

Islam and Pluralism

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Abstract

This article makes an attempt to dispel the western prejudice that Islam does not believe in pluralism, is essentially an intolerant religion, believes in perpetual war, hold abhorrence towards peaceful, coexistence and negates religious freedom. The author quotes from authentic sources of Islam, contemporary Islamic literature and from history to negate the unfounded assertion and calls for better understanding and dialogue between Islam and the West and thus rekindle hope for peace for making this world a happier abode for all humankind and reconstruct a new world order where different civilizations could coexist peacefully without resorting to war and mutual destruction.

To every knowledgeable person it is clear that Muslim countries put together are no match to the U.S. not to speak of the West as a whole. Muslim countries are backward in the field of education. Technologically Muslim countries are far behind the West. The Muslim countries jointly or singly cannot challenge the U.S let alone the West. Why then is the West suspicious of the Muslim *ummah*? This question needs to be addressed afresh from an academic point of view to erase the misgivings of the West towards the Muslim world, for nobody can hope for a peaceful future in the world unless the mistrust between the Muslims and the Judeo-Christian West is removed.

Why did the West consider the people of Timor who fought for separation from Indonesia as freedom fighters, whereas it considers the Palestinian or Kashmiri or Chechen or Moro fighters for freedom and independence as terrorists? Why is this attitude? Why is this hypocritical behavior of the West towards the Muslims? Why is this double standard? What is the underline reason? Is the West afraid that the Muslim world will retaliate for the past misdeeds of the West once they become powerful? Is Britain or the U.S. afraid that if the Arab Muslims become powerful they will avenge the illegitimate creation of the state of

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Israel by expelling Arab Muslims from Palestine? Are the former colonial powers and new-colonial powers of the West afraid that if the Muslim countries become powerful they will have to pay back for plundering the Muslim wealth and resources? Is it the sole and the only reason or more than one reason is liable for the existing bitter and sour relations between the Muslims and the Judeo-Christian West?

One must not overlook the fact that western scholars, the Occidental intellectuals, frequently quote from the text, from the revealed verses of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet (*SM*), sometimes out of context, to justify their contention. It cannot, however, be denied that our earlier scholars sometimes did interpret the texts in a way as if it was the only valid explanation and that the prevailing situation of their time was the last situation. They forgot that newer conditions might arise afterwards which would need to be addressed by interpreting the revealed text of the Qur'an and the sayings and practices of the noble Prophet, and what he had endorsed by remaining silent when certain things happened before him and he did not oppose them. Islamic scholars of the golden era thought that the Muslims are born to translate the teachings of Islam worldwide and make Islam a victorious *deen*, way of life. The classical jurists took it for granted that the Muslim society would remain powerful and established for forever. They, therefore, could not contemplate today's situation in which the Muslims are living. They took very rigid stand on many matters at the time when the Muslims were the rulers although the Divine Guidance is definitely more flexible and elastic to suit the ever-changing environment. What is important is that the western scholars are using these very interpretations of the *imams*, the eminent jurists and the scholars of the earlier generation, to prove that the Muslims are intolerant. The Oriental scholars and the western media are making concentrated propaganda to prove that the Muslims do not believe in pluralism and that there is no question of living with them peacefully and no hope of coexistence with them.

The beauty of Islam is that its followers, the Muslims, accept anything new if it is established through *ijtihad*, research and investigation. The Muslims, therefore, always adjust their position if more appropriate and correct conclusions are arrived

at on any issue after careful and meticulous use of reasoning. Islam, therefore, is a dynamic religion that is able to face the ever-changing milieu. The West, however, intentionally repeats the old *ijtihad* made by some of the eminent scholars and intellectuals of the earlier generation of the Muslims. For example, it repeats the thousand years old *ijtihad*, which has divided the world into *dar al Islam* (the abode of peace) and *dar al harb* (the abode of war). The contemporary Muslim scholars and jurists have, however, divided the world into two realms : *dar al ijabat*: (the land of acceptance. the land where people .have accepted Islam and Islamic values are practiced) and *dar al dawah* (the land of invitation. the land to which dawah has been presented and its people are invited to Islamic values and practices).¹ Dr. Taha Jabir al Alwani, president of the Fitqh Council of North America (FCNA) and also a member of Jeddah-based International Academy of Fiqh, in an interview with the Islamic Horizons pointed out that an "example of misguided rulings is the fatwa that countries like the United States are *dar al kufr* and *dar al harb*, where Muslims have the right to circumvent their laws and regulattons"² Dr. Alwani pointed out: "We are living in North America as a small minority among non-Muslims in a pluralistic. multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. Muslims have the facility of opting to live their lives as Muslims according to the Islamic shariah andfiqh. We need a lot of understanding from our fuqaha and ulama in the North American environment, and if they issue fatwa without studying this environment, they will be doing a great disservice to the North American Muslim community. Indeed their rulings, or rather their misinterpretations, will have a serious effect on the future of Islam in this contment."³ Dr. Alwani pointed out that "in the past, scholars were unanimous in their view that the entire earth was the land of Allah and did not divide it into such spheres. Instead, some scholars like Imam al Razi considered the earth to consist of *dar al ijaba*, which replaces the term *dar al Islam*, and *dar ad dawah*., which replaces the term *dar al harb*. *Dar ad dawah* means a land for dialogue and inter-faith communication, a land where people are not classified, but all human beings are considered one family. This family has two parts. One is identified as *ummat al ijaba*, instead of *ummat al Muslim*, and the other as *ummat ad dawah*, instead

of *kuffar* or *harbiyun*. This part of our heritage and legacy represents Islam more correctly than the other part, because the whole earth has been created by Allah as humanity's home. The Prophet told us that the entire earth is a *masjid* and pure. The only difference is that in *dar al ijaba*, the message of Islam has been established, and in *dar ad dawah* the message has to be spread. We all know what the nuances of performing *dawah* are, and certainly that misguided *dar al harb* / *dar al kufr* ruling is not among the instruments of *dawah*".⁴ "The famous 5th Hijra century Imam al Mawardi, in fact, said that even if we have one Muslim family living in a non-Muslim state, their home will be the home of Islam. The reality is that wherever Muslims find the freedom to practice Islam, that place will be *dar al Islam* for them, and there is no need for them to migrate to some other *dar al Islam* for this purpose".⁵

Dr. Azizah al Hibri, Lebanese jurist and professor at T.C Williams School of Law, University of Richmond, USA, while addressing a selected gathering in Dhaka preferred to divide the world into a land and people where *dauiah*; the message of Islam, has been presented on the one hand, and where *dauiah*; the call and guidance of Islam, has not been presented or is yet to be presented on the other, rather than *dar al Islam* (the abode of peace) and *dar al harb* (the abode of war). Yet other scholars grouped lands and people into *dar al sulh* (the abode of peaceful coexistence or on contractual peace). There can be further classification of states in the light of the spirit of the Qur'an and the *sunnah*; the Traditions of the Prophet.

The West also repeats another old *ijtihad* of the Muslim scholars that non-Muslims living in Muslim countries have to pay *jiziah* (tax imposed on the non-Muslims) even though contemporary jurists have ruled that the paying of *jiziah* is not compulsory and binding. In fact, the second rightly-guided caliph Omar bin Khattab (*RA*) reviewed the *jiziah* policy and abrogated the *jiziah* imposed on old people, children, orphans and unsupported women.⁶ Omar even ordered to pay monthly allowance to a Jew when he saw him begging door to door. As long as non-Muslims pay some taxes as a mark of their obedience to the Muslim state, there is no need for a special tax only to be paid by the non-Muslims. Renowned Islamic jurist Prof. Dr. Yusuf Al Qaradawi in

his book *Fiqh-uz-Zakat* mentioned that caliph Omar bin Khattab dropped jiziah on the Christians of Banu Taglib tribe on their request and imposed another tax. Dr. Qaradawi opined that it is not necessary that non-Muslims pay jiziah. It is enough if the non-Muslims pay a tax equal to zakat.⁷ Eminent Arab economist Dr. Monzer Kahf, currently working with Islamic Development Bank (IDB), opined that jiziah can be charged only on the subjects of the conquered lands.⁸ Moulana Mawdudi also holds the same view. Moulana argued that Pakistan not being a conquered land the question of imposing jiziah on the non-Muslim citizens of Pakistan does not arise.⁹ The days of colonization are over. Modern states have been established by the joint struggle of both Muslims and non-Muslims. The imposition of jiziah has therefore, become irrelevant and impractical. In fact, Islam makes no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims as far as the basic necessities are concerned (2: 126)

Islam and Muslims are being accused by the West on the basis of the old ruling of the Muslim jurists that if a Muslim leaves Islam or converts to some other religion, such a person is beheaded for being *murtad* (leaving Islam). But eminent contemporary Islamic scholars hold different views on the basis of renewed *ijtihad*, research and investigation. The West, however, continues to beat the drum and propagate that Islam is against the freedom of conscience and Muslims do not believe in liberty, free will and choice. In fact, there is not a single instance that Prophet Muhammad did treat apostasy as a prescribed offense under *hudud* (capital punishment) only for leaving Islam. The Prophet never put anyone to death for apostasy alone rather he let such person go unharmed. No one was sentenced to death solely for renunciation of faith unless accompanied by hostility and treason or was linked with an act of political betrayal of the community. As a matter of fact, the Qur'an is completely silent on the question of death as a punishment for apostasy. Apostasy does not qualify for temporal punishment. In fact, the Supreme Court of Malaysia ruled that conversion to Christianity by a Muslim is not a punishable offense.¹⁰

Mohammad Hashim Kamali put forward verse 137 of Sura An Nisa as a conclusive proof of argument against the death penalty for apostasy: "Those who believe, then disbelieve, then believe

again, then disbelieve and then increase in their disbelief - God will never forgive them nor guide them to the path". Commenting on the verse, Mohammad Hashim Kamali pointed out; "The implication is unmistakable. The text would hardly entertain the prospect of repeated belief and disbelief if death were to be the prescribed punishment for the initial act. It is also interesting to note that the initial reference to disbelief is followed by further confirmation of disbelief and then 'increase in disbelief. One might be inclined to think that if the first instance of apostasy did not qualify for capital punishment, the repeated apostasy might have provoked it - *had such a punishment ever been intended in the Qur'an*" (emphasis added).¹¹

Mohammad Hashim Kamali pointed to the *hadith*, the saying of the Prophet, which "makes it clear that the apostate must also boycott the community (*muifariq lil-jamaah*) and challenge its legitimate leadership, in order to be subjected to death penalty".¹² "The blood of a Muslim who professes that there is no god but Allah and that I am His Messenger, is sacrosanct except in three cases : a married adulterer; a person who has killed another human being; and a person who has abandoned his religion, while splitting himself off from the community (*muifariq lil-jamaah*)".¹³ Imam Ibn Taymiyyah explaining the aforementioned *hadith* of the Prophet inferred that "the crime referred to in the *hadith* under discussion is that of high treason (*hirabah*) and not apostasy (*riiddah*) as such".¹⁴

S A Rahman, a former Chief Justice of Pakistan in his monograph *The Punishment of Apostasy in Islam*, looked "into the evidence in the Qur'an and the *sunnah* in detail, and draws attention to the fact that the Qur'an is silent on the question of death as the punishment for apostasy, despite this subject occurring no less than twenty times in the Holy Book".¹⁵ Justice Rahman examined the *hadith* "kill whoever changes his religion" (*man baddala dinahufaqtuluhu*) and found "some weakness in the transmission (*isnad*)".¹⁶ Justice S A Rahman's conclusion is also supported by other evidence, such as the fact that neither Prophet himself nor any of his Companions (*RA*) ever compelled anyone to embrace Islam, nor did they sentence anyone to death solely for renunciation of faith.¹⁷ Justice Rahman's view is supported by

such eminent earlier scholars as Ibrahim al Nakhai and Sufyan al Thawri (both held the view that "apostate should be re-invited to Islam but should never be condemned to death"), the renowned Hanafi jurist Shams al Din al Sarakhsi ("apostasy does not qualify for temporal punishment"), Malaki jurist al Baji ("apostasy is a sin which carries no prescribed penalty, hadd") and modern scholars as Abd al Hakim al Ili and Ismail al Badawi (apostasy to be punishable by death has to be "political in character and aimed at the inveterate enemies of Islam"), Mahmud Shaltut ("apostasy carries no temporal penalty"), Mahmassani ("death penalty was meant to apply, not to simple act of apostasy from Islam, but when apostasy was linked to an act of political betrayal of the community"). Selim el Awa raised a very rational argument that if the hadith "whoever renounces his religion shall be killed" is literally applied it would be applicable also "to Christians, who convert to Judaism and vice versa" which "manifestly fall outside the intention" of the hadith.¹⁸

The great Iranian scholar Ayatollah Mutahhari highlighted the incompatibility of the coercion with the spirit of Islam, and the basic redundancy of punitive measures in the propagation of its message. He wrote that it is impossible to force anyone to acquire the kind of faith that is required by Islam, just as "it is not possible to spank a child into solving an arithmetical problem. His mind and thought must be left free in order that he may solve it. The Islamic faith is something of this kind".¹⁹

Dr. Hsasn Turabi, the ideologue of the Sudanese Islamic movement, raised a very pertinent rational argument on the validity of the opinion of those scholars who hold the view that apostasy in Islam is punishable by death. He pointed out: "How can it be imagined by a rational person that Allah, Who has compelled none to believe, allows us the right to compel others and force them to believe?"²⁰

"If Almighty Allah has granted us the merit of freedom, he who wants to believe is allowed that right and so too the one who wants to disbelieve. If He has chosen to distinguish us from other creatures through his gift of freedom, instead of creating us believers by necessity like stones, mountains, and the earth, which all fear the responsibility of freedom shouldered by Man, the

ignorant, the unjust; if that is so, then the exercise of that freedom will become a matter of course - a self-evident truth confirmed by the Qur'an as in, 'No one is to be compelled to believe.'

"At the time of the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, the Qur'an tells us of those who believed and then disbelieved again and so forth. The opinion of the people of those days changed so easily and freely - between belief and disbelief - that it appeared to swing like a pendulum.

"The Prophet's saying about apostasy is a short statement pronounced within the context of war conditions. Muslims were greatly affected to see one of their companions desert his faith and join the ranks of disbelievers. They were not sure if they should kill him or spare his life because he was a Muslim once. The Prophet, peace be upon him, explained that one who abandons his religion and deserts his fellows should be killed. Regrettably, people of the subsequent generations have taken the Prophet's saying out of its historical context and generalized it. In so doing they deny one of the basic truths of Islam: the freedom of faith. "The saying is related to the case of the Muslim who deserts his fellows and joins the enemies of Islam. Such a person will either be killed or kill someone else':²¹

It is, therefore, clear that the Prophet's saying about the apostate is restricted to times of war, when a Muslim deserter joins the ranks of the enemies to wage war against Islam, rather than seeing this *hadith* as a measure for controlling the faith of those who do not bear arms.

Eminent German Orientalist Adam Mez in 1937 pointed out: in fact "any attempt by a Muslim forcibly or by unfair pressure to convert a Christian subject ... was punishable to death. This law existed in the Turkish Empire even in our day".²²

If anybody, however, takes a penetrating look into the revealed text of the Qur'an, the verses related to the creation, the very pluralistic approach of Allah will be crystal clear. Allah is All Powerful (57: 1-2) and He created everything to worship Him alone (5: 56). He even then tolerated the rebellion of the Satan and allowed Satan the opportunity to misguide men and women from the worship of Allah (7: 11-18). When Allah tolerates Satan, how Muslims can be intolerant to some people or powers who do

not subscribe their view and way of life? Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy on humankind and not to force people (3: 164, 21: 107 and 50: 45). The very principle of Islam is persuasion and not to force. There is no compulsion in religion (2: 256). How then Muslims can be intolerant and deny other religious communities the opportunity to live with them peacefully?

The Prophet was considerate and sympathetic in his attitude and behavior towards the non-Muslims. Some Jewish families lived in the neighborhood of the Prophet's quarter in Madinah. If some of their children fell sick, the Prophet would visit the sick child. If a funeral passed through the streets of Madinah and the Prophet was around, he would stand up as a mark of respect for the deceased.²³

The scheme of Allah is basically and essentially plural. He created humankind into many tribes, races and nations. Humankind speaks many languages and is of many colors (49: 13 and 30: 22). Every race is different from the other in their physical appearance and nature, which is the reflection of His beauty. Had Allah willed He could make humankind into one nation (5: 48 and 11: 118). But His scheme is different.

The shariah is very flexible and gives only the outlines and leaves the matters of details to humankind. We, therefore, find that the attire of the Nigerian Muslims is different from that of the Arab Muslims or the Indonesian Muslims. Muslim men everywhere use cap, but the cap of one Muslim country is different from that of the other. The cap used in Central Asia is different from what is used in neighboring Pakistan. The Nigerian cap is different from the Malaysian cap. The Muslim women use hijab, but the hijab used by the women in Indonesia-Malaysia is different from the Iranian chadder or the Saudi abaya, the cloak.

The essential teaching of Islam is tawheed, unity of Allah. Allah is alone and there is no partner of Him (17: 111). Still then Allah has ordained the Muslims not to criticize even the idols (6: 108). This precept of Islam has direct bearing on the life and activities of the Muslims. The Qur'an played and continues to play a major role in forming and maintaining the values in the Muslim conscience and the social system. The Qur'an shapes the Muslim outlook. The Muslims are, therefore, by and large tolerant.

The plural nature of Islam can be understood from the fact that the Muslims are permitted to eat food of the Jews and Christians. Accordingly, the Muslims can eat the flesh of otherwise lawful animals Jews and Christians have slaughtered or hunted.²⁴ A Muslim man can marry a Christian and Jew woman without converting her to Islam. Islam has made the marriage with Jewish or Christian women lawful for Muslim men for they being the People of the Book, *ahl al kitab*.²⁵

According to Imam Abu Hamfa, non-Muslims are not subjected to Muslim legal punishment (*hudud*) for committing adultery and theft.²⁶

The Islamic state guaranteed not only the safety of the lives and honor of the non-Muslims and the protection of their religious beliefs and rituals but also the protection and maintenance of their personal laws, institutions and endowments.²⁷ In some cases, the expenses for the maintenance and repair of the places of worship of the non-Muslims were met from the public treasury (*bayt ul mal*). Similarly, the salaries of rabbis and priests were often paid from the state treasury.²⁸

There was no pressure on the Jews or Christians to convert to Islam; Muslims continued to uphold the old religious pluralism of the Middle East and learned to coexist with the members of other religions, which according to the Qur'an, were earlier revelations. Karen Armstrong rightly points out: "In the Islamic empire, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians enjoyed religious freedom. This reflected the teaching of the Qur'an which is a pluralistic scripture, affirmative of other traditions. Muslims are commanded by God to respect the People of the Book, and reminded that they share the same belief and the same God".²⁹

Adam Mez pointed out: "What distinguished Muslim Empire from Christian mediaeval Europe is the fact that within the borders of the former, unlike the latter, lived a large number of peoples of other faiths than Islam.... The necessity to live side by side created an atmosphere of toleration, absolutely unknown to mediaeval Europe".³⁰

Osama EI Baz pointed out: "The Qur'an and the *sunnah* are replete with strictures calling for peace, mutual tolerance, justice and equity among the People of the Book. Because of the

spirit of tolerance of Islam Muslims, Jews and Christians coexisted in harmony from the beginning of the Islamic Empire, through the Umayyad and Abbasid eras until the end of the Ottoman Empire. Nor should we forget that in Spain both Jews and Muslims, who had lived peacefully for seven centuries, suffered at the hands of Christian inquisitions. It is also interesting to note that when the French Jews began to flee the Nazi occupation of France the only country to offer them refuge was Morocco under the late King Mohamed V".³¹

It has never been a problem for the Muslims to coexist with the people of other religions. The Islamic caliphate was able to pay host to Christians and Jews for centuries; but the West has found it almost impossible to tolerate Muslims as aptly demonstrated in Bosnia and more recently in Chechnya. John Major, the then British Prime Minister, is on record to have said that Britain is not ready to have an independent and sovereign Muslim state on the soil of Europe.³²

If we fall back to the history we find that Arab Muslims-Christians-Jews were living together peacefully during the Muslim rule in Jerusalem. In the words of Dr. Azzam Tamimi : The conquest of Jerusalem (637 AD) "put an end to the centuries of instability, religious persecution and colonial rule once by the Egyptians, another by the Greeks, a third by the Persians and a fourth by the Romans To the natives of Palestine, the Muslims were a new breed of humans, different from all those who invaded their country before For both Jewish and Christian inhabitants of the conquered lands, Islamic rule signaled the start of the golden age. The territories under Muslim rule became the safe havens to which many Jews and Christians fled to escape persecution in their own homelands. It was in Muslim metropolis that many Christians and Jews found the opportunity to acquire learning and to excel in various fields of knowledge and expertise. Many of them has become historic figures who benefited from as well as contributed greatly to the Arab Muslim civilization".³³

Prof. Thomas Arnold in his book *The Spread of Islam in the World: A History of Peaceful Preaching* wrote: "When the Muslim army reached the valley of the Jordan and Abu Ubaydah pitched his camp at Fhil, the Christian inhabitants of the country wrote to the Arabs, saying ; 'O Muslims, we prefer you to the Byzantines,

though they are of our own faith, because you keep better faith with us ... and your rule over us is better than theirs, for they have robbed us of our goods and our homes'. The people of Emessa closed the gates of their city against the army of Heraclius and told the Muslims that they preferred their government and justice to the injustice and oppression of the Greeks".³⁴

Commenting on the visit of Omar bin Khattab to Jerusalem, Prof. Thomas Arnold wrote : "In company with the Patriarch, Omar visited the holy places, and it is said while they were in the Church of the Resurrection, as it was the appointed hour of prayer, the Patriarch bade the Caliph offer his prayers there, but he thoughtfully refused, saying that if he were to do so, his followers might afterwards claim it as a place of Muslim worship".³⁵ This was the attitude of the Muslims and noble example of a Muslim's tolerance towards non-Muslims.

History is the testimony that Christians and Jews in Andalusia, Spain, under the Muslim rule lived very peacefully and, therefore, non-Muslims could survive in Spain even after 700 years (around 8th to the late 15th century) of Muslim rule. It was, however, when the Muslim caliphate became weak and the Muslim rule ended that Muslims were systematically killed and massacred. Gary Leupp, Associate Professor of History, Tufts University, pointed out: "King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella drove the Moor Muslims out of Spain, forced everybody to embrace Catholic Christianity or be killed, and promoted the exquisite Christian tortures of the Inquisitions. Under Muslim rule, Christian and Jewish communities generally flourished from Spain to Iraq. On the other hand, until recent times, Christian intolerance prevailed throughout Europe".³⁶ How then Muslims can be described as intolerant?

Fatima Mernissi, teacher at the University of Mohammad, Rabat, Morocco, pointed out: "To be a foreigner in the Abbasid court was not really a drawback since the culture encouraged diversity and rewarded people for speaking many languages and bringing the richness of their backgrounds. In fact, during that time scholars, artists, poets and litterateurs came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (speaking Aramaic, Arabic, Persian and Turkish), colors (white, black and mulatto), and creeds (Muslim, Christian, Jew, Sabian and Magtan). It was this cosmopolitanism and multi-

culturalism of Baghdad that made for its enduring strength as a great centre of culture.³⁷ It is, therefore, evident that today's multiculturalism and pluralism has its roots in the 7th and 8th century Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates.

The Muslims ruled India for nearly 800 years. Even then the Hindus always remained the majority in the old quarters of Delhi, the seat of Mogul dynasty, all through Muslim rule. The Hindus held prominent positions in Mogul courts, from Emperor Babur to Awrangzib and thrived in all fields of knowledge, from music to military craft. Awrangzib punished the grandson of his Prime Minister Azad Khan. Mirza Tafakhur, who had outraged the modesty of a non-Muslim woman. Awrangzib wrote: "It is my duty to prevent oppression on the people who are a trust from the Creator".³⁸

It is not a sufficient testimony that Muslims are tolerant, they believe in pluralism and all religious communities can live with them peacefully? It is, however, the Hindus who throughout history behaved in an intolerant manner. The recent happening in Gujrat is the glaring example of the intolerant attitude of the Hindus towards their Muslim neighbors who are living in India side by side with the Hindus for a thousand years. As a result of this brutal communal violence. in which the Indian government machinery also took part. 19,000 Muslims were killed. 12,000 Muslim women were gang raped and 90 percent of the total persons arrested during the riots were Muslims. This is the example of Gandhian non-violence.³⁹

During his life time, Prophet Muhammad concluded many treaties with the Jews and the Christians and the community of the believers lived peacefully with them as long as the concluding parties remained faithful to the terms of the treaties which are the reflection to the plural nature of Islam and its capacity to live with other communities peacefully and its tolerant attitude. Some misunderstandings have, however, arisen regarding verses 3-16 of Sura At Tauba. Sura At Tauba of Al Qur'an is "entirely devoted to treaty-breakers".⁴⁰ Westerners have, however, inferred on the basis of Sura At Tauba that "Islam teaches the destruction of the non-Muslims".⁴¹ The westerners, the Christians and the Jews particularly took exception to: "... slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you may come upon them, and take

them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place. Yet if they repent, and take to prayer, and render the purifying dues, let them go their way: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (9: 5).

Muhammad Asad (formerly Leopold Weiss from Polish/Austria and brought up in a Jewish family) in his monumental commentary of the Qur'an pointing to this verse observed: "Every verse of the Qur'an must be read and interpreted against the background of the Qur'an as a whole. The above verse, which speaks of a possible conversion to Islam on the part of "those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God" with whom the believers are at war, must, therefore, be considered in conjunction with several fundamental Qur'anic ordinances. One of them, "There shall be no coercion in the matter of faith" (2: 256) lays down categorically that any attempt at a forcible conversion of unbelievers is prohibited - which precludes the possibility of the Muslims demanding or expecting that a defeated enemy should embrace Islam as the price of immunity. Secondly, the Qur'an ordains, "Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you; but do not commit aggression, for, verily, God does not love aggressors" (2 : 190); and, "if they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them: and it is against these that We have clearly empowered you (to make war)" (4 : 91). Thus, war is permissible only in self defence, with the further proviso that "if they desist - behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (2: 192), and "if they desist, then all hostility shall cease" (2: 193). Now the enemy's conversion to Islam - expressed in the words, "if they repent, and take to prayer (iit., "establish prayer") and render the purifying dues (*zakat*)" - is no more than one, and by no means the only way of their "desisting from hostility"; and the reference to it in verses 5 and 11 of this surah certainly does not imply an alternative of "conversion or death", as some unfriendly critics of Islam choose to assume. Verses 4 and 6 give a further elucidation of the attitude which the believers are enjoined to adopt towards such of the unbelievers as are not hostile to them. In this connection see also (60: 8-9)".⁴²

Eminent Egyptian scholar Sayyid Qutb commenting on the verse "Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you; but

do not commit aggression, for, verily, God does not love aggressors" (2: 190) quoted above, pointed out: "War should not be pursued for glory or dominance, not for material aggrandizement, not to gain new markets or control raw materials. It should not be pursued to give one class, race or nation of people dominance over another".⁴³

This makes it clear that Islam is essentially tolerant and does not really intend to fight unless compelled by rebellious circumstances. Now is the time to reflect why the West established the vassal state Israel in the Middle East and is nourishing it with all military and economic assistance against the rights of the Palestinians in their homeland. Time Magazine immediately after 11 September 2001 reported that the U.S. alone annually provides Israel \$3 billion military aid plus access to advanced U.S. weapons in addition to another \$840 million economic assistance.⁴⁴ Why the U.S and the U.K want to make renewed attack on Iraq? The good intention of the US to invade Iraq is to "turn Iraq into another U.S. oil protectorate"⁴⁵ President Bush and Prime Minister Blair are out to attack Iraq now for they think that if Iraq acquires nuclear arms it will "alter the strategic balance in the oil rich Persian Gulf"⁴⁶ to the disadvantage of the interest of the West. According to the report of the U.S Air Force Counter Proliferation Center located in the Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, Israel has 400 atomic and hydrogen bombs and thermonuclear weapons with nuclear cruise missiles range of 350 kilometres.⁴⁷ The West is, however, silent about the possession of nuclear arms by the Israel. The U.S is now threatening the world community that if the U.N does not take any action against Iraq for the alleged possession of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and non compliance to the Security Council resolutions and if Iraq does not allow U.N inspectors (Earlier reports showed that U.S intelligence personnel entered Iraq under the cover of U.N inspectors. Reuters in a report from Stockholm released on 4th October 2002 claimed that U.N inspector team members made "too many copies of their of the finding documents and passed on to the U.S and Israeli military" as is evident from the fact that "some targets checked out by the weapons inspectors were bombed by the U.S and its allies just immediately after the inspection". Ake Sellstrom, Swedish expert employed by the U. N

weapons inspection organization UNSCOM led by American Scott Ritter "accused that '90s arms inspectors in Iraq were spies" and the inspectors were, therefore, forced to leave Iraq in December 1998) then it would take unilateral action against Iraq. However the U.S and its western allies are silent about the continued violation of U.N resolutions by Israel. In this connection, it will suffice to mention that when the U.N Security Council by a unanimous resolution decided to send a five-member facts finding team headed by former Finish President Martti Ahtisaari to investigate the massacre in the Palestinian refuge camp in Jenin early April 2002, Israel blocked the mission to probe the atrocities committed by the Israeli military forces and the fact finding team could not proceed to Israel to begin its assigned task. Neither the U.S nor the U.K or any other member state of the so-called civilized club, the champions of liberty and freedom, spoke a word condemning the Israeli defiance not to speak of forcing Israel to comply with the U.N Security Council resolution. The western war on terrorism is nothing but a "smokescreen", as rightly pointed out by John Pilger.

Why is the West supporting client governments in the Middle East against the wishes of the people of these countries? It is undoubtedly to ensure their economic interest and plunder oil resources of the region. It is the western desire to dominate and control the resources of the Central Asian republics, which encouraged the U.S led western coalition attack on Afghanistan and install a puppet government in the name of resisting terrorism.

It is high time to review the current world scenario and the state of affairs. The West is pursuing a policy, a strategy to keep itself the dominant power. Ever since the demise of the Soviet Union, the U.S is pursuing a policy that no new Centre of Power can emerge. What the West, particularly the U.S and the U.K, is doing is nothing but to attempt to impose its hegemony over the Third World and the Muslim countries. The U.S and the U.K are now planning to attack Iraq and trying to mobilize a coalition of western countries although these very countries are silent against Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, on old, women and children and continuous occupation of the Palestinian land, creation of new Jewish settlement in the Palestinian land expelling the original Arab Palestine population from their homeland.

The need of the hour is to identify the real enemies of the tension and conflict and sincerely work to eliminate the existing bitterness - thus rekindling hope among the peace loving people and making this world a safer and happier abode for all of humankind. This, however, cannot be achieved unless the developed West makes genuine change of attitude and develops a new paradigm of equitable relationships. This would require adopting new policies that would pave the way for a healthy exchange of ideas and creating opportunities for dialogue between civilizations. This calls for the construction of a New World Order where different civilizations could coexist peacefully without resorting to war and mutual destruction.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith in 1965 summarized the fundamental weakness of both the western civilization and the Christianity in the following words :

"[It] is their [West and Christianity] inability to recognize that they share the planet not with inferiors but with equals. Unless western civilization intellectually and socially, politically and economically, and the Christian church theologically, can learn to treat other men with fundamental respect, these two in their turn will have failed to come to terms".⁴⁸

The reality is that Islam and the West share a common tradition. for both affirm monotheism, profess belief in revelation, in Prophets and in scriptures. The Muslims share many teachings with the Christians: they accepted all Biblical Prophets, emphasized moral responsibility and believed in the Last Day. From the time of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims have recognized this, but the West cannot accept it. Today some Muslims are beginning to turn against the cultures of *ahl al kitab*, the People of the Book, which have humiliated and disgraced them. The Arab Muslim mind towards the West is depicted in the just conducted opinion poll of Weekly Al Ahram, Cairo. The result of the opinion poll on 'what the Egyptians think about the West' reported by the weekly in its issue of 12-18 September 2002 shows that 68 percent respondents see the U.S war on terror "as a means of asserting the U.S's global dominance" and 51 percent consider it "a war against Arabs and Muslims".

The paradox of history is that the West accuses the Muslims of being intolerant towards the West whereas its leaders are

behaving in a manner, which directly reflects the prejudiced and intolerant attitude of the western leaders towards the Islamic civilization and their abhorrence of the Muslims. Immediately after the Twin Towers Attack, President Bush Jr. without losing time declared "crusade" which undoubtedly reflects his subconscious mind and the U.S President's outlook and stance towards Islam and the Muslims. Following the footsteps of President Bush Jr. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi declared that "Western civilization is superior to Islamic culture". Speaking at a news conference, Berlusconi said: "We must be aware of the superiority of our civilization, a system that has guaranteed well-being, respect for religious and political rights".⁴⁹

If Muslims need to understand western tradition and institutions more thoroughly today, the West needs to separate it from some of their prejudices. "Perhaps one place to start is with the figure of Muhammad: a complex, passionate man who ... founded a religion and a cultural tradition that was not based on the sword - despite the western myth - and whose name 'Islam' signifies peace and reconciliation".⁵⁰

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