

Issues/Discussion Forum

Nothing Can be Gained from a Siege Mentality, Muslims Need to Change Approach

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The harassment and humiliation meted out to Mohamed Bouazizi by a municipal official and her aides became a catalyst for the Tunisian revolution and the wider Arab Spring, inspiring demonstrations and resistance movements not just within Tunisia but acting as a catalyst for similar movements in several Arab countries.

In a similar way, it is heartening to note the reaction in Pakistan and the rest of the Muslim world to the cruel and heartless shooting of the school girl Malala Yousafzai in Peshawar by the Taliban.

Reactions

Since then, there has been an outpouring of dismay and an expression of support for the teenager. School boys and girls under the age of 10 have stepped out, some with their faces uncovered, addressing themselves as 'I am Malala' in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan Education Ministry organized a nationwide prayer for her at Afghan schools likening her to the Joan of Arc.

What is even more heartening is the number of Islamic organizations and Millats that have come out speaking against the Taliban.

This is heartening because for years we have noted the lack of positive reaction from conservative Muslims against the Taliban.

Generic fatwas against terrorism have been issued, including from Indian seminaries such as Deoband but specific criticism of the Taliban had been muted.

The sad part in this entire decade and a half has been that Islam has come to be bracketed by many as a faith that is impatient and intolerant towards freedom of speech and open debate.

Time and again Muslims around the world have reacted violently on issues that hurt their faith while reactions among followers of other religions in similar situations are comparatively muted.

What is often forgotten is that disturbances are caused by a minuscule minority.

Let us not forget that Muslims today number over two billion people on the planet and a vast majority goes about their business as usual.

Nevertheless it is tragic that this vast majority is unable to control or influence a small minority that in fact goes against the fundamental teachings of the religion and the Prophet.

The Prophet has been quoted as saying..... "the strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger".

One can see the reason for Muslim anger- repressive governments, efforts by the West to occupy or interfere in the affairs of Muslim countries, a sense that the rest of the world thinks of Islam as a medieval religion unsuitable to the modern age etc, do give reason for anger.

But one cannot forget the foundation of Islam rests on "Bismillah ar-rahmaan ar-raheem" or 'in the name of the Almighty, the most merciful, the most beneficent'.

Community

Maulana Azad, a great Islamic scholar, wrote the entire first volume of his three volume Tarjuma-e-Quran (Translation of the Quran) on these magical words.

Should anyone understand the hidden and mystical meanings of these words or reflect upon 'Akhlaq-e-Muhammadi' or 'the etiquette and behaviour of the Prophet' he will hopefully understand the Quran when it says 'let not hatred of others to you make you swerve to run and depart from justice'.

Be just.....' (Quran 5.8) and further adds that 'no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self restraint' (Quran 41.35).

The Muslim therefore needs to rediscover the virtues of forgiveness and mercy.

This needs a change in attitude and thinking, a softer expression of views, and an abhorrence and resistance to vulgar demonstration of wanton violence.

Muslims in India must appreciate that despite scores of riots, despite the horrendous experiences of Babri Masjid, Mumbai 1991 and Gujarat 2002, India remains secular because 85 per cent of Indians, a vast majority of whom are Hindu, remain steadfastly secular.

Secularism

At a recent seminar at the Jamia Millia Islamia, organized as a joint initiative between the Citizens of Justice and Peace and the University, a majority of participants who spoke at different events or performed at different functions were non- Muslims.

The passionate reasoning and arguments against communalism by Prof. Romila Thapar, Shiv Vishwanathan, Dipankar Gupta, Mukul Kesavan, R.B. Sreekumar, Prof. Prabhat Patnaik, Harsh Mander, Rajdeep Sardesai, Ashish Khetan, Ram Rahman and Madan Gopal Singh showed that secularism is an essential ingredient of our DNA.

So it is imperative for Muslims to understand that nothing can be gained from a siege mentality.

They are proud citizens of India and they shall remain so. Like the majority of Hindus, the majority of Muslims also share the same access to law and the Constitution of India.

But to that end they must resist the minority that resort to unconstitutional ways rather than address issues through legal means.

There is no denying that there are ample number of cases of discrimination, unfair treatment and apathy towards them but minorities across the world are faced with similar issues with different levels of severity.

Here in India we can fight communalism and discrimination not by aggression but enhanced education, dialogue, courtesy and a firm conviction that a very big majority in India stands for secular values and fairness.

If western societies have been largely able to address their ethnic issues why can't we?

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(Courtesy : Daily Mail)