

Interview

Interview with Amina Wadud

Amina Wahud is a well known black scholar of Islam widely popular as 'Islamic Feminist', Based in USA she has been lecturing and writing on Islamic issues specially women's rights in Islam.

When the controversy over the cancellation of Amina Wadud's special lecture by the University of Madras was raging in Chennai, *Frontline* contacted her over the phone at Kozhikode, where she is currently recuperating after a surgery. When she was asked to react to the unfortunate incident, she was a bit hesitant. She said she had been overcoming the trauma and did not want to open the "wounds". But after repeated requests, she agreed and spoke for nearly 40 minutes, which she followed up with a detailed mail. The excerpts:

On her visit to India

I have been in India since 2012. I came of my own free will, my own accord and through my own means. I am retired and free to do as I choose. I chose to come to India. During that time, I have been observing the life of this secular democracy with a large Muslim minority. I am interested in how such a nation-state negotiates the rights of its citizens with particular interest in women and development. Because I came with my certifications and qualifications as well as a world-renowned personality, it was not at all strange to me that not long after my arrival I was extended invitations to speak at community events and at local universities. In almost all cases, I agreed to speak at various venues with little or no compensation for myself. By that I mean I was not provided the honorarium I require of universities and other academic institutions for such public speaking. Thus I considered my acceptance of such invitations a service in exchange for an opportunity to meet with students, researchers and academics along the lines of Islamic studies with a particular focus on women and justice.

On the topic "Islam, gender and reform"

The title for my public lecture at Madras University reflects a common theme about which I have spoken not only in India but elsewhere in the world—the U.S., Europe, Australia, Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. 'Islam gender and reform', this topic

allows me to both describe the various perspectives and strategies of gender reform today amongst the Muslims, from Islamist neo-conservatives to secular human rights feminism and a new field and strategy of Islamic feminism. Most importantly, I emphasize that women can and will choose their way in these matters.

On women in India

I have been disappointed by what I have observed in India, especially regarding women in India, Muslims and non-Muslims, and I have been disappointed with the state of academia and in particular Islamic studies. I wonder how India will move forward and I hope them the best.

On the cancellation of the Chennai event

My commitment to Madras (Chennai) was the last one I had accepted with no plans for any more, as I will be travelling to other countries in the region for other commitments- Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan among others. When I was stranded at the airport in Calicut (Kozhikode) for seven hours and learned there had been some commotion about my upcoming lecture and it had been cancelled I was disappointed at the chaos of it but delighted to be able to return to my apartment rather than to be stuck in Chennai and possibly assaulted by thugs. I was adamant that the lie that was told against me should be sorted out that I had given a lecture somewhere in Tamil Nadu and caused riots. Nowhere had I ever spoken in Tamil Nadu and after none of my public lectures in Kerala, Hyderabad and Delhi among other places in India had there ever been any incident. For one thing I am eminently qualified to speak on the topics chosen and have the supporting degrees and certificates to prove it. The accusation that I do not know Islam is also false, although that was not given as a reason directly but it was implied indirectly.

Her image about India

I wish India all the best, but it has been exhausting to live here and not so rewarding and I look forward to completing my affairs and returning to my family soon.

(Courtesy : Frontline, August 23, 2013)

