female relatives in the name of family 'honor' for forced or suspected sexual activity outside marriage, even when they have been victims of rape.

These killings have been reported in Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt and West Bank. The killings are also known in Syria, Iraq and other Persian Gulf countries and among Arabs in Israel. Honor killings are not exclusively an Arab phenomenon. The United Nations says such killings have been reported in Bangladesh, Turkey and Uganda. Afghanistan, where the practice was condoned under the rule of the fundamentalist Taliban movement, can be added to the list, along with Iran. Such killings have also occurred in Italy, Britain, Norway, Italy, Brazil, Ecuador, Sweden, Peru and Venezuela. At least one case has been reported in the US, but these crimes are labeled "crimes of passion" instead of "honor" crimes. However, some argue they should also be seen as honor killings.

"They are the same thing with a different name", some rights advocates say. In India, for example, more than 5,000 brides die each year because their dowries are considered insufficient, according to UNICEF. According to the Human Rights Commission, the total number of honor killings is much higher than reports indicate, as data from some provinces and some remote regions is not available. Information from UNICEF for 1997 states that around 1,000 girls and women are murdered each year in Pakistan. More than two-thirds of all murders in Gaza Strip and West Bank are honor killings. In Jordan, an average of twenty-five to thirty women are killed each year in the name of honor. In Lebanon, around 36 honor killings are reported each year, while in Egypt, some 52 honor killings reported every year.

Estimating the scale of the phenomenon is made more difficult not only by the problems of data collection in predominantly rural countries, but by the extent to which community members and political authorities collaborate in covering up the atrocities. In some countries such as Jordan, Morocco and Syria, "honor crimes" are also legally sanctioned and defense of the family honor is considered a mitigating factor. Legislation in various countries awards lesser punishment in cases where the victim is considered to have "provoked" the crime by violating cultural norms. Article 232 of the Penal Code of Yemen stat that "if a man kills his wife or her alleged lover in the act of committing adultery or attacking them causing disability, he may be fined or sentenced to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year."

That rule is also applied on a man who surprised a "direct or subsidiary relation or sister" in the act of committing adultery. But in many countries activists and human-rights groups say that most killers receive light punishment, when they are prosecuted at all. Arab



judges, who are almost always male, are generally allowed great latitude in sentencing, and most tend to see honor as a circumstance akin to self-defense. Nabil Al-Mohamedi, a lawyer who participated in the session discussing honor killing organized by the Sisters Arab Forum last year in Yemen, said that the article stated that the man should be surprised by his relative committing adultery. If he previously had suspicions about it happening then the law did not apply, he argued. "The relative must be in the act of committing adultery and not be, for example, only in a shameful position or naked" Al-Mohamedi, said.

The concepts of women as property and honor are so deeply entrenched in the social, political and economic fabric of society that the government, for the most part, ignores the daily occurrences of women being killed and maimed by their families. Frequently, women murdered in "honor" killings are recorded as having committed suicide or died in accidents. "We do not consider this as murder," Wafik Abu Abseh, a 22-year-old Jordanian woodcutter is reported to have said about 'honor' killing, as his mother, brother and sisters nodded in agreement. "It was like cutting off a finger." Honor killings of women reflect longstanding patriarchal-tribal traditions, which cast the male as the sole protector of the female, and so he must have total control of her. If his protection is violated, he loses honor because either he failed to protect her or he failed to bring her up correctly. The unwritten law argues that if someone is wronged, the perpetrator's family must make amends-often with gifts or livestock - to avoid an injury to family honor that could end in a feud.

Restoring a woman's honor, however, is a more complicated matter. If she's believed to have had an affair, the only way to clear her name, if at all, is for her to be married to the man in question-or to be killed. Marzouk Abdel Rahim, a Cairo tile maker, stabbed his 25-year-old daughter to death at her boyfriend's house in 1997, and then chopped off her head. He said he had no regrets. "Honor is more precious than my own flesh and blood," said Abdel Rahim, who was released after two months. The typical "honor" killer is a man, usually the father, husband, or brother of the victim. Frequently teenage brothers are selected by their family or community to be the executioners, because their sentences will generally be lighter than those handed down to adults. While the victims of "honor" killings are overwhelmingly female, tradition dictates that males involved in the "crimes" should face death as well.

But the accused women are normally killed first, giving men a chance to flee retribution. According to Amnesty International, targeted men in Pakistan can escape death by paying compensation to the family of the female victim, leading to an "'honor killing industry' involving tribespeople, police and tribal mediators," which "provides many opportunities to make money, [or] obtain a woman in compensation". Although most honor crimes occur in Muslim societies, Islam does not sanction such killings. "On the contrary, what's there in the Qur'an, is against it," said Mohammed Serag, a professor of Islamic studies at the American University in Cairo. "In the eyes of Islam, those people (who kill in the name of honor) are criminals."

Islam, which emphasizes chastity for men and women, prescribes 100 lashes each for anyone who violates the Muslim code for behavior. But nothing in the Qur'an, supports the



death punishment for honor-related transgressions. Serag said men who believe Islam approves of honor crimes may have misinterpreted the Qur'an, verse that allows husbands to beat their wives. Islam is clear on its prohibition of sexual relationships outside of marriage. This prohibition does not distinguish between men and women, even though, in some countries, women are uniformly singled out for punishment of sexual crimes while the men, even rapists, may be treated with impunity.

In order for a case to even be brought before a Muslim court, several strict criteria must be met. The most important is that any accusation of illicit sexual behavior must have been seen by four witnesses; and they must have been witness to the act of sexual intercourse itself. Other forms of intimacy do not constitute 'zina' and therefore are not subject to any legal consequences even though they are not appropriate and are considered sinful. On the other hand, a woman falsely accused of zina has in her support the Qur'an, which spells out harsh consequences for those accusers who are unable to support their allegations with four witnesses.

The Prophet Muhammad was known for his clemency, even if the accusations met the criteria, for he recognized the seriousness of the matter. In addition, there is no evidence whatsoever that he condoned any form of retribution that singled out women and he was swift to ensure that those accused of any crime received due process to guarantee justice.

—Elham Hassan

*Courtesy: Yemen Observer*

## IX

### MADRASA REFORMS: PAKISTANI ULAMA'S VOICES

Reforms in the madrasas or Islamic seminaries of South Asia are a hotly-discussed subject today. Much discussion about madrasa reforms in the region is driven by security concerns. In the process, voices from within the South Asian madrasas reflecting the views of the ulama on the question of madrasa reform have been given little attention in the media. It is, however, crucial to highlight these voices since ultimately it is the ulama who control the madrasas who will decide the pace and scope of madrasa reform. Ignoring these voices and thereby perpetuating the stereotypical notion of madrasas as a monolith and as impervious to change can only make the task of madrasa reform in South Asia even more daunting.

A good indication of the internal debate among the ulama about madrasa reforms are the contributions included in a recent Urdu book titled 'Hamara Dini Nizam-i Ta'lim' ('Our System of Religious Education'). Published by the Majlis-i Fikr-o-'Amal, a Lahore-based organization of university professors and ulama concerned about reforming Pakistan's madrasa system, the book provides interesting insights on the on-going debates among the Pakistani 'ulama on the present conditions of the country's madrasas that number several thousand. The contributors to the book, all Sunni scholars, include noted ulama from the four main Sunni madrasa boards in Pakistan, representing the Deobandis, the Barelvis, the Ahl-i Hadith and the Jama'at-i Islami.



In his introduction to the book, the noted Pakistani Deobandi scholar, Abu Ammar Zahid ur-Rashdi, sets out the scope of reforms that ulama like him are willing to accept. He recognizes the need for reforms in the madrasas, lamenting that the present madrasa curriculum 'is not fully in accordance with the rapidly-changing and globalised world and its demands'. 'Most ulama', he claims, 'are not aware of these changing conditions and do not understand the new challenges facing the madrasas resulting from the fact that now distances between places and cultures are less than ever before and a new global culture is emerging'. At the same time as he calls for reforms in the madrasa curriculum, Rashdi insists that these should be designed in such a way that the essential task of the madrasas—that of preparing religious scholars and functionaries—be maintained and promoted. In other words, the introduction of secular or 'modern' disciplines in the madrasas must not result in their complete secularization or their conversion to regular schools, which is how he appears to see the intention of some advocates of madrasa reform 'It is wrong', he writes, to expect madrasas to produce doctors, engineers and scientists. That is not their responsibility or claim, because they've always insisted that they aim to create religious specialists'.

Calling for a critique and a reappraisal of the curriculum employed in Pakistani madrasas, Ahmad Javed, a Pakistani university professor, stresses the need for madrasas to move beyond rote learning. Mere knowledge of religious texts is not enough, he stresses. He laments that in many madrasas, 'Teachers don't focus on the moral and spiritual training of their students. They think it is enough to wear a special dress or have a distinct appearance, and teach their students some points of religious law (masail), and that too in a polemical mode, and force them to memorise these'.

Madrasas also instill in their students a dogged commitment to their own particular sect (maslak) or version of Islam, and thus, Javed says, actively promote sectarian strife. Obviously, he writes, each madrasa will be 'closer to one maslak or the other', but today, he says, this sectarian prejudice has assumed 'extreme proportions'. 'Without breaking the grip of maslaki prejudice and control', he adds, 'one cannot gain a proper knowledge of the din (Islam)'. Javed makes so bold as to call for a restructuring of the madrasa system, which at present, is organized entirely on sectarian lines. 'Students should be allowed to study different disciplines from experts of different sects, depending on their ability. They should be familiarized with the views and beliefs of all the sects. Efforts should be made to encourage ulama of different sects to teach in the same madrasas', he writes. Admitting that sectarian differences cannot be wished away, he suggests that madrasas should deal with these sensitively instead of, as often, descending into hate-filled polemics. 'The sects have their differences (ikhtilafat) and these can be discussed, but on an intellectual, rather than emotional, basis. Such differences are natural and must be tolerated because they concern not the basics of the faith but, rather, issues of human interpretation (ijtihad)'.

For would-be ulama to play a socially relevant role, Javed writes, madrasas should no longer remain focused simply on rules of medieval jurisprudence (fiqh) but must also encourage their students to reflect on issues (masail) of contemporary concern. Religion, he says, is of no use if it does not address itself to present-day social issues as well, for



which he suggests that madrasa students be also taught English and Current Affairs. If the madrasas refuse to do so, he warns, 'people will start doubting the compatibility between Islam and the modern world and this would only further alienate people from religion'. Javed also suggests that madrasas move away from seeing issues in simply narrow juridical (fiqhi) terms, because that, he says, 'makes the ulama appear a laughing stock'.

In his article, K. Nishtar, another Pakistani university professor, insists that reforms in the madrasas must come from within the madrasa system itself. This is the duty of the ulama, and not of the West or the Pakistani state, which he sees as being in league with dominant Western imperialist powers. He suggests a bold package of reforms, including introduction of modern and technical subjects in the madrasa curriculum to enhance the employment opportunities of madrasa graduates, the setting up of madrasa teachers' training centres, introducing specialized courses which students can enroll for after completing the basic madrasa course, and encouraging madrasa students to simultaneously enroll in open universities to pursue research programmes in Islamic Studies.

Contrary to widely-held views, the madrasa syllabus, Nishtar writes, has never been static. Rather, it has undergone a gradual process of evolution over the centuries, responding to changing times and conditions. Hence, he says, there is no reason why madrasas today cannot consider reforming their curricula. He insists that certain aspects of the syllabus, including the Quran and the Hadith, are unchangeable, but he also points out that other ancillary subjects or the 'rational sciences' (ulum al-'aqliya), such as philosophy, logic, natural and social sciences were taught in medieval madrasas and can be included in the curriculum today after being suitably reformed. He pleads for the inclusion of new subjects in the Dars-i Nizami, the syllabus prepared in seventeenth century Mughal India and used by most South Asian madrasas today, to include subjects such as Muslim History, Sociology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Geography, Current Affairs, Comparative Religions, Western Legal Principles, the basic beliefs of the different Muslim sects and schools of jurisprudence, as well as English and Computer Applications. In addition, he suggests, madrasas should include in their syllabus commentaries on the Quran written by modern scholars in order to enable their students to interpret Islam in the light of the contemporary age.

Nishtar also suggests the urgent need for reforms in teaching methods. The Quran, he says, should be placed at the heart of the madrasa curriculum, and all other subjects should be studied in its light. At present, he laments, other subjects, particularly medieval jurisprudence, have tended to overshadow the Quran. In madrasas, he writes, the focus of education is on the learning of particular books, whereas the intention should be to acquire mastery of particular subjects. He critiques what he sees as the 'mental stagnation' (jamud) that madrasas promote, their hostility to freedom of thought and inquiry and their unwillingness to know about or listen to opponents. He calls for more openness and also suggests that the madrasas' book-centred approach be replaced by a discipline-oriented one. Other means of acquiring knowledge should also be explored, Nishtar says, such as the Internet, study tours and debates. Besides, he writes, madrasas must also arrange for their students to engage in various extra-curricular activities, including sports.



Muhammad Amin, secretary of the Majlis-i Fikr-o-‘Amal, Lahore, echoes many of the views expressed by other contributors to this volume. He presents madrasa reforms as part of a broader effort to combat sectarian extremism and to promote Muslim welfare and unity. He also sees this as a crucial means to challenge Western political, economic, cultural and intellectual hegemony. As he puts it, ‘Un-Islamic ideologies cannot be combated unless the thoughts and plans of the enemy are understood. Hence, there is an urgent need to understand our opponents’ language and their sciences so that their poison can be combated’. While this concern to oppose Western imperialism is no doubt laudable, like other contributors to this volume Amin appears to ignore the need for sincere dialogue with non-Muslims, seeing them all as somehow, by definition, ‘enemies’ who need to be combated.

Amin sees Islamically-valid knowledge as a comprehensive whole and argues that the notion that most madrasas operate with, of a strict division between ‘religious’ (dini) and ‘worldly’ (duniyavi) knowledge, actually has no sanction in the Qur’an and in pre-colonial Muslim history, being a product of colonial times. In Islam, he says, all disciplines, even those regarded as ‘worldly’ by conventional ulama, which are useful for the progress of human beings are acceptable. Because they are, in this sense, also ‘Islamic’, there is no reason why madrasa students should not be given a basic grounding in these subjects as well. Besides the Qur’an, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence, he says, all other disciplines that are taught in the madrasas are subject to change and modification. Indeed, he says, they must change if Islam is to prove its relevance in every age. Hence, certain disciplines, such as Greek philosophy and logic, that are part of the Dars-i Nizami, should be replaced with their modern counterparts so that madrasa students would be better equipped in their task as religious functionaries and leaders in the contemporary age. In addition, he says, madrasas must move away from their inordinate concern with the nitty-gritty of fiqh or jurisprudence and familiarize their students with the basics of modern languages and social and natural sciences. This, he says, should be envisaged as part of a broader effort to gradually do away with the educational dualism between madrasas and ‘regular’ schools as well as to expand the employment possibilities of madrasa graduates.

Amin offers several other suggestions for madrasa reform. In order to counter sectarianism, he suggests that there should be a common syllabus for all the Sunni madrasas in Pakistan. To broaden the horizons of the students, he says, madrasas must subscribe to a range of magazines and newspapers. Students should be encouraged to use libraries and conduct independent research. They should be taught to understand Arabic as a ‘living language’, and must also be taught the translation of the Qur’an, rather than simply relying on the Arabic original alone.

Despite the fact that there are thousands of madrasas in Pakistan, there is, some contributors to this volume note, not a single institution in the country devoted to the training of madrasa teachers. These contributors suggest the need for setting up such institutes as well as to encourage universities to start short-term courses for madrasa teachers or else to arrange for extension lectures by university professors in madrasas on new methods of teaching. Included in this volume is a syllabus prepared by the Majlis-i Fikr-o-Amal for a one year-course for a proposed madrasa teacher’s training institute which would be open



to madrasa graduates irrespective of sectarian affiliation. The syllabus includes such subjects as Arabic, principles of Comparative Jurisprudence, basic Social and Natural Sciences, Computer Applications, English, Current Affairs, Educational Psychology, Modern Pedagogy, Philosophy and History of Education, and Organisational Management and Administration. Those aspiring to teach in madrasas must undergo some sort of training for the profession, these contributors insist, and only those students should be allowed to become madrasa teachers who are genuinely committed to the vocation. To attract better teachers they suggest improving teachers' service conditions, including salaries and various benefits.

The numerous proposals for reform that the contributors to this volume make clearly suggest that the stereotypical notion of the South Asian madrasas and their ulama being wholly impervious to change is misplaced. There are, of course, serious limits to the sort of reform that these ulama propose. Thus, significantly, none of the contributors to this volume talks about madrasa reforms in the context of developing new understandings of Islam in order to promote inter-faith dialogue and harmony, social justice or the rights of women and minorities, issues that are of particular concern today. Obviously, in the absence of these new perspectives emerging from within the bastions of the ulama, measures for madrasa reform can remain, at best, cosmetic, failing to challenge medieval notions that have little or no relevance in our day. That said, voices such as those captured in this book cannot be ignored. Rather, they demand to be heard and to be suitably and sensitively engaged with.

—Yoginder Sikand

## X

### PAKISTAN'S FORGOTTEN DALIT MINORITY

Of the roughly 3 million officially classified 'Hindu' population of Pakistan, some 80 per cent are Dalits. There are 42 different Dalits castes in the country, the most numerous being Bhils, Meghwals, Odhs and Kohlis. Most Pakistani Dalits live in Sindh, with smaller numbers in southern Punjab and Baluchistan. Like their Indian counterparts, they are pathetically poor and largely illiterate and eke out a miserable existence mainly as agricultural labourers, menials and petty artisans.

A recent visit to Pakistan took me to lower Sindh, home to a large number of Dalits. Land ownership patterns are enormously skewed in this part of Pakistan. A small class of landlords, or waderas, owns most of the land, and some estates run into tens of thousands of acres. The conditions of the Sindhi peasantry or haris, who include both Muslims as well as Dalits, are pathetic. Many haris do not even own the mud huts in which they live. One can travel for miles at a stretch in rural Sindh without seeing a single habitation. The reason: much of the land is owned by absentee landlords who live in mansions in Hyderabad and Karachi, Sindh's largest cities.

In much of lower Sindh, Dalits constitute up to 70 per cent of the agricultural workforce. According to Khurshid Kaimkhani, a leftist activist from Sindh, and author of what is



probably the only book on the Pakistani Dalits, local landlords prefer to employ Dalits instead of Muslim *haris* because the former are less vocal and more docile. Hardly any Dalits own any land, he says, and they are entirely dependent on the landlords for their survival. Women earn a pathetic 60 rupees a day and men twenty rupees more than that. As in some parts of India, in parts of Sindh Dalits work as bonded labourers, prevented from escaping by private armies of powerful landlords. There are no special government development schemes for Dalits. This is hardly surprising, for the only significant presence of the state in large parts of rural Sindh appears to be roads, electricity poles and tall minaret-like police stations named after various 'martyrs', these being mainly policemen gunned down by dacoits.

Dalits in rural Sindh face other forms of oppression similar to their counterparts in India. Village eateries have separate utensils for Dalits, and small towns have separate Dalit restaurants. Generally, 'upper' caste Hindus and Muslims do not eat food prepared by Dalits. Cases of Dalit women being kidnapped by landlords are common. Often this results in the women being converted to Islam against their will. Dalit students routinely complain of being taunted in school by their classmates, which, in addition to their poverty, forces most of them to soon drop out. The perception that they would be discriminated against in the job market makes higher education too expensive a choice for many Dalit parents to consider. In the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the consequent massacre of Muslims in India, the conditions of Pakistan's Dalits have become even more precarious. Some Dalits, as well as caste Hindus, were killed by mobs in Sindh and numerous temples were destroyed. To add to this is the influence of radical Islamist groups who are vehemently anti-Hindu and anti-India. All this has made Dalits even more scared to speak out. Says Himmat Solanki, a Dalit from Moenjodaro, 'Our future here depends critically on how Muslims are treated in India. Each time there is an attack on Muslims there, we Pakistani Dalits and Hindus have to face the brunt. Our future critically depends on harmonious relations between India and Pakistan and Hindus and Muslims in south Asia as a whole'. Solanki tells me of how growing insecurity among Pakistani Dalits has led to an increase in migration to India. 'Many Pakistani Dalits are originally from Rajasthan, having migrated to what is now Pakistan before 1947. So, naturally they want to join their relatives in India, and the growing fears among the minorities here has further exacerbated this trend'.

In Pakistan's only Hindu majority district of Thar Parkar, bordering Rajasthan and Gujarat, the conditions of Dalits are equally pathetic. According to Pirbhu Lal Satyani, a local social activist, 'upper' caste Hindu Rajput landlords, Brahmins and Banias routinely subject the Dalits, who form the overwhelming majority of the population, to various forms of discrimination. They are not allowed to enter Hindu temples, and, as in other parts of Sindh, are also often used as bonded labourers. At election time, Dalits who have dared to contest against caste Hindu candidates are routinely harassed and some have even been killed. As a protest against continuing discrimination, a number of Dalits have converted to Christianity, foreign-funded missionary groups being active in the area. Interestingly, there are no Islamic missionary organizations working among the Dalits.



Organising the Pakistani Dalits for their rights is an uphill task, says Satyani. He attributes this to fear of reprisal, the fact of abysmal levels of Dalit literacy, the small Dalit middle-class and the difficulty of bringing the various Dalit castes together. 'They have internalized the Brahminical logic of hierarchy', he says, 'as a result of which each caste considers itself superior to other castes'. Thus, in Tando Allah Yar, where I spent a week, the snake-catching Jogis have no contact with the Gurgulas, a caste that earns its livelihood by hawking cosmetic items to women. Says Sadhu Mal Jogi about the Gurgulas, whose sprawling settlement, hutments made of twigs and plastic sheets, lies just adjacent to his Jogi colony, 'The Gurgulas are lower than us. We have nothing to do with them'.

Another difficulty that Pakistani Dalits face in voicing their demands is the process of Hinduisation. Says Sonu Lal, a Meghwal from Tando Allah Yar, who identifies himself as one of the few radical Ambedkarites in Pakistan, 'Before 1947, caste Hindus dominated the economy of Sindh, and we Dalits could readily identify them as well as the Brahminical religious as the principal source of our oppression. After the Partition, most caste Hindus left for India, so now the direct oppressors are the local Muslim landlords. But instead of mobilizing on the basis of our Dalit identity, many Dalits seek to deny that identity by passing off as super-Hindus. In this context, how can we retain our identity as Dalits, take pride in it and organize on that basis?'. 'Hinduisation', he says, 'is not the answer to our problems because, inevitably, it will strengthen upper caste hegemony and weaken the Dalit struggle by making Dalits deny, rather than stress, their Dalit identity'. In this regard, he cites the case of Pakistan's largest Dalit temple, a shrine in Tando Allah Yar, dedicated to Rama Pir, a Meghwal convert to the Ismaili Shia faith. Every year, during the annual mela of the Pir, several hundred thousand Dalits from all over Pakistan assemble at the shrine. 'The shrine has been captured by a Brahmin priest now', says Sonu Lal. 'All the money that the Dalits give to them temple is taken by the priest and the Banias who dominate the management committee. Dalits have no role to play now in the shrine, which has been converted into a Brahminical temple, with idols of various Hindu gods, alien to the Rama Pir tradition, being installed therein'.

Pakistani Dalit activists routinely point out that caste Hindus take little or no interest in the plight of the Dalits. 'They treat us as Hindus only at election time when they come to us to seek our votes', says Panna Madho, a Dalit activist from Larkana. Madho says that most Hindu members of the state and national assemblies are caste Hindus, who are taken by the Pakistani state as representatives of all Hindus. Like most other caste Hindus, he says, they are 'completely indifferent to Dalits and continue to treat them as untouchables'. M. Prakash, a senior lawyer from Hyderabad, Sindh, himself an 'upper' caste Amil Hindu, admits, 'It is true that caste Hindus are as unconcerned about Dalits as others in Pakistan are, despite Hindus being a minority in the country. They have done nothing to help them organize for their rights'.

Yet, Dalits in Pakistan are no longer silent and attempts are being today to voice their demands, helped in part by non-government organizations and social activists, including some of Muslim background. Aslam Khwaja, a leftist activist, and his friends in Hyderabad have purchased a plot of land, which they have christened 'Himmatabad' ('The Abode of



Valour'), where they have resettled some 15 pathetically poor Bhil and Kohli families rescued from landlords and their private armies. Manu Bhil has been sitting on strike outside the Hyderabad Press Club for the last three years demanding the release of nine members of his family kidnapped by a Baloch landlord. Last year, Kishan Bhil, a member of Pakistan's National Assembly, created a major stir when he slapped a Maulvi member of the Assembly for denigrating his religion. And in rural Sindh, some Bhils have even joined up with gangs of dacoits, consisting mainly of landless Muslim peasants.

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of some Dalit organizations in Pakistan. The Hindu Sudhar Sabha in Lahore is one such group, bringing together Bhangis or Lalbegis of the sweeper caste. In Sindh, the Pakistan Scheduled Caste Federation has sought to pressurize the state to reserve jobs for Dalits, treat them as officially separate from the caste Hindus, grant them land, institute special development programmes for them and purge textbooks of contents that are derogatory of non-Muslims. Early this year, the International Dalit Solidarity Network, along with some local Dalit groups, organised Pakistan's first ever Dalit convention that came out with a bold charter of demands. The recently held World Social Forum in Karachi brought together some 400 Pakistani Dalit activists, and provided them an opportunity to interact with their Indian counterparts. This has led to plans for a South Asian Dalit platform, based on the recognition that the plight of the Dalits in Pakistan is no different from that of their fellows in India and other parts of the subcontinent. As Nathu Ram, an elderly Meghwal I met at the dargah of Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, says stoically, 'We Dalits suffer the same plight no matter where we are. India or Pakistan, both are the same for us. We have only God and ourselves who can work to change things for us'.

—Yoginder Sikand

## **SURVEY / REPORT**

### **SURVEY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS IN INDIA**

#### **Introduction**

After India's independence in 1947 most Muslims decided to stay on in the country despite large-scale killing and violence. In the heat of what are known as the Partition riots, not to migrate to Pakistan was a conscious yet difficult decision for most individuals and families. Those who remained in India boldly faced the onslaught of communal violence or the threat of it. It was not that communalism was absent among the Muslims of the country. In fact, it survived, with both Hindu and Muslim communalism feeding on each other. Yet, by and large, Muslims chose to ally with secular forces. However, despite this, discrimination, social stagnation and educational marginalisation cumulatively resulted in growing economic backwardness of the Muslims in large parts of the country. The share of Muslims in government services dropped drastically.

In the name of helping Muslims, many 'secular' parties have repeatedly compromised with the most reactionary elements of the community at the same time as right-wrong Hindu groups have wrongly accused Muslims of being 'appeased' by these parties. In reality the ordinary Muslim was left to his fate and the few development schemes devised for uplifting the community were never made effectual. Economic and educational deprivation reduced the community's ability to seek relief from government development schemes. This was made more difficult by the fact that a large section of the north Indian middle class had migrated to Pakistan in the wake of the Partition, leaving behind millions of Muslims rudderless and leaderless. A large section of these were of 'low' caste background, who, despite their conversion to Islam over the centuries, had not witnessed any noticeable economic change, remaining tied down to their traditional, 'low' status occupations. Discrimination in various walks of life and police repression and often active collaboration and instigation by state authorities during communal riots further demoralised Muslims, caused loss of confidence in secular forces and resulted in withdrawal symptoms and a siege mentality. Ironically, when Hindu right-wing forces managed to grab political power they found communal elements among Muslims as their natural allies and willingly portrayed them as the representatives of Muslim community, further reinforcing deeply-rooted negative stereotypes.

The increasing communal polarisation and broadening of the Hindutva fascist ideological base is being intensely felt by the Muslim community in the country. Many Muslims are conscious of the fact that, in addition to Hindutva groups, many of their own political leaders, instead of healing the rifts between the communities, are adding fuel to the fire. On the basis of their experience of pre- and post-Partition riots, after independence Muslims, by and large, rejected efforts to build a religion-based national political party. Presently, unable to find a workable solution to the problem of communal polarisation, a feeling of helplessness is seeping in among ordinary Muslims. In the absence of an adequate



political leadership, religious leaders, were allowed to come to the fore. A number of regional political parties in the recent past have used Muslim religious leaders to assert the claim that they are champions of their cause. The trend is dangerous, and instead of economic, social or educational development of the community it could cause further religious polarisation, leading to further social and economic marginalisation of the community. Religious leaders are not known to have taken an active interest in the social, economic and educational progress of the community. Because of the growing influence of Hindutva forces, of both the 'soft' and 'hard' variety, many Muslims feel their identity is under threat. This naturally reinforces the influence of the conservative religious leadership that seeks to frame the community's agenda in largely religious terms, minimising the importance of issues related to socio-economic empowerment of the community. This explains, in part, why many Muslim religious and political leaders do not give social, economic and educational issues of the Muslims the attention that they so sorely deserve, focussing, instead, on religious and identity-related issues instead, often in response to anti-Muslim propaganda and mobilisation by right-wing Hindu forces. The widely-shared perception among Muslims that their identity is being undermined has been further reinforced by the dominant forms of official nationalism in India that are framed in largely Brahminical Hindu terms, giving little space to alternate, including Muslim, identities.

The purpose of the above discussion is not to suggest that Muslims as a community constitute a homogenous group. The community is as fragmented as any other religious formation is on economic, social, linguistic, ethnic, regional and caste lines. Indeed, the notion of a monolithic pan-Indian Muslim community is as misleading as that of a similarly constructed pan-Indian Hindu community. Both notions are, in effect, elite constructs that completely gloss over internal differences and contradictions. Despite this, however, it is possible to make some broad generalisations for Muslims, or the various Muslim communities, in India as a whole. Various studies conducted during the past a few decades amply show that Muslims have been increasingly socially and economically marginalised on the whole, although there has, admittedly, been some progress in some small pockets. This limited progress, has, however, been largely independent of state efforts. For its part, the state appears to have deliberately or otherwise played a somewhat indifferent, and, in some states, clearly hostile, attitude to Muslim social, economic and educational advancement. This is suggested, for instance, by the fact that Muslim percentage in regular employment, in both the public as well as the private sector, has considerably dropped over the decades since 1947. Today, the situation is being made more serious as a result of the impact of 'globalisation' and neo-liberal economic policies, that have hit marginalised groups such as peasants, landless labourers and artisans, a large proportion of whom are Muslims, the worst. Some writers have claimed that the socio-economic backwardness of Muslims has surpassed the backwardness of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities, and, on this basis, are today demanding reservations in government services and educational institutions for them as well as proportionate or balanced allocation of resources on the part of the state for Muslim economic development. According to official estimates, Muslims account for roughly 14% of the Indian population. Obviously, the



economic and educational marginalisation of such a large section of Indian society should be a matter of concern for all.

The fact of overall Muslim marginalisation since 1947 is well-known, and has been highlighted by numerous studies and even by various commissions set up by different governments. Often, these commissions were simply political gimmicks. They submitted their reports and made various recommendations to the government to address the marginalisation of the Muslims. Yet, the government took little or no heed to these suggestions, 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.

In March 2005, the Prime Minister of India appointed a High Level Committee headed by Retired Justice Rajinder Sachar to prepare a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslims of India. Given the fact that similar commissions in the past were not able to make any significant difference to government policies vis-à-vis the Muslims of the country, it is important not to exaggerate the importance of the present one. Yet, it is also crucial to engage with the government on the vital issue of Muslim marginalisation and it is hoped that the report being prepared by the Committee will, if nothing else, sensitise some policy-makers to the urgent need to address Muslim concerns.

### **Terms of Reference of the Sachar Committee**

The Sachar Committee has been given the task of examining the following questions:

1. In which states, regions, districts, and blocks of the country do Muslims mostly live?
2. What is the geographical pattern of their economic activity, i.e. what do they mostly do for a living in various states, regions and districts?
3. What are their asset base and income levels relative to other groups across various states and regions?
4. (a) What is the level of their socio-economic development in terms of relevant indicators such as literacy rate, dropout rate, Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) etc?  
(b) How does this compare with other communities in various states?
5. (a) What is the Muslims' relative share in public and private sector employment?  
(b) Does it vary across states?  
(c) What is the pattern of such variations?  
(d) Is the share in employment in proportion to their population in various states?  
(e) If not, what are the hurdles?
6. (a) What is the proportion of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from the Muslim Community in the total OBC population in various States?  
(b) Are the Muslim OBCs listed in the comprehensive list of OBCs prepared by the National and State Backward Classes Commissions and adopted by the Central and State Governments for reservations for various purposes?



- (c) What is the share of Muslim OBCs in the total public sector employment for OBCs in the various states in various years?
- 7. (a) Does the Muslim Community have access to
  - (i) Education Services
  - (ii) Health Services
  - (iii) Municipal Infrastructure
  - (iv) Bank Credit
  - (v) Other services provided by Government/Public Sector Entities?
- (b) How does this compare with access enjoyed by other communities in various states?
- (c) What is the level of social infrastructure located in areas of Muslim concentration in comparison to the general level of such infrastructure available in various states?
  - (i) Schools
  - (ii) Health Centres
  - (iii) Anganwadi Centres
  - (iv) Other Facilities

As can be seen from the above, the terms of reference of the Committee are, in some respects, rather narrowly defined. Many of the questions that the Committee has been asked to answer relate to data that the government already has in its possession, and, hence, in a sense, are superfluous. The Committee has not been charged with the responsibility of making any suggestions for the amelioration of the living conditions of the Muslims, and even if it does make such suggestions, the Government is not bound to act on them. There is no mention of the specific problems of Muslim women or of the Dalit Muslims, who are clubbed together with Backward Caste Muslims as Other Backward Classes. The terms of reference ignore the deleterious impact of the 'liberalised' economic policies of the Government on Muslim OBC artisanal communities, who account for a large section of the Muslim community. Instead, the focus is on Muslim OBC representation in government services at a time when such jobs are rapidly contracting owing precisely to the Government's economic policies. The question of communal bias and discrimination in Muslim recruitment to government services or in allocation of resources for development is also not addressed directly. All this naturally limits the scope and overall usefulness of the Committee. This said, however, the value of the Committee cannot be underestimated, and if nothing else one expects that it will be able to come up with important data about the actual living conditions of the country's Muslims.

### **Background and Methodology of the Present Study**

In order to assist the Sachar Committee by providing it additional empirical and qualitative information, ActionAid (India), in collaboration with the Jahangirabad Media Institute and the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, decided to conduct a study to examine the social, economic and educational conditions of Muslims. Given the time-frame it was not possible

to administer a study that would cover all the states and union territories of the country. Hence, it was decided that a survey based on a small, but somewhat representative sample would be conducted in seven states where Muslims live in substantial numbers. The study was also conceived of as a means to mobilise and encourage the general public, civil society activists and organisations working on issues related to the Muslim community, to become more sensitised to the dismal economic, educational and social conditions of the Muslim masses. This is a desperately needed corrective in the light of the fact that many NGOs have been indifferent to Muslim issues, while the few others that have engaged with Muslims have mostly done so simply from the point of view of countering communalism.

The following states were chosen for the survey:

1. Gujarat
2. Rajasthan
3. Delhi
4. Madhya Pradesh
5. Bihar
6. Andhra Pradesh
7. Uttar Pradesh

It was agreed upon that from each of the seven identified states, one big city, one town and three villages would be selected for administering the survey. The state team leaders were given the responsibility of identifying the city, town and villages for the survey.

The following instructions were to be strictly followed during the collection of data:

1. One big city in each state was selected on the basis of sizable Muslim population. At least 350 households from the city had to be covered through scheduled interviews. 20 non-Muslims were also to be interviewed from the same area for comparative purposes.
2. In every selected town representatives of 200 Muslim families and 20 non-Muslim families were to be interviewed.

### **Focus Group Discussions: How Muslims Perceive Their Own Problems**

To supplement the data generated through secondary sources and questionnaires for the purposes of this study, state research team leaders were asked to organize focus group discussions with selected members of local Muslim communities where the survey was held. This was intended to bring out qualitative information that cannot be fully reflected through questionnaires and are not adequately dealt with in the available secondary literature. These discussions brought out a number of common issues, indicating common trends across states.

In focus group discussions conducted with Muslim men and women, including social activists, as well as in individual conversations and interviews, one point was repeatedly stressed: that government institutions are, by and large, indifferent; if not hostile, to Muslims. This was attributed to anti-Muslim communal prejudice and to the growing influence of Hindutva propaganda against Muslims. Another reason, one provided by some Muslims of



'low' caste background, was caste prejudice. Comparisons were drawn between Hindu and Muslim localities to stress the point that the latter are much more deprived than the former in terms of government expenditure on various developmental schemes. It was pointed out that basic infrastructural facilities, such as proper roads, sewage systems, banks, dispensaries, health facilities, schools, etc. were largely conspicuous by their absence in most Muslim localities. Respondents claimed that while they, like others, are also taxpayers, they are consistently ignored by government departments. Even in Muslim majority-areas, it was pointed out, there are hardly any Muslim employees in government departments, even in junior posts such as drivers, cleaners and clerks, for which higher educational qualifications are not required.

To add to this, some stressed, the neo-liberal economic policies being followed by successive governments in the last two decades or so had hit Muslim artisan communities, such as potters, weavers, craftsmen, etc., particularly badly. They had resulted in further economic marginalization of these communities. Linked to this, the cutting down of subsidies and the privatisation of education had made quality education even more difficult for these communities to access. Yet, the government had done little to address the situation. Further, many respondents argued, in areas where Muslims have witnessed some degree of upward economic mobility, often anti-Muslim riots are engineered by Hindu chauvinist groups in league with agencies of the state, resulting in tragic loss, on a massive scale, of Muslim lives and property. Hence, the government, they argued, is, to a large extent, responsible for the marginalization of Muslims.

A discussion held in Patna with bidi workers in Bihar, including the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the Bihar State Bidi Labourers' Federation, highlights some of these points. It was stated that according to government figures there are some 200,000 bidi workers in Bihar, of whom roughly 70% are Muslims. These are the official numbers, but it was argued that the total number of bidi workers in the state is not less than 700,000. These workers get daily wages well below the statutory minimum, which is less than even the amount that defines the poverty line. Even after working all day long they are barely able to meet the needs of their families. Yet, the apathy of the government is such that the minimum wages have not been revised for years. The workers are routinely exploited by government commissioning agents, middle-men and factory owners. They have no fixed working hours, social security and welfare benefits and, instead of working in industrial premises, they are asked to work in the house by factory owners in order to escape labour laws. They have no representation in the policy-making wing of the Bidi Workers' Union. Cases cannot be filed against the owners of bidi industries for breaking laws. Women workers are paid considerably less than men. Their families live in conditions of pathetic poverty. Few can afford to send their children to school. More than 75% of the labourers are said to suffer from tuberculosis.

Similar views were voiced in a discussion held with Muslim weavers in Bhagalpur in Bihar, including with the Chief Secretary of the Handloom Weavers' and Suppliers' Association and the Chief Secretary of Bhagalpur Weavers' Electricity Consumers' Union. It was said that till the end of the 1980s there were around 20 thousand power loom units



and around 40 thousand handloom units in Bhagalpur district, mostly owned by Muslims, particularly from the Ansari caste. However, government apathy and the mismanagement crippled this industry. The government promised to provide uninterrupted electricity to the weavers, but, instead of doing this, the Electricity Board charged the weavers for the electricity which it failed to give them. The 'Yarn Bank' promised by the government also did not materialize, and, gradually, the supply of yarn was transferred into the hands of Marwari Banias. Weavers are mostly dependent upon middlemen, particularly Marwaris, for yarn. The Marwaris provide them with yarn but with the condition that the products should be sold only to them at rates fixed by them. Once Muslims dominated this business but now it is completely under the control of the Marwari community. Today, the weavers' earnings are barely enough to meet their families' requirements. In addition, the subsidy given by the government in the name of the 'Janata Sari' and 'Janata Dhoti' programme has been withdrawn and the cooperative societies have become victims of corruption and irregularities. For the development of the silk industry, the government established a silk institute in Barari for training weavers in weaving, designing, colouring, printing, etc.. Today this institute is closed. Likewise, government sericulture training centres were established in several other places but now they are completely dysfunctional.

The discussants pointed out that anti-Muslim riots of 1989 in Bhagalpur had a devastating impact on the district's handloom industry and today there are no more than 10-12 thousand power looms left. Weavers who lost everything in the riots were not rehabilitated or given any compensation from the government. Today these weavers have migrated to other states of the country in search of petty employment. One fall out of the violence has been that Muslim weavers have been facing mounting discrimination. Banks located in Muslim localities were closed down. Discrimination against Muslims in providing is now a major complaint. Muslim weavers complain that for taking loans banks conduct rigorous investigations, often maliciously, as a result of which they fail to receive loans or else have to pay hefty sums as bribes, making it difficult to repay them. Even to get loans from the Prime Minister Employment Scheme Muslim weavers face considerable discrimination.

A similar picture of Muslim marginalisation emerges from discussions held with Muslim respondents in Madhya Pradesh. Rahatgarh is a Muslim-dominated village in Sagar district in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh. The village is home to numerous communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis. Most of the inhabitants of the village are bidi workers, landless labourers and a few shopkeepers. The village has 15 wards, out of which 5 wards are dominated by Muslims. The overall appearance of the Muslim localities, as compared to the rest of the village, is very poor and depressing. The Muslim wards are characterised by unplanned houses and huts, and are without any proper roads, sewage system, water supply and electricity. Most of the Muslims live in stone houses or huts which are very congested. Very few of their houses have sanitation facilities. Due to non-availability of proper drinking water facilities, most families depend on wells and drink dirty water. Most people appear frail and weak due to malnutrition and lack of proper health facilities. On an average life span of villagers is very short. Tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases are very common.



Ninety per cent of the Muslims in the village belong to the Qureshi or butcher community, and the rest are Pathans. Relations between different castes and communities in the village are quite harmonious. Nevertheless, on the issue of buying and selling of domestic animals like cow and bullocks, Muslims have been unfairly targeted by right-wing Hindu groups. Villagers complained of police high handedness in this regard. Non-Muslims of the village often refer to the Muslim localities as Mini Pakistan. During festivals, Hindu right-wing activists sometimes deliberately lead their religious processions through the Muslim localities so as to create tension, although there have as yet been no incidents of communal violence.

Most denizens of Rahatgarh are very poor, and this is particularly true for the Muslims living in the village. Because of their low levels of education, there is no Muslim in the village who is employed as a government servant. Most of them are landless casual daily wage earners, engaged particularly in the bidi-rolling trade. Everyone in the family, including small children and the aged, contributes to supplement the meagre family income by making bidis. On an average income from this comes to between 15 to 20 rupees after working six or seven hours a day. The bidi-contractors and small businessmen are Hindus while the workers are mainly Muslims.

Seehara Freeganj, another village where a focus group discussion was held with respondents, is located in the Vidisa district in Madhya Pradesh. The state highway divides the village into two: Seehora and Freeganj. Seehora is dominated by Muslims while Freeganj is mainly inhabited by various non-Muslim castes. Freeganj locality looks comparatively better and has more government infrastructural facilities than Seehora, whose inhabitants are almost entirely very poor, with a very high level of illiteracy. However, in recent years Muslim enrolment in the local government school is said to have considerably increased, although drop-out rates, particularly of girls, remain high.

Unemployment is a major challenge for the inhabitants of the village. In the agricultural sector, respondents say, labourers get employment for only 3-4 months in a year, and for the rest of the year many of them have to migrate outside to do manual work. In Seehora Freeganj, the main occupation is making brooms. Workers are heavily over-exploited: they sell brooms to middlemen for the pitiable price of one rupee a piece, with the brooms being sold in towns for eight times that amount. Consequently, the average daily earning of a broom-maker is around 15 rupees only. In this remote village there is one carpet factory which employs a sizeable number of local labourers. Interestingly, the owner is from Amritsar, Punjab, and all the raw materials are also brought from there. Carpets produced in the village exported to other countries, and the owner reaps a good profit from the exploitation of the cheap local labour. After working for nine or ten hours a day, a labourer is paid a paltry Rs 60 by the owner of the factory.

Out of the 20 panchayat members in the village, 13 are Muslims. The panchayat does not seem to have taken any significant measures for the welfare and development of the village. The sarpanch is presently living at Bhopal and so the villagers complain that they could not see or meet her after she was elected. Many Muslim villagers, despite their abject poverty, lack Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards. It appears that such cards are issued by the



panchayat arbitrarily. Some people who are not poor are also said to have received the cards through their political connections. Seehora lacks a government health centre, and so for medical treatment its inhabitants are forced to bear the heavy expense of travelling to the neighbouring town. Several inhabitants suffer from ailments such as asthma, tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, as a result of the dust that is created when making brooms and weaving carpets.

Goharganj is situated in Raisen District in Madhya Pradesh. 40 per cent of the inhabitants of the village are Muslims, and their relations with the Hindus of the village are fairly harmonious. 11 out of 20 members of the village panchayat are Muslims. Although the village is not far from Bhopal, the state capital, it lacks proper infrastructural facilities. The entire village is not properly electrified. There is a health centre in the village but there are no doctors and nurses. There is no tapped water facility in the village, as a result of which women have to walk for up to two kilometres to fetch water.

In recent years, respondents say, several Muslim girls have started going to the local government school. However, since there is no separate girls' high school, many girls, Muslims as well as others, drop out of education altogether as their parents are not willing to send them to co-educational schools after a certain age. Many Muslim boys also drop out of school because their families' poverty forces them to start earning at a young age. To add to this is the Hinduisation of the government school system, which is seen as culturally alienating by some. Further, due to their poverty, Muslim parents are not able to afford the high cost of private tuitions for their children, as a result of which their performance in school is poor.

Unemployment is a major problem for most of the village's inhabitants, particularly Muslims. More than 90% of the village's Muslims are landless. As a result, many Muslims are employed as agricultural labourers and or as drivers of tempos, most of whose owners are Hindus. Some Muslims complain that Hindu industrialists in the neighbouring town are unwilling to employ them due to 'political reasons'.

For this survey, focus group discussions were also conducted in four localities in Bhopal, the capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh, with a fairly sizeable Muslim population: Arif Nagar, Nawab Colony, JP Nagar and Jhinshi Chowrah. The first three colonies are located near the Union Carbide Factory, and were devastated in the gas leak which caused the deaths of thousands of people. Most of the people in these localities complain of some form of illness or the other as a result of the gas leak. They are, by and large, desperately poor and live in temporary shacks or jhuggis in slums. They complain of routine discrimination from the state authorities and say that they have not been adequately compensated for the tragic loss that they had to suffer as a result of the gas leak. Many local Muslims complain of discrimination in getting loans from banks, to add to which they have to pay bank officials hefty bribes. They also talk of growing insecurity because of the anti-Muslim campaign of Hindu terrorist groups, which is leading to a process of ghettoisation.

Rajasthan has a Muslim population of some 9%. Some districts of the state, such as Alwar, Bharatpur, Tonk, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Jodhpur, have a sizeable Muslim population,



but elsewhere in Rajasthan Muslims live as scattered minorities. Although almost one in every ten people in Rajasthan are Muslims, their levels of representation in most sectors of public life are relatively low.

In a focus group discussion held in Jaipur, one respondent provided the following information that illustrates the pathetic conditions of Muslims in the state in terms of employment in various government departments:

**Representation of Muslims in Different Government Departments in Rajasthan**

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Sanctioned posts</i>	<i>Filled</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Percentage of Muslims</i>
1.	Indian Police Service	158	112	02	1.26%
2.	Rajasthan Public Service	589	489	17	2.88%
3.	Police Inspector	903	778	40	4.42%
4.	Sub-Inspector	3395	2815	126	3.71%
5.	Assistant Sub-Inspector	3930	3188	199	5.06%
6.	Head Constable	8929	8363	417	4.68%
7.	Constable	52905	47531	1880	3.55%
Total		70808	63276	2681	

According to this respondent, in Rajasthan only 38 Muslims have been appointed under the OBC category, although it is possible that some OBC Muslims have been selected in the general quota as well. This very low figure clearly suggests that Muslim OBCs have not benefitted much from the state's policy of protective discrimination for the OBCs in general.

The low levels of representation of Muslims in government services in Rajasthan have several causes, the respondents say. One of these is discrimination on the part of government departments and agencies. Compared to Hindu localities, Muslim localities throughout most of Rajasthan are characterized by very low levels of government infrastructural investment.

Chatpura Basti, in ward no 58 of Kota town, is a typical Muslim locality. The total population of the Basti is approximately 12,000. In this locality there is only one government school but it is only to the primary level. Besides this, the locality also has one Madrasa. The condition of the government school is pathetic. There are not enough teachers and there is complete absence of state provision for the students in terms books, sitting space and cleanliness. The school rests on a mound of rubble. Apart from this, the attitude of the teachers towards the students in general and Muslim students in particular is not very encouraging or conducive. Instead of encouraging more students to come to school, they create hindrances for them. There is no separate provision for the girls to go to study, which acts as to further inhibit Muslim and other parents to educate their girl children. Although there are few girls enrolled in the school, they are reluctant to study further as the middle and secondary schools are located very far from the locality.

As far as the representation of the Muslims in the government services is concerned, it is a pity that there is not a single government employee from the Basti. Not only this, even



though the Basti is Muslim dominated the community does not have any representation in the municipality. This lack of representation could be blamed on the government for not doing enough for the community. It is also a reflection of lack of awareness and political awakening in the community itself. Government schemes tend to bypass this Basti, and, in fact, most people in the locality are not aware of any such schemes. There is no sincere effort from the government to educate the residents of the Basti about any welfare scheme meant for them. Even such schemes as widow pension, old age pension, work for food programme, BPL cards etc. hardly benefit the denizens of the locality at all. Those fortunate few who are aware of these schemes are unable to benefit from them because the formalities associated with them are too complicated and because, apparently, it is not possible for them to complete these due to lack of any help from the officials.

Shahpura Chandaliya, a Muslim majority locality in Kaithoon town was another place where a focus group discussion was organized. There is no government or private school in the locality apart from one Islamic madrasa. Not a single home in the locality has toilet facilities. Most of the residents here are not aware of various government schemes.. Old age pension, widow pension etc. are available only after running from pillar to post and bribing officials responsible for the allotment. The 15 point programme has done no good to the residents of this locality. Not single resident from Shahpura Chandaliya has benefited from the reservation meant for the Backward Castes. The government health facility available in the area is also of not much help. Most of the time doctors are not available at the centre and there is no provision for free distribution of medicines.

Another fact that came to light during discussion was that, although there is representation of almost all the religious groups in the panchayat, the number of Muslims is negligible. The community graveyard has become a cause for communal tension. Although the Muslims of the locality are ready to accept the judgment of the court, the graveyard has become a bone of contention between Hindus and Muslims. Local Muslims complain that in the government schools their children are forced to recite the Saraswati Vandana in the school assembly. When eating their mid-day meal at the school all the children have to recite verses from the Hindu scriptures and Muslim children are compelled to recite these verses, too, and this is something that most Muslims understandably resent.

In focus group discussions conducted in the states selected for this survey, a salient point that emerged was that most respondents felt that Muslims, as a whole, are economically far behind Hindus, particularly 'upper' caste Hindus. In the light of this, they offered various suggestions, such as greater state allocation in various development schemes in Muslim areas and separate reservation for Muslims as a whole or for Backward Caste Muslims in various government services and in educational institutions. They also repeatedly stressed the point that Muslim economic and educational development hinges crucially on the communal situation in the country. Hindutva fascist forces, they argued, could not tolerate Muslims developing economically and educationally. They claimed that Hindutva groups wanted to convert Muslims into the 'new untouchables', by engineering periodic pogroms directed against them, ignoring them in government development projects and branding all demands that the state address the economic plight of the Muslims as 'communalism'. In



fact, some of them argued, Muslims, who, before 1947, had a fairly sizeable presence in government services, now lag considerably behind Dalits in this sphere.

Some 'low' caste Muslim respondents pointed out that while their castes had been included in the official list of Other Backward Castes (OBCs), they had not benefited from this provision. Government facilities for the OBCs, they said, had been cornered almost entirely by more numerous and influential Hindu OBCs. Some of these respondents argued that the Presidential Order of 1950 extending Scheduled Caste status only to 'Hindu' Dalits (later extended to Sikh and Buddhist Dalits as well) was unconstitutional and anti-secular. This had resulted in the further marginalization of Muslim Dalits, who are not eligible to apply for various schemes of the state meant specifically for the Scheduled Castes. Consequently, they said, the economic and educational conditions of Muslims of Dalit origin were considerably worse than their non-Muslim counterparts. Hence, they insisted, the Presidential Order of 1950 needs to be amended and Dalit Muslims must also be treated by the state as Scheduled Castes.

Several Muslim respondents, most noticeably in Uttar Pradesh, also lamented what they referred to as the government's consistent discriminatory policies vis-à-vis the Urdu language. This, they argued, was also an important reason for their economic and educational backwardness. It was the fundamental right of all communities, they said, to receive instruction in their own mother tongue, but through various anti-Urdu policies, the government had, they claimed, subverted this right for Muslims, many of who consider Urdu as their mother tongue. They described the government's policy towards Urdu as a sign of anti-Muslim prejudice, and pointed out that it was misleading to consider Urdu as a specifically 'Muslim' language. In Uttar Pradesh, once considered the bastion of Urdu, they pointed out, there were few or no facilities for children from Urdu-speaking families to educate their children in Urdu-medium schools beyond the primary level. Instead, children were forced to learn Hindi and Sanskrit. By thus effectively marginalizing Urdu and by de-linking Urdu from employment opportunities the state had, they insisted, only further exacerbated the problem of Muslim educational marginalization. To add to this, they pointed out, government-approved textbooks often contain negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims and are heavily laced with stories from Hindu religious texts. The sort of nationalism that is sought to be inculcated in the students through textbooks and school activities, such as compulsory prayers etc., are also heavily Hinduised. Many respondents were critical of this, and expressed the suspicion that this was part of a carefully calculated effort to 'de-Islamise' Muslim children, to 'Hinduise' them as well as to promote anti-Muslim feelings among non-Muslim students. Because of this, they said, some Muslim parents were reluctant to send their children to school to study.

Some women as well as men were critical of conservative religious leaders, alleging that they had wrongly confused patriarchy with Islam. Due to strict purdah, it was difficult, they said, for many Muslim women to acquire education, as a result of which they remained 'ignorant'. To promote Muslim women's education they stressed the need for the state and the community to devote more attention and resources to setting up separate girls' schools and colleges.



In many villages where interviews and focus group discussions were held with Muslims, it was reported that relations between Hindus and Muslims are fairly cordial. In several villages, traditional bonds are still intact and Muslims and Hindus attend each others' functions. Yet, several other villages covered in this survey, and, particularly towns and cities, present a different picture. Respondents in these areas spoke of the presence and growing influence of Hindu right-wing groups, particularly through shakhas and schools run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, visiting pracharaks of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, and leaders of some political parties. They pointed out that there have, on the whole, been few organized initiatives to combat these forces, and many expressed the fear that if they continued unchecked Muslims might face a similar situation as their co-religionists in Gujarat during the state-sponsored anti-Muslim genocide of 2002. This called, they argued, for urgent steps to address the phenomenon of growing Hindutva fascism. Some respondents, particularly some 'low' caste Muslims, pointed to the practice of untouchability that they are subjected to by 'upper' caste Hindus. Others admitted the fact that, like many 'upper' caste Hindus, they, too, practice forms of untouchability vis-à-vis non-Muslim Dalits.

In several places, respondents pointed out that although violent communal incidents had not taken place in their own localities, many Hindus and Muslims had negative images of each other. These notions have been they said, reinforced by the media and politicians as well as communal groups. They stressed the need for steps to be taken both by the state as well as civil society organizations to promote inter-community dialogue. Some respondents also expressed the view that the ulama were, in part, to blame for not playing an active role in promoting better relations between Muslims and others and by reinforcing negative stereotypes about other communities.

Many respondents were of the view that Hindutva forces were inimical not just to the Muslims but also the Dalits, and argued for the need for a broad alliance between Muslims and Dalits. This view was articulated particularly by several 'low' caste Muslims, who also spoke about how Hindu and Muslim elites had a vested interest in promoting communal controversy and conflict so as to pit 'low' caste Muslims and Dalits against each other in order to reinforce their own hegemony.

While critiquing the government as well as Hindu chauvinist organizations and blaming them for many of their problems, many respondents were also critical of the existing Muslim community leadership. Several respondents argued that the ulama of the madrasas were serving the community by promoting religious awareness and preserving Islamic identity and the tradition of Islamic learning. The madrasas, they said, were also playing an important social role by providing free education and boarding and lodging facilities to many Muslim children from poor families, victims of governmental neglect. Yet, they pointed out, the ulama needed to widen their horizons, play a more active role in the economic, social and educational development of the community and refrain from promoting sectarian strife. Some respondents critiqued the ulama for not being able to offer what they called a 'proper' interpretation of Islam attuned to the context of contemporary India, because of which, they said, Muslims and Islam had got a 'bad name'. They also stressed that the distinction



that many ulama make between 'religious' and 'worldly' knowledge is 'un-Islamic' and said that this had contributed to the further educational backwardness of the community.

Similarly, many respondents were critical of Muslim political leaders for not raising their vital economic, social and educational problems. They accused them of being in league with Hindutva chauvinists and the state machinery in promoting communal controversies, resulting in the perpetuation of the poverty of the majority of the Muslims. Most Muslim political leaders, they said, were simply 'agents' of various political parties who used Muslims as 'vote banks' but did little, other than adopting some cosmetic measures, for the Muslim masses. They suggested the need for an alternative Muslim leadership that focuses on the social, economic and educational problems of the community and abstains from unnecessary communal controversy. They stressed the need for community leaders to liaison between state agencies and the community so that the public could access information regarding various government development schemes. They also called for Muslims to set up more non-government agencies for community development as well as for the community to interact more closely with secular NGOs.

### **Ghettoisation of Muslims: Trends and Consequences**

A major issue afflicting Muslims in some parts of India is that of enforced ghettoisation. Periodic anti-Muslim riots and pogroms, sometimes instigated by state authorities in league with fiercely anti-Muslim Hindutva groups, have forced Muslims in several places to shift to separate localities for safety. The most stark demonstration of this process is the case of Gujarat, where, in the wake of the anti-Muslim holocaust of 2002, Muslims were forced to flee to separate areas to save their lives. In such places migration has been forced, for that has been the only way for many Muslims to save their lives. In other cases, even in places where there have been no riots, many Muslims prefer to live in Muslim-majority localities for fear that anti-Muslim violence can break out at any time. Living in their own localities gives them a sense of security.

Many middle class Muslims, too, prefer living in such areas although the levels of infrastructural provision are poor and even though they can afford living in more 'posh', 'upper' caste Hindu-dominated areas. Often, ghettoisation is promoted by the fact that Hindu landlords simply refuse to rent out their houses to Muslim tenants.

Ghettoisation has crucial consequences for the economic and educational conditions of Muslims and for relations between the different communities. This fact emerges in a study on Indian Muslims in which these two authors are presently involved, and jointly undertaken by Action Aid and the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.

As this survey discovered, typically, Muslim ghettos are deprived in terms of government provided infrastructure, possessing few good schools, roads, sewage facilities etc.. Ghettoisation also leads to a steep reduction of opportunities for social interaction between members of different communities and, consequently, to the strengthening of an insular mentality, because of which the community is not able to properly articulate its views and concerns before the wider public. It also strengthens the hold of conservative religious forces.



No study of Indian Muslim economic and educational conditions can ignore the impact of the process of ghettoisation that is evident particularly in urban areas today. For this purpose, the Action Aid-Indian Social Institute study took up the case of Delhi and Ahmedabad in order to examine patterns of shifting residence among Muslims. In Delhi, the Muslim-majority localities of Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin and Mehrauli were selected for sampling, while in Ahmedabad Juhapura, the city's largest Muslim settlement, was selected. In Delhi 304 respondents were interviewed, and in Ahmedabad the figure was 243.

55.6% of the respondents interviewed in the above-mentioned localities of the two cities have been living in the area for less than 10 years. This indicates a high level of migration or ghettoisation in recent years. 15.4% of the respondents were staying in the area for the last 10-20 years and 17.2% for more than 20 years. 45.7% of the respondents had moved in from Hindu-dominated localities, and 22.3% from areas with a mixed Hindu-Muslim population. Only 13.2% responded that they have moved in from Muslim dominated areas. This clearly implies that fear and insecurity was the most important reason for their shifting of residence from one locality to another. 31.4% of the respondents answered that they had migrated in search of better livelihood options. On the other hand, 42% of the respondents answered that the reason for their migration to Muslim-dominated areas was fear of anti-Muslim violence or the fact thereof.

There are significant differences between Delhi and Ahmedabad in this regard, which owes to the fact of the state-sponsored anti-Muslim genocide in Gujarat in 2002, which resulted in the deaths of some 4000 Muslims and destruction of Muslim property on a massive scale. Prior to this, too, there have been several anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat, including Ahmedabad, which had led to a process of Muslim ghettoisation some three decades ago. Thus, while 33.9% of the respondents in Delhi said that they were relatively new migrants, living in their present localities for between 0-10 years, the corresponding figure for Ahmedabad was 82.7%. This indicates the massive scale of enforced ghettoisation in Ahmedabad in recent years, a fact which holds true for almost all other towns in the state of Gujarat. While 26.3% of those interviewed in Delhi had been residing in their present locality for 11-20 years and 29.6% for over 20 years, the corresponding figures for Ahmedabad are 1.6% and 1.59% respectively.

While 14.8% of the respondents in Delhi said that they had migrated from Hindu-dominated localities, the corresponding figure in the case of Ahmedabad was 84.4%. 54.9% of the respondents in Delhi answered that they had migrated to the locality in search of better livelihood options, 6.9% for educating their children and 6.3% because of communal riots and insecurity. In Ahmedabad, on the other hand, the corresponding figures were 2.1%, 0% and 86.8%, indicating that anti-Muslim terror was the major factor in causing inter-locality migration in the city.

Migration and consequent ghettoisation seems to have had a particularly deleterious impact on the economic conditions of the respondents in Ahmedabad. Some 52% of the respondents in Ahmedabad said that their economic conditions had markedly declined after migration, and the corresponding figure for Delhi respondents was 5.3%. On the other hand, in Delhi 60.5% respondents said their living conditions had improved after



migration, and the figure for Ahmedabad was just 7.4%. Respondents were asked if they go out of their area of residence, particularly to those inhabited by Hindus, in search of employment. 77.7% responded in the affirmative, and only 16.6% reported in the negative.

A large number of Ahmedabad respondents said that while before their migration that had frequent and fairly cordial relations with non-Muslims, this had markedly declined after migration. 68.1% of Delhi respondents said they had friendly relations with Hindus, and the figure for Ahmedabad residents was only 2.9%. Many Ahmedabad respondents said that they feared and suspected Hindus, this being a result of the recent anti-Muslim pogrom and the enormous clout of Hindutva fascist groups in Gujarat. They also said that the infrastructural conditions in their new localities are far poorer than in the areas where they previously lived, attributing this to anti-Muslim discrimination on the part of government authorities.

Ghettoisation of Muslims appears to have an extremely deleterious impact on their overall economic and educational conditions. 32.5% of the children of the respondents were not attending any school. Of those children who were going to school, 6.0% were attending Urdu-medium schools, 17.7% English-medium schools, 15.4% Hindi-medium schools, and only 5.1% were enrolled in madrasas. Only 15.7% of the respondents said that religious instruction was being imparted in the schools in which their children were enrolled. A majority of the children were going to government schools, and the proportion of those in private schools was only 27.8%, indicating the high levels of poverty among the respondents. From these figures it emerges that the majority of parents in these localities prefer to send their children to regular 'mainstream' schools rather than to madrasas and Urdu-medium schools, contrary to widely-held notions as often depicted in the media.

Almost one fourth of the respondents were unskilled labourers. 39.1% of the respondents interviewed reported an annual income of Rs. 10,000 or less. Only 5.5% of the respondents claimed an annual income of Rs. 60,000 and above. Despite the overall poverty and deprivation of most of the respondents, a significant 36.9% of them claimed that their economic conditions had improved somewhat after migration. On the other hand, 25.8% stated that their economic conditions were better before their migration, while 14.3% of the respondents felt that there had been no change in their economic conditions after migration.

In a religiously plural society, inter-community interaction at the personal as well as economic level are of utmost importance in preserving communal harmony and peace. Obviously, therefore, the trend towards increasing ghettoisation of Muslims in several places is a disturbing phenomenon that needs to be seriously and urgently addressed.

—Imran Ali & Yoginder Sikand



## BOOK REVIEW

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**TEMPLE DESTRUCTION AND MUSLIM STATES IN MEDIEVAL INDIA** by Richard M. Eaton, Hope India, Gurgaon, Pages 101 Price: Rs. 225

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Central to the diverse memories of Hindus and Muslims in India about the history of Hindu-Muslim relations are incidents or claims of the destruction of Hindu temples by Muslim rulers. These memories are a defining element in the construction of contemporary communal identities. Some Muslims see medieval Muslim Sultans who are said to have destroyed temples as valiant heroes who struggled against Brahminism, idolatry and polytheism. For many Hindus, these very kings are the epitome of evil and godlessness.

The theme of the iconoclast Muslim Sultan is routinely put to use for political mobilization by communal forces, as so tragically illustrated in the case of the Babri Masjid controversy, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people. Not content with that, Hindutva forces are on record as declaring that they aim at destroying or capturing some 30,000 mosques and Muslim shrines, which, they claim, were built on the sites of Hindu temples allegedly destroyed by Muslim rulers. Hindutva literature is replete with exhortations to Hindus to avenge the misdeeds, both real and imaginary, of medieval Muslim kings, including destruction of temples. This propaganda and the communal mobilization that it has provoked have resulted in a sharp deterioration of inter-communal relations in recent years.

That some Muslim kings did indeed destroy certain Hindu temples is an undeniable fact, which even most Muslims familiar with medieval history would readily concede. However, as this remarkable book by the noted historian Richard Eaton points out, extreme caution needs to be exercised in accepting the claims of medieval historians as well as in interpreting past events in terms of today's categories. Failure to do this, he says, has resulted in the construction of the image of all Muslims as allegedly fired by an irrepressible hatred of Hindus, a gross distortion of actual history.

The notion of the Muslim Sultan as temple-breaker, Eaton says, derives essentially from history texts written by British colonial administrators, who, in turn, drew upon Persian chronicles by Muslim historians attached to the courts of various Indian Muslim rulers. Eaton argues that British colonial historians were at pains to project the image of Muslim rulers as wholly oppressive and anti-Hindu, in order to present British rule as enlightened and civilized and thereby enlist Hindu support. For this they carefully selected from the earlier Persian chronicles those reports that glorified various Muslim Sultans as destroyers of temples and presented these as proof that Hindus and Muslims could not possibly live peacefully with each other without the presence of the British to rule over them to prevent them from massacring each other. Although some of these reports quoted in British texts were true, many others were simply the figment of the imagination of court chroniclers anxious to present their royal patrons as great champions of Islamic orthodoxy even if in actual fact these rulers were lax Muslims. Dealing with actual instances of temple-breaking by Muslim rulers, Eaton appeals for a more nuanced approach, arguing that in most cases



these occurred not simply or mainly because of religious zeal. Thus, the raids on temples by the eleventh century Mahmud Ghaznavi must be seen as motivated, at least in part, by the desire for loot, since the temples he destroyed were richly endowed with gold and jewels, which he used to finance his plundering activities against other Muslim rulers in Afghanistan, Iran and elsewhere. Beginning in the early thirteenth century, the Delhi Sultans' policy of selective temple desecration aimed, not as in the earlier Ghaznavid period, to finance distant military operations on the Iranian plateau but to de-legitimise and extirpate defeated Indian ruling houses. The process of Indo-Muslim state building, Eaton says, entailed the sweeping away of all prior political authority in newly conquered territories. When such authority was vested in a ruler whose own legitimacy was associated with a royal temple, typically one that housed idol of ruling dynasty's state-deity, that temple was normally looted or destroyed or converted into a mosque, which succeeded in 'detaching the defeated raja from the most prominent manifestation of his former legitimacy'. Temples that were not so identified were normally left untouched. Hence, Eaton writes, it is wrong to explain this phenomenon by appealing to what he calls as an 'essentialized theology of iconoclasm felt to be intrinsic to Islam'.

Royal temple complexes were pre-eminently political institutions, Eaton says. The central icon, housed in a royal temple's *garbha griha* or 'womb-chamber' and inhabited by the state-deity of the temple's royal patron, expressed the 'shared sovereignty of king and deity'. Therefore, Eaton stresses, temple-breaking, especially of temples associated with ruling houses, was essentially a political, rather than simply religious, act. As proof of this thesis he cites instances of the sacking of royal temples of Hindu rulers by rival Hindu kings as early as the sixth century C.E.. In AD 642 CE the Pallava king Narashimhavarman I looted the image of Ganesha from the Chalukyan capital of Vatapi.. In the eighth century, Bengali troops sought revenge on king Lalitaditya by destroying what they thought was the image of Vishnu Vaikuntha, the state deity of Lalitaditya's kingdom in Kashmir. In the early ninth century the Pandyan king Srimara Srivallabha also invaded Sri Lanka and took back to his capital a golden Buddha image that had been installed in the kingdom's Jewel Palace. In the early eleventh century the Chola king Rajendra I furnished his capital with images he had seized from several neighbouring Chalukya, Kalinga and Pala rulers. In the mid-eleventh century the Chola king Rajadhiraja defeated the Chalukyas and plundered Kalyani, taking a large black stone door guardian to his capital in Thanjavur, where it was displayed to his subjects as a trophy of war. In addition to looting royal temples and carrying off images of state deities, some Hindu kings, like some of their later Muslim counterparts, engaged in the destruction of the royal temples of their political adversaries. In the early tenth century, the Rashtrakuta monarch Indra III not only destroyed the temple of Kalapriya (at Kalpa near the Jamuna River), patronized by the Pratiharas, but, Eaton writes, 'took special delight in recording the fact'.

This and other such evidence clearly suggests, Eaton argues, that 'temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the coming of Muslim Turks to India'. Hence, the Turkish invaders, in seeking to establish themselves as rulers, followed a pattern that had already been established before their arrival in India. Yet, the



iconoclastic zeal of the Muslim rulers of India must not be exaggerated, Eaton says. He claims that based on evidence from epigraphic and literary evidence spanning a period of more than five centuries (1192-1729), 'one may identify eighty instances of temple desecration whose historicity appears reasonably certain', a figure much less than what Hindutva ideologues today claim.

In judging these incidents, extreme caution is necessary, Eaton suggests. These temples were destroyed not by 'ordinary' Muslims, but, rather, by officials of the state. Further, the timing and location of these incidents is also significant. Most of them occurred, Eaton says, on 'the cutting edge of a moving military frontier', in the course of military raids or invasions of neighbouring territories ruled by Hindu kings. Once Muslim rulers had conquered a particular territory and incorporated it into their kingdom typically such incidents were few, if at all. When Muslim rulers grew mainly at the expense of other Muslim ruling houses, temple desecration was rare, which explains, for instance, why there is no firm evidence of the early Mughal rulers Babar and Humayun, whose principal adversaries were Afghans, in engaging in temple desecration, including, strikingly, in Ayodhya. Certain later Mughal and other rulers are said to have engaged in the destruction of royal temples and building mosques on their sites in territories ruled by rebel chieftains. These acts were intended to be punishments for rebellion, and once rebellions were quelled few such incidents took place.

Whatever form they took, Eaton says, 'acts of temple desecration were never directed at the people, but at the enemy king and the image that incarnated and displayed his state-deity'. Eaton cites in this regard a contemporary description of a 1661 Mughal campaign in Kuch Bihar, northern Bengal, which resulted in the annexation of the region, makes it clear that Mughal authorities were guided by two principal concerns: to destroy the image of the state-deity of the defeated Raja, Bhim Narayana and to prevent Mughal troops from looting or in any way harming the general population of Kuch Bihar. Accordingly, the chief judge of Mughal Bengal, Saiyid Muhammad Sadiq, was directed to issue prohibitory orders that nobody was to touch the property of the people. Sayyid Sadiq, Eaton tells us, 'issued strict prohibitory orders so that nobody had the courage to break the laws or to plunder the property of the inhabitants. The punishment for disobeying the order was that the hands, ears or noses of the plunderers were cut'. In newly annexed areas formerly ruled by non-Muslims, as in the case of Kuch Bihar, Eaton goes on, 'Mughal officers took appropriate measures to secure the support of the common people, who after all created the material wealth upon which the entire imperial edifice rested'.

The theory that politics, rather than simple religious zeal, lay behind most instances of temple-breaking by Muslim rulers is strengthened by the fact that, as Eaton points out, once Hindu Rajas were defeated by Muslim kings and their territories annexed, pragmatism dictated that temples within the Emperor's realm remained unharmed. This was the case even with the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, generally projected as the epitome of Muslim iconoclasm. Eaton quotes an order issued by Aurangzeb to local officials in Benares in 1659 to provide protection to the Brahman temple functionaries there, together with the temples at which they officiated. The order reads:



In these days information has reached our court that several people have, out of spite and rancour, harassed the Hindu residents of Benares and nearby places, including a group of Brahmans who are in charge of ancient temples there. These people want to remove those Brahmans from their charge of temple-keeping, which has caused them considerable distress. Therefore, upon receiving this order, you must see that nobody unlawfully disturbs the Brahmans or other Hindus of that region, so that they might remain in their traditional place and pray for the continuance of the Empire. Justifying this order, Aurangzeb asserted, 'According to the Holy Law (shari'at) and the exalted creed, it has been established that ancient temples should not be torn down'. At the same time, he added that no new temples should be built, a marked departure from the policy of Akbar. However, Eaton says that this order appears to have applied only to Benares because many new temples were built elsewhere in India during Aurangzeb's reign. Eaton thus seeks to dismiss the notion that various Muslim rulers in India wantonly engaged in destroying Hindu temples, allegedly driven by a 'theology of iconoclasm'. Such a picture, he insists, cannot, sustained by evidence from original sources from the early thirteenth century onwards. Had instances of temple desecration been driven by a 'theology of iconoclasm', he argues, this would have 'committed Muslims in India to destroying all temples everywhere, including ordinary village temples, as opposed to the highly selective operation that seems actually to have taken place'. In contrast, Eaton's meticulous research leads him to believe that 'the original data associate instances of temple desecration with the annexation of newly conquered territories held by enemy kings whose domains lay on the path of moving military frontiers. Temple desecration also occurred when Hindu patrons of prominent temples committed acts of treason or disloyalty to the Indo-Muslim states they served'. Otherwise, he notes, 'temples lying within Indo-Muslim sovereign domains, viewed normally as protected state property, were left unmolested'.

This slim volume is a path-breaking book, a passionate protest against the horrendous uses to which the notion of the 'theology of iconoclasm' has been put by contemporary Hindutva ideologues to justify murder in the name of avenging 'historical wrongs'. It urgently deserves to be translated into various Indian languages and made readily available at a more affordable price.

—Yoginder Sikand

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#### **GREAT ANCESTORS-WOMEN ASSERTING RIGHTS IN MUSLIM CONTEXTS**

by Farida Shaheed with Aisha Lee Shaheed, Lahore, Shirkat Gah, Vol. 2, Kit Training Manual: 133 pages; Narratives: 193 pages.

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The international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and the Lahore-based women's collective Shirkat Gah (also acting as the WLUML Regional Coordination office for Asia) have undertaken a ground breaking historical research. Its aim is to reclaim women's rights activism as grounded in Muslim societies.



The resulting publication-the *Great Ancestors, Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts*-highlights the lives and deeds of women from diverse Muslim countries and communities who have, in the past, engaged in the struggle for gender equality. Richly illustrated, it provides dozens of examples of women's rights advocates ranging from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 1950s and encompasses regions as varied as the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Muslim Spain, India, Pakistan, Algeria, Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, Nigeria or Indonesia.

In the words of the author, Farida Shaheed from Pakistan, the research allows to connect "the contemporary struggle for women's rights [with our] historical past, engendering a sense of linkage with-and ownership of-both women's assertions in the past and the contemporary movement."

### **Feminism belongs to all**

The impetus for the project came from a need to challenge a common assumption that defines feminism as a project which originated in the West in the course of the last couple of centuries. This misconception, combined with the portrayal in mainstream Western media of "Muslim women" as passive victims, serves the proponents of the so-called clash of civilizations-who would like us to believe that boundaries of identities negates the very possibility of a global feminist agenda.

On the other hand, it also serves the interests of the religious Right in Muslim countries and communities. These politico-religious forces ("fundamentalists") systematically denounce feminism as a foreign discourse and practice. The goal is to de-legitimize feminists as "Westernized" women who betray their culture or religion by opting for a "non-indigenous" strategy.

It is clear that the challenges women faced (and continue to face) are influenced by historical, social and political circumstances, and that the strategies they designed (individually or collectively) are, accordingly, varied. Yet, *Great Ancestors* sets to demonstrate that the efforts undertaken by women towards achieving gender equality in Muslim contexts have been ongoing for centuries. In the process, it "explodes the myth that struggles for women's rights are alien to societies that embraced Islam."

The wealth of illustrations-from portraits to covers of 19<sup>th</sup> century women's magazines to reproductions of early miniatures, some of them exquisite-also goes a long way in making this statement not only politically valuable but also enjoyable for the eye.

### **Documenting Women's Struggles in Muslim Contexts-A WLUMI Approach**

Reclaiming a feminist past in Muslim contexts is not a new endeavor. For more than a decade already, scholars have documented prominent female figures, or focused their research on women's activism in a given region.

For example, Margot Badran has translated the Memoirs of Hoda Shaarawi, an early Egyptian feminist leader (*Harem Years-1879/1924*). Badran subsequently drew upon a wide range of women's sources (memoirs, letters, essays, journalistic articles, fiction, treatises, and extensive oral histories) to record the spread of feminism at the turn of the last century in Egypt in her *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (1996).



Other well-known researchers include Fatima Mernissi in Morocco, who brought back to life the *Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993). Or Kumari Jayawardena in Sri Lanka, whose research on women's political struggles from the last 19th century onwards did include women in some Muslim countries (*Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, reprint 1994).

Yet, *Great Ancestors* adds an international dimension to this previous scholarship. In addition to its stated aim to uncover an "indigenous" feminist past that can inspire younger generations of activists, it also differs from earlier work at other levels.

The unique format will prove invaluable to women's advocates, trainers and educators alike. The 2 volume kit offers, on the one hand, a narrative part which is organized chronologically from the 8th century till the contemporary period. Varied illustrations enrich the almost 200 pages of text. The "Narratives" portray women according to the specific area of activism on which they focused. The scope of their activities is an eye opener-reminding us that a number of issues (such as polygyny, divorce rights, child custody, etc.) remain sites of struggle to this day.

Shaheed underlines three main "strands of women's assertiveness"-at times interconnected, at times developing independently from one another: "The first strand consist of women asserting control over their personal lives, especially in terms of bodily integrity, including sexuality, and rights within the family. The second, much less documented strand is women's solidarity actions, that is, initiatives by women to support other women. The third strand is women's efforts to improve their societies."

Some women worked towards ensuring access to education (for themselves or others) and thrived on intellectual achievements or the knowledge of scriptures. Others fought to secure rights within marriage or refused the marriage institution altogether. Yet others engaged in collective solidarity projects, including anti-colonial struggles or early forms of transnational feminist networking. For the reader, the combination of chronological and thematic within the "Narratives" (as well as the index) makes the various chapters easy to navigate.

The second volume of the kit-the "Training Module"-also mirrors the three broad "strands" of women's activism. It provides texts and illustrations (as well as guidelines and glossary) that are specifically designed for teachers and trainers to run a one hour training session. The Training Module's script, to be read aloud, offers a series of monologues/ cameos either based on original sources or, where possible, using women's own voices. These concrete examples of women's activism, each lasting no more than 60 seconds so as to keep attention focused, start with the provocative sentence: "How could you have forgotten me?". Indeed, participants will no doubt wonder how so many powerful women could have been silenced and made invisible throughout history.

The content is also original in terms of its orientation. *Great Ancestors* is not focused exclusively on famous women. In the words of author Farida Shaheed: "it is about women who intervened for women's rights and social justice, whether they were subsequently famous or not."

It also, deliberately, does not limit itself to "Muslim women" - for two reasons. First, because WLUML is aware that there were, and there are, non-Muslim women who live



and struggle in Muslim contexts. Second, and importantly, because there are women from Muslim backgrounds who-whether they are believers or not-choose other markers of identity than religion.

Finally, *Great Ancestors* includes some male voices, to pay tribute to the men who took a stand in favor of gender equality and advocated for women's rights. As Farida Shaheed emphasizes: "The notion that all men in Muslim societies are misogynistic is as much a myth as the notion that women are only silent victims."

### Sources and Limitations

Historical sources rarely do justice to women's struggles. Apart from the recurrent issue of male monopoly over knowledge, there may also be the fact (at least in some contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa) that a number of societies tended to rely on oral rather than written traditions.

However, in the early days of Islam (during the 8th and 9th centuries), various historical data do include prominent women. Shaheed notes that, among the 4,250 names entered in the earliest *Tabaqat al-kubra* (the "First Generations"-a record of important figures), about 15% are women.

Between the 11th and 15th centuries, scholars continue to record the lives of Muslims from royal and elite families-but now also move towards documenting less affluent or influential people. This includes "women merchants, poets, midwives", etc. The geographical range increases as well: early works focus initially on Mecca and Medina later ones, starting from the 14th century, also mention women from Egypt to Syria.

But, from the 15th century onwards, "women mysteriously disappear". In the 16th century Al-Ghazzi's (died 1651) compilation of 1,647 illustrious people includes only 12 women. In the 17th century, Al-Muhibbi (d. 1699) lists no women at all. In the 18th century, Al-Muradi (d.1791) refers to one single woman. And in 19th century, Al-Baytar (d.1918) mentions only two women.

### What Happened?

Shaheed suggests this sudden disappearance could be a consequence of the "fragmentation into disparate structures and empires, each with its own priority and language."

Badran situates the time when "notable women [began to] rapidly drop out of Islamic history" earlier, possibly linking it to the increased practice of concubinage around the 10th and 11th centuries. She states: "The 'Abbāsids [832-950] preferred having concubines to wives. Wives were free Muslim women who could exercise their rights, while concubines were slaves with few rights. The emphasis on concubinage affected the whole society and engendered attitudes that canceled the exercise of women's rights and freedom."

More research would help establish whether this was one of the early factors which led to women's exclusion from historical records.

For the 15th to 19th century period, court records would have no doubt offered a wealth of information, as many women took advantage of legal means at their disposal to settle disputes (as a delicate 13th century miniature from Baghdad shows, with a wife and husband



consulting a qadi, or magistrate). But the *Great Ancestors*'s small team could not take advantage of such sources—at least not for this volume (it is conceived of as an ongoing project).

Another limitation, acknowledged by the authors, is linked to the fact that the research relied primarily on information available in English or Urdu - leaving unexplored large sections of the "Muslim world" (such as Chinese, Indonesian Muslims or communities from sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, etc).

However, overall, *Great Ancestors* proves to be an exciting, well researched, and attractively illustrated book. Hopefully, the present publication will encourage groups with access to local data to undertake further research in other countries. Reclaiming history is an endeavor most oppressed constituencies - from indigenous to women, from gays and lesbians to disabled people - are engaged in. By documenting their own great ancestors, such groups are able to trace the roots of their activism, and sustain contemporary struggles. Similarly, a large-scale history of feminism in the Muslim world<sup>6</sup> can go a long way in confronting the challenges posed to women by foreign intervention, the failure of nation states to provide for citizens' basic needs or the rise of the Muslim religious right.

—Anissa Helie

(Courtesy: *Women Living Under Muslim Law*)

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**EMPOWERMENT OF MUSLIMS IN INDIA THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION** by A.U. Asif, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi. Pp: 151, Price: Rs. 180

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The role of the mass media in empowering communities is a recognized fact. Given that Muslims in India are, on the whole, a marginalized community, the mass media can play a crucial role in promoting internal reform and facilitating the community's social, economic, educational and political empowerment. The importance of the mass media is further enhanced in the current context of growing anti-Muslim sentiments which large sections of the media, national as well as international, are engaged in actively cultivating. This is the underlying message of this timely book.

The book begins with a chapter surveying the Muslim presence in the mass media, both print as well as electronic, in India today. The author points to the negligible presence of Muslim employees in 'mainstream' media organizations and to the remarkably low number of Muslim-owned newspapers and magazines in languages other than Urdu. Of the approximately 750 daily English newspapers in the country, only one—the Mumbai-based *Mid-Day*—is owned by Muslims. Yet even this single paper, an evening tabloid, cannot be said to represent Muslim views. Barely half a dozen of the roughly 3500 daily Hindi newspapers in the country are run by Muslims. Only two of the 225 daily newspapers published from Kerala in Malayalam are Muslim-owned. Gujarat has a single Muslim-run Gujarati newspaper. The situation is similar in the case of other regional languages. Likewise,



in the case of periodicals in languages other than Urdu. Most of these, Asif says, are poorly and rather unprofessionally managed.

The remaining section of the book consists of interviews with media persons, Muslims as well as others, eliciting their views about Muslim representation in the Indian media. Understandably, there is considerable repetition in what they have to say, and this the author could conveniently have left out. The interviews itself lack depth, are somewhat superficial and the language is rather shoddy. An issue that many interviewees deal with is the negligible number of Muslims in the non-Urdu media. Various explanations are offered for this, including discrimination and lack of sufficiently qualified applicants. While many Muslim respondents working in 'mainstream' media houses stress that they do not face any discrimination in the workplace and in covering Muslim issues, some say that they have to be extra-cautious in dealing with issues related to Muslims and Hindu-Muslim conflict so as not to appear to be 'biased' or 'pro-Muslim', a burden that Hindu journalists do not have to carry. It is almost as if Muslims, in contrast to Hindus, cannot be expected to be objective and fair in discussing issues related to Hindu-Muslim controversies. A related issue that should have been raised in this regard but is curiously absent in all the interviews is that of the caste-class character of the 'mainstream' Indian media, being dominated almost entirely by 'upper' caste Hindus.

Another issue, which is barely touched upon in the interviews but which deserves to be discussed in considerable detail, is the tendency of large sections of the non-Muslim media to present Muslims and Islam in a negative light. The issue of Hindutva-leaning journalists and the impact of Western media discourses demonizing Islam and Muslims is hardly discussed. However, some interviewees do point to the fact that the non-Muslim media displays little or no interest in highlighting positive stories or images of Muslims and in discussing their manifold social, economic, educational and political problems and concerns. Instead, Muslims are talked about almost only in the context of some controversy or the other, particularly in the context of violence, thus reinforcing negative stereotypical images of Muslims.

A third issue that some interviewees refer to is the condition of the Urdu media. Some of them argue that the future of Urdu and Urdu journalism is bleak in India, both because of the discriminatory policies of the state vis-à-vis the Urdu language as well as because north Indian Muslim elites, who appear to champion the cause of Urdu, have done little to promote it. Poor working conditions in Urdu media houses, lack of freedom, professionalism and objectivity, and tendency to engage in 'desk-work' rather than 'field-work' are a characteristic feature of many Urdu publications, they argue. Other features of large sections of the Urdu press, such as an overwhelming focus on urban Muslim issues and lack of stories and reports on rural Muslims, who constitute the majority of the Muslim population, the inter-sectarian debates that some Urdu publications excel in fanning and the narrow focus of many of these on Muslim communitarian issues while ignoring broader issues facing the country as a whole are, however, not dealt with, although they should have.

The book concludes with an ambitious list of suggestions for Muslim organizations to adopt in order to increase the Muslim presence in media houses and to counter anti-Muslim



prejudice being spread through the media. These include setting up news and feature agencies specializing in Muslim-related issues, establishing media institutes in every state, providing scholarships for Muslim students pursuing courses in mass media, organizing workshops for media persons to sensitize them on Islamic and Muslim issues, co-ordination between Muslim and other like-minded journalists, launching daily newspapers in English, Hindi and regional languages and starting more Muslim community radio stations and Urdu television channels that would focus on Muslim social issues. If any of this actually comes about remains to be seen, however.

—Yoginder Sikand

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### **THEY TOO FOUGHT FOR INDIA'S FREEDOM—THE ROLE OF MINORITIES**

by Asghar Ali Engineer, Hope India Publications, Gurgaon, Pp. 214

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Indian textbooks routinely describe the country's freedom struggle from British colonial yoke as an essentially 'upper' caste movement. The 'nationalist' heroes they portray and extol are almost all 'upper' caste Hindus. Several of these were unabashed Hindu supremacists and defender of 'upper' caste/class privilege and entered into various forms of collaboration with the British. If these history texts are to be believed, other communities, particularly Muslims, Adivasis and Dalits, had little or no role to play in the anti-colonial movement. An unstated assumption here is that Hindus, by definition, are 'patriots' and that the loyalty of non-Hindus to the country is suspect or, at best, lukewarm. It as if the rest of India must always live under 'upper' caste Hindu tutelage and rely on 'upper' caste saviours to represent them as guardians of the 'nation'.

This book seeks to forcefully challenge this version of the nationalist myth. It provides fascinating glimpses into the lives of non-Hindu Indian freedom fighters, many of whom laid their lives for liberating the country from British rule. As the largest non-Hindu community in India, the Muslims understandably receive the greatest attention here. This is important for yet another reason: 'Upper' caste Hindu ideologues spare no effort to brand Muslims as 'anti-national' and their loyalty to India is always sought to be questioned. Hence the need to highlight the contributions made by numerous valiant Muslims in opposing British rule.

Asghar Ali Engineer's chapter neatly summarises the role of leading 'ulama in the freedom movement, providing a valuable counter to contemporary depictions of the ulama of the madrasas as 'anti-national' and 'subversive'. He refers to the role of the late eighteenth century Shah Abdul Aziz of Delhi, who issued a fatwa declaring India under the British an 'abode of war'. He discusses the legacy of Shah Abdul Aziz's disciples, some of who led a jihad against the British and the Sikh rulers of Punjab. Some of those associated with this tradition carried on the banner of revolt in 1857 and even thereafter, being brutally repressed by the British. Thereafter, sections of the ulama continued their struggle against the British through the Deoband madrasas. Shaikh ul-Hind Mahmud ul-Hasan, rector of the madrasa,



launched an organization devoted to this purpose, and one of his disciples, Ubaidullah Sindhi, a Sikh convert to Islam, tied up with leftist and nationalist revolutionaries, of both Hindu and Muslim background, to set up India's first government-in-exile, in Kabul. Deobandi ulama were also involved in the Khilafat movement against the British along with Gandhi, taking part in the Non-Cooperation movement and opposing the 'two-nation' theory of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League and denouncing the demand for the Partition of India. At the same time, numerous other Muslim groups, such as the Shia Conference and the Momin Conference, also joined the anti-colonial movement and stiffly opposed the Pakistan demand.

The Khilafat movement is discussed in considerable detail by Mushirul Hasan and M. Rafiq Khan in their respective chapters. They argue that the demand for the protection of the Ottoman Caliphate must not be seen as simply an expression of pan-Islamic sentiments divorced from local Indian politics. Rather, the movement to protect the Khilafat launched by key Indian Muslim leaders was at the same time powerfully anti-colonial in thrust, and these leaders insisted, as did numerous Hindu Congress leaders, that the struggle for the Khilafat and for India's independence and inter-community solidarity were inseparable.

The role of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in India's freedom movement is discussed in considerable detail by Moin Shakir and Uma Singh in their respective essays. They argue against the standard Indian 'nationalist' depiction of the Muslim League being the principal or sole villain in the Partition of India, and stress the need for a closer look at class factors leading to consolidation of political differences between Hindu and Muslim elites. Equally important is the role of caste Hindu chauvinism and the refusal of the Congress (besides avowed Hindu supremacist groups) to fully respect and recognise Muslim rights, identity and representation in the name of a unified nationalism that was really (and still remains) a cover-up for caste Hindu domination.

Shantimoy Roy's essay on Muslims in India's freedom struggle refers to numerous charismatic Muslim leaders in different parts of India who led local struggles against the British. The focus is here particularly on Bengal, where numerous such Muslim heroes rallied the support of local Hindus, too, particularly from the so-called 'low' castes. Abida Samiuddin's essay examines the critical role of Urdu newspapers, from the early nineteenth century onwards, in promoting anti-British sentiments and exhorting Muslims, Hindus and others to engage in a joint struggle against British imperialism.

The remaining essays in the book look at the role of various other non-Hindu communities in India's freedom movement. Harish Puri discusses the Kuka movement among the 'low' caste Sikhs and the Ghadar movement, again largely Sikh-dominated, showing how mobilizing to protect and promote a certain form of community identity and to struggle against colonialism could be so deeply interlinked. T.R. Sharma's essay looks at the complex role of the Akali Dal as it sought to negotiate Sikh rights while at the same time participating in the anti-colonial movement. Aloo Dastur's essay examines the role of noted Parsis in the Indian National Congress and various local anti-colonial initiatives in the Bombay Presidency. Teresa Albuquerque's paper discusses the participation of Christians in various social reform efforts and in the larger struggle for Indian freedom, noting that



this was often at the cost of antagonizing white Church leaders, the vast majority of whom were committed to the British Raj.

This collection of essays is a valuable counter to official and popular historiography of India's freedom movement. It forcefully challenges the notion of Indian patriotism being a solely 'upper' caste Hindu monopoly. The title of the book is apt to be a little misleading, however. There is no single majority community in India, the Hindu 'majority' being a myth that exists only on paper and not on the ground. Hence, to speak of the role of 'minorities' in the freedom struggle, as contrasted with that of the 'majority', is misleading. Further, the book suffers from a complete silence on the role of such marginalised communities as Dalits and Adivasis in the freedom struggle (while it does include an essay on Sindhis, focusing essentially on Sindhi Hindus), this being probably the result of the conventional, although hardly forgivable, tendency to club these communities together with caste Hindus as 'Hindus', thereby building up the myth of a Hindu monolith, which is, in turn, used to justify caste Hindu hegemony.

—Yoginder Sikand

## **SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON ISLAM/MUSLIMS**

### *From Blurb/About the Book*

**ASPECTS OF ISLAM AND MUSLIM SOCIETIES** by Nadeem Hasnain (ed.), Serials Publications, New Delhi

Islam and Muslims today, than at any other time, are a matter of great attention throughout the world especially in the west. In the wake of 9/11 the global media, with rare exceptions, is feeding the world with largely prejudiced and negative images of both. The unbalanced approach of the global media can only be described as Islam/Muslim bashing. Islam and Muslims are not monolithic. The "Lived Islam" has a great diversity and heterogeneity.

The book, through its twenty three articles, presents a variety of aspects of Islam and Muslim societies. Starting with modernity and Islam and the Arabian quest for freedom, justice and human dignity, it journeys through the Islamisation of Moroland in the Philippines and discourse on South Asian identity as Islamic identity in England. Issues regarding Islamic banking, role of Zakat in poverty alleviation in Bangladesh, analysis of occupation and economy among Indian Muslims have been dealt with in an objective manner. Gender in Islam and women's movement among Indian Muslims along with imperatives of education among Muslim girls present a relatively ignored aspect of Muslim societies. The socio-economic condition of Indian Muslims based on field studies makes an objective assessment of plight of Indian Muslims while the much maligned *Madrasas* have also been put under critical scrutiny. A very important article on the role of social scientists in Muslim societies has posed a number of questions of critical importance to the Muslims of the entire globe.

Thus, the present volume may be looked at as an important contribution to the growing literature on Islam and Muslims but one thing that puts it apart from the crowd of writings is that every piece has been written by a social scientist.

**ISLAM IN HISTORY AND POLITICS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH ASIA** by Asim Roy (ed.) Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Asim Roy is Honorary Fellow, School of History and Classics, University of Tasmania, Australia. Formerly, he was the Director of the Asia Centre in the same University.

What is behind the current obsessive preoccupation with Islam? Islam and Muslims have never been so ubiquitous as in recent times, dominating wide-ranging public discourses in the media, academia, politics, and society. This volume discusses the meanings of Islam, the Muslim community, and the changing nature of Muslim consciousness, from colonial to contemporary times in South Asia.

The essays explore issues crucial to a holistic understanding of Islam—reform and revival, moral economy, identity formation, pluralism, politics and democracy, and regional manifestations. In an insightful introduction, Asim Roy investigates the global and local challenges and problems currently pressing Islam and Muslims. Underlining the traditions



of resilience, plurality, and creativity central to the faith, he also highlights the importance of alternative perspectives.

Collecting some of the finest writings on South Asian Islam, this interdisciplinary collection brings together distinguished scholars from across the globe.

**REDEFINING URDU POLITICS IN INDIA** by Ather Farouqui (ed.) Oxford University Press, New Delhi

Ather Farouqui has studied the socio-political aspects of the Urdu language in post-partition India, for which he was awarded a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has been a widely published columnist and commentator on Urdu language issues in national and international journals and newspapers such as *EPW*, *Mainstream*, *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Pioneer* (India), *The Nation* (Lahore), *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, *University of Wisconsin* (Madison) USA, *South Asia* (University of New England, Australia).

This volume breaks new ground on the issue of the Urdu language with the backdrop of language politics in the pre and post-Partition eras. It examines the problems faced by Urdu, and its survival as a functional language in the common civic space. The editor and the contributors argue that this language, despite its past glory and present nostalgia, has now been relegated to those Indians who profess Islam. But it is their opinion that Urdu can and will survive in India as a functional language only if it is taught in the educational curriculum as a modern Indian language.

These essays by seventeen renowned Urdu litterateurs focus on the socio-political, educational and policy situation to assess how the teaching of Urdu can become a part of mainstream education. They opine that Urdu, denied its rightful place alongside other regional Indian languages, has also suffered the ire of the Hindu majority after the Partition of the subcontinent. Communal politics have played their own role in discriminating against Urdu.

The only solution—integrating Urdu in the mainstream of secular education—would be a giant step forward for this minority community, as it would promote a more liberal and modern outlook.

**COMMANDING RIGHT AND FORBIDDING WRONG IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT** by Michael Cook, Cambridge University Press (Foundation Books), New Delhi.

What kind of duty do we have to try and stop other people doing wrong? The question is intelligible in just about any culture, but few of them seek to answer it in a rigorous fashion. The most striking exception is found in the Islamic tradition, where 'commanding right' and 'forbidding wrong' is a central moral tenet already mentioned in the Koran. This book, which represents the first sustained attempt to map the history of Islamic reflection on this obligation, covers the origins of Muslim thinking about 'forbidding wrong', the relevant doctrinal developments over the centuries in all the major Islamic sects and schools, and its significance in Sunni and Shi'ite thought today. In this way the book contributes to the understanding of contemporary Islamic politics and ideology and raises fundamental questions for the comparative study of ethics.



**LIVING ISLAM: MUSLIM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN PAKISTAN'S NORTH-WEST FRONTIER** by Magnus Marsden. Cambridge University Press (Foundation Books), New Delhi.

Popular representations of Pakistan's North-West Frontier have long featured simplistic images of tribal blood feuds, fanatical religion, and the seclusion of women. The rise to power of the radical Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan enhanced the region's reputation as a place of anti-Western militancy. This evocative study of the Chitral region challenges all these stereotypes. Through an exploration of the everyday experiences of both men and women, he shows that the life of a good Muslim in Chitral is above all a mindful life, enhanced by the creative force of poetry, dancing and critical debate. Challenging much that has been assumed about the Muslim world, this study makes a powerful contribution to the understanding of religion and politics both within and beyond the Muslim societies of southern Asia.

**ISLAM AND HUMAN RIGHTS: ADVOCACY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN LOCAL CONTEXTS** by Mashood A. Baderin, Mahmood Monshipouri, Lynn Welchman, Shadi Mokhtari, Global Media Publications, New Delhi.

This book reflects the outcome of the Islam and Human Rights Fellowship Program, a three-year project at Emory University School of Law, Atlanta, USA. The Program brought ten scholars and activists together to explore the relationship between human rights and Islam, with the objective of helping people within Muslim societies promote and protect human rights from an Islamic perspective.

The book begins with a Foreword by Prof. Abdullahi An-Na'im, Director of Program, which explicates the idea and approach of the program and the ten studies. This introduction is followed by an article authored by each Program Fellow, reflecting the theoretical framework, research methodology, and fieldwork experience of their particular project. The ten articles cumulatively cover a wide range of disciplinary, theoretical, and advocacy issues and perspectives on engagements between Islam and human rights in diverse local contexts.

The articles in the collection are divided into three categories. The section on Gender Justice, Sexuality, and Health Rights includes articles on: Islam and women's rights in Senegal; Islam and gender justice in Philippines; and domestic violence in Indonesia. The section on Civil and Economic Rights consists of articles on: Shari'ah in Northern Nigeria; constitutional and human rights perspectives on Islam in Malaysia; rights of slum dwellers in Morocco; and rights violations of the Al-Akhdam ethnic minority in Yemen. The section on Commentary on Islam and Human Rights includes: an evaluation of a rights paradigm beyond secularism and Islamism for Nigeria; and an examination of human rights in Islam between universalistic and communalistic perspectives. An article on promoting human rights education through the Islamic Law curriculum in a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia represents the final category of Human Rights Education in an Islamic Context.

The individual articles and the collection as a whole represent a rich engagement between human rights scholarship and human rights advocacy, in keeping with the program objective



of promoting the protection of human rights in Islamic societies and communities around the world. This book marks an innovative and original contribution to the discourses of human rights theory, practice, and advocacy; Islamic law; Islamic studies; women's rights, gender studies; and fieldwork methodology. It is an invaluable resource for scholars, rights activists and advocates, NGOs, policymakers, and anyone with an interest in issues of Islam and human rights.

**IQBAL: MAKERS OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION** by Mustansir Mir. IB Tauris & Company, London.

This is a highly informative yet accessibly-written introduction to the life and works of the poet-philosopher-politician Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), who as President of the Muslim League played a vital role in the birth of Pakistan, and is revered today as the country's spiritual founder. In discussing Iqbal's philosophy, and analyzing his poetry and prose at some length, Mustansir Mir suggests that Iqbal represents a paragon for modern Muslims, caught as they are between tradition and modernity.

**ISLAM BETWEEN CULTURE AND POLITICS** by Bassam Tibi. Palgrave MacMillan, London.

Bassam Tibi offers a radical solution to the problems faced by Islam in a rapidly changing and globalizing world. He proposes a depoliticization of the faith and the introduction of reforms to embrace secular democracy, pluralism, civil society and individual human rights. The alternative to this is the impasse of fundamentalism. The pivotal argument is that Islam is being torn between the pressure for cultural innovation and a defensive move towards the politicization of its symbols for non-religious ends.

**WE ARE IRAN** by Nasrin Alavi. Soft Skull Press, London.

There are now 64,000 blogs in Farsi, and Nasrin Alavi has painstakingly reviewed them all, weaving the most powerful and provocative into a striking picture of the flowering of dissent in Iran.

**EMBRACING THE INFIDEL: STORIES OF MUSLIM MIGRANTS ON THE JOURNEY WEST** by Behzad Yaghmaia. Delacorte Press, London.

At once an eye-opening testimony and a gripping human drama, this takes the reader on an astounding journey along a modern-day underground railroad that stretches from Istanbul to London used by Muslim migrants on their journey to the West.

**FROM SECULARISM TO JIHAD: SAYYID QUTB AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF RADICAL ISLAMISM** by Adnan A. Musallam. Praeger Publishers, Rome.

This is the first book written since September 11, 2001 to look at the life and philosophy of controversial radical Islamist Sayyid Qutb of Egypt (1906-1966), the philosopher of Islamic terror and the man many have called the godfather ideologue of al-Qaeda.

**FAITH AT WAR: A JOURNEY ON THE FRONTLINES OF ISLAM, FROM BAGHDAD TO TIMBUKTU** by Yaroslav Trofimov. Henry Holt & Company.

Drawing on reporting from more than a dozen Islamic countries, "Wall Street Journal" reporter Trofimov offers an unforgettable portrait of the Muslim world after September 11. What emerges is a penetrating portrait of people, faith, and countries.

**WHAT'S RIGHT WITH ISLAM IS WHAT'S RIGHT WITH AMERICA: A NEW VISION FOR MUSLIMS AND THE WEST** by Feisal Abdul Rauf. Harper, San Francisco

An American Imam offers straight forward answers for today's toughest questions about Islam.



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- Type all copy-including indented matter, notes and references—double spaced allowing generous margins at the top, bottom and sides of page. Please do not break words at ends of lines.
- Place all the tables at the end of main text, assigning numbers to each one of them in the same numbers whenever referred to, in the text.
- Place all the notes immediately after the tables (if any) followed by references.
- Within the text, adopt the author-date style of citation minus the comma, for example- (Geertz 1998). If a page is also cited it should be (Geertz 1998:95). When more than one author is cited, the entries should be chronological with works of different authors separated by a semicolon- (Barth 1993; Geertz 1998).
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