

# SPECIAL AMANA ISSUE

Theme: Readdressing Inequality and Injustice and Promoting Peace



AMAN 30th Anniversary  
Asian Muslim Action Network

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AMAN 30th Anniversary

**Theme:  
Readdressing  
Inequality and  
Injustice and  
Promoting Peace**

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The 5th Assembly, Institute of  
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Theme: Towards A Justly Balanced  
Global Community

**2011**

The 4th Assembly, Prince of  
Songkhla University, Pattani  
Theme: Multi-culturalism and  
Global Peace

**2006**

The 3rd AMAN Assembly,  
Islamic State University, Jakarta.  
Theme: Reform and  
Resistance in the  
Quest for Peace

**2003**

The 2nd AMAN Assembly,  
Thammasat University,  
Bangkok, Thailand  
Theme: The New Vision for  
Peace

**2000**

The 1st AMAN Assembly,  
Bangladesh Institute of Administration  
and Management, Dhaka,  
Theme: Culture of Peace

**1990**

The Founding  
Meeting of AMAN,  
YMCA, Chiang Mai



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# *Personal Journey and Reflections towards Formation of AMAN*

**Mohammad Abdus Sabur**

## **Personal Journey**

I was born in a Muslim family, in a village called Harunja, where Hindus and Muslims have been living together in peace for ages. The primary school that I went to was a one-room mud house with a thatched roof. This room was used for 5 classes, simultaneously. We had three amazing Muslim teachers. The land for the school was donated by a Hindu family. The Hindu community celebrated major festivals such as Durga Puja and Kali Puja and Muslims assisted them with whatever was needed. Hindus and Muslims together used to stage a celebratory drama.

There were four Mosques for Muslim to pray. Now, the number has increased partly because of population growth. In one case a group established a new mosque due to conflict related to local politics. The new addition to the village is a new Hindu Temple and a Nanijan-Aftabi Foundation (NAF). NAF, in collaboration with communities, established a modest hospital, high school, junior high school, Kindergarten, and is supporting a few private primary schools with a philosophy that school goes where the children are. A shrine of a Sufi Saint is located in this village where people from all faiths come to pray and seek blessings to overcome all kinds of problems and to meet all kinds of desires.

I was born in an economically-declining but kind-hearted Pramanik family. We are 10 children and father and mother. Very often, particularly at the end of the year, we did not have enough food to eat. When I was in grade 7, my aunty, Shobnom Aftabi supported my school fee, 4 taka per month and continued up to my bachelors degree.

After the liberation war in December 1971, I left my village for Dhaka. Initially I stayed in a room of a kind family and taught 4 children in the morning and afternoon. One day a friend of my

uncle took me to a building where BRAC had just opened an office. There I met Mr. Fazle Hassan Abed and inquired if a job is available for me. He asked what is the district I am coming from. I replied Bogra. Then he asked if a job is given in my district whether I shall accept. Then I told him that so far, I know you are starting a project in war-affected Sylhet district. He smiled and asked me to go to Sylhet. On 31st January 1972, I joined BRAC. It took 24 hours by train then motor launch to reach Derai. The initial work was emergency relief and rehabilitation in war-affected Hindu majority Haor areas of Sylhet.

Working with BRAC provided an opportunity to meet volunteers and staff of charitable organizations, mostly from rich countries. Some of the organizations were secular and some of them were faith-based. That was the time I also came to know about Catholic and protestant communities.

After almost 6 years of my job, in 1977 I had an opportunity to join a Development Workers Program (DWP) offered by the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) based in Bangkok, Thailand. We were 7 development workers from seven countries namely Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka from South Asia and Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand from South East Asia. We had a program Monitor from the Philippines. This was an opportunity to visit and learn from faith-based organizations.

In the Philippines we learnt about the Catholic and Protestant Churches and their engagement. They were addressing issues affecting people, such as farmers indebtedness, workers low wages and lack of job security, abuse of women and human rights. Churches play a supportive role in awareness-raising and capacity-building. They extended support to peoples movements to raise their voice against Marcos dictatorship, American military bases and violation of human rights.

In Indonesia we learnt about the holistic and integrated education program of the Pesantren Pabelan an Islamic boarding school in Borobudur and the Pesantren Putri in Zumbang. Brother Habib Chirzin and late brother Abdurrahman Wahid explained to us the role played by the Pesantren and religious institutions in promoting progressive Islamic understanding and addressing socio-political problems. How to overcome the democratic deficit during Suharto's rule? What are ways to empower communities and promote accountable and just governance?

In Jakarta we learnt about research and issues that require policy advocacy through alliance-building.

The experience in Singapore was different. It was a modern, business city. Life of the people, we found out, was faster than other countries. We visited the office of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) which connects and builds capacity of all national and local churches in the Asia Pacific region.

They relate with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva. Similarly the Bishops Conference of Asia-Pacific relates to the Vatican. Then a question came to my mind. Is there any such people-centered, socially-engaged Network of Muslim Organizations?

In Malaysia we were hosted by the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) dedicated to the promotion and protection of consumers rights. Malay, Indian and Pakistani Muslims plus Hindus and Chinese Buddhist and Christian scholars and activists together were making efforts to build awareness and to protect and promote consumers rights. Mohamad Idris was leading CAP. That time I also learnt about the International Organization of Consumers Union( IOCU).

The regional office was being led by Dr. Anwar Fazal. I became interested about the idea of consumers movement.

Visits in Thailand and Sri Lanka helped us to understand the complementary role of Buddhist monks in cooperation with University scholars, students and NGOs to uplift the living conditions of rural communities. University students generally do not come back to the village to learn and contribute. But graduate volunteers program

encouraged and supported students to spend one year with communities and develop a profile of experiences.

Our visit to the Gandhi Peace Foundation helped us to understand the nonviolence movement in India. Interactions with the late Jai Prakash Narayan inspired us to understand the power of the people to hold governments accountable. A powerful leader, Indira Gandhi was unseated through the united power of the people. I personally thanked him for his role in support of the Bangladesh liberation movement.

### **An Effort to Apply Some of the Experiences**

Small part of these experiences I tried to replicate in a humble way in Bangladesh. I consulted other NGOs and they liked the idea. Susan McCord a motherly figure, from Quaker Service USA was very supportive. We brought together development workers to visit each other's projects and organizations which was the first of its kind, connecting development workers from secular and faith-based NGOs. But it was not easy to develop a network of faith-based organizations.

Along with friends we established the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) and the Institute of Environment and Development Studies (IEDS).

### **Journey with Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) and Inception of AMAN**

When I moved to Bangkok with regional responsibility of ACFOD, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with scholars and leaders of faith-based NGOs in the Asia-Pacific region as well as in Europe, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand. I shared with them my thoughts on forming a regional Muslim Network. Friends from other faith- based organizations encouraged me to go ahead, so that they can have a Muslim partner in a journey towards a common goal to serve God by serving God's creations.

### **Formation of AMAN in November, 1990**

After some person- to -person communications, in November 1990, we organized an Asian Development Workers Workshop. In consultation with co-organizers , it was decided to invite a few Muslim Scholars and activists and explore if we could form an Asia level Network of Muslims. The

late Dr. Ulrich Dornberg from Germany and Dr. Clarence Dias from New York assisted me in preparing a draft of the rationale, goals and objectives of an Asia-level Muslim Network. For two evenings we met and discussed the draft and scope of the network.

Among the participants we had Muslim Scholars and social workers including the late Asghar Ali Engineer from India, Dr. Mubarrak Ali and the late Omar Asghar Khan from Pakistan, Dr. Raisuddin from Dhaka University, Bangladesh, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar and Mr. Sabri Cheek MP from Malaysia, and Ms. Wiriya Wingnom from Thammasat University Thailand.

From other faith communities we had the late C. I. Itty, a senior adviser of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the late Vorakit, Secretary of YMCA Chiangmai, Dr. Ulrich Dornberg from Misereor, Germany, and Dr. Clarence Dias based in USA. The draft of the rationale, goal and objectives and the name Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) which means peace, were adopted. It was also decided to bring out a Magazine called AMANA (which means trust). The late Asghar Ali Engineer agreed to be the President and I was asked to coordinate as Secretary General. Others agreed to serve as interim council members to open discussion about AMAN and invite members to join on a voluntary basis. ACFOD agreed that Dr. Ulrich and I can spend some time for AMAN.

The main focus, we thought, was to draw inspiration from the Quranic teachings and the prophetic traditions to develop human resources by capacity building training, exposure visits of the young generation and connecting them with civil society organizations and progressive scholars. The second focus was to develop resource materials for young generations to read.

The third, to promote intra and interfaith dialogue around issues affecting human society and the natural world. Forth, to engage young scholars in research work and use the findings for social transformation. We clearly stated that AMAN is a Muslim initiative but it is to address common concerns in cooperation with other faith-based and secular organizations.

The first AMAN Strategic Planning Consultation was hosted by Malaysian prominent organizations and personalities in Kuala Lumpur on 17-19 April; 1992, which further sharpened AMAN's focus and orientations: AMAN shall be an open, inclusive and participatory network concentrating on knowledge building, information sharing, empowering young generation; forging interfaith cooperation and transborder solidarity towards just, peaceful and humane societies.

### **The Legal Status of AMAN and its Orientation**

We realized that in order to sustain long term engagement in the above-mentioned field, AMAN ought to function within the legal frame-work. We adopted a two-pronged approach: (I) to register AMAN as a legal body wherever it is necessary and possible and (II) to work with registered NGOs, institutions and scholars.

The AMAN Secretariat was conceived as a meeting point, connector and facilitator to build capacity and strengthen National AMAN organizations, as well as members, alumni, youth, women and partners from other faith communities. Though AMAN is a Muslim initiative it is ready to serve the most-needy, irrespective of one's faith and identity; including refugees and asylum seekers. AMAN -ARF in partnership initiated the International Institute of Peace and Development Studies (IIPDS). Since then it has been offering various courses.

### **Accountability to Members and Partners and Renewal of Vision and Commitment**

Roughly every three to five years the AMAN Assembly was organized to report back to the members and partners. The first Assembly was held in Bangladesh in the year 2000 with the help of AMAN members and NGOs. The Venue was a government facility in Dhaka called BIAM. The Theme was Culture of Peace. The Assembly adopted the Peace Education Program based on a paper presented by Fr. Thomas Michel.

The second Assembly was held in Thammasat University with the help of brother Prof. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, AMAN Council member, in 2003. The Theme was The New Vision for Peace. A Research Fellowship program was adopted.

The Third Assembly was hosted by the Islamic State University in Jakarta. Brother Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, sister Dr. Amany Lubis, faculty members, students and NGO representatives were the Key for a successful Assembly. The Theme was Reform and Resistance in the Quest for Peace. Environment and Climate Change and Territorial Conflicts were also highlighted.

This Assembly was addressed by the former President Abdurrahman Wahid and the former Vice President Yusuf Kala.

The Fourth Assembly was hosted by the Islamic College Pattani in 2011. The theme was Multiculturalism and Global Peace, which emphasized negotiated settlement of territorial conflict and recognition of minority rights.

The Fifth Assembly was hosted by AMAN Malaysia in cooperation with the JUST World Trust and the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (GMMF). The theme was Towards a Justly Balanced Global Community.

Holding AMAN Assembly in different countries helped to connect more people and organizations and to be rooted organically. Dr. Chandra Muzaffar and Dr. Mohamed Yunus secured help from GMMF team led by Dato Dr. Saifuddin bin Abdullah.

AMAN in a humble way organized interfaith peace missions and organized consultations in conflict - affected territories and outside. To mention a few, East Timor, West Papua, Aceh, Southern Thailand, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Kashmir, Assam and Northern Sri Lanka were covered. In absence of a unified, structured Muslim apex body, the AMAN approach has been to connect individuals, groups and institutions around common concerns, mutual respect, and Gender equality has worked quite well at regional and international levels. AMAN is still searching what is the best way to organize at the national level.

### **Challenges for Muslim Networks to Address Instability and Insecurity**

Given the global political environment and historical narratives, it is unfortunate that the major global and regional Muslim organizations are still struggling to fine tune. Tensions and disharmony, proxy wars still exist particularly in the Middle East. Some progress has been made in

the case of Aceh and Bamngsamoro region. Afghanistan gradually is making some progress but instability in divided Kashmir, National Registration Certificate (NRC) in Assam are some of the issues and challenges yet to be addressed effectively. If we compare with ASEAN, the SAARC region is still struggling. India- Pakistan relations have impacted SAARC negatively.

### **Role of the National AMAN, Council and the Secretariat**

Stronger AMAN National Chapters will make AMAN at Asia and international level more significant. In between any two Assemblies, the role of the Council is very important to translate Assembly mandates into programmatic actions. The function of the Secretariat is to mobilize financial and human resources to implement the programs and report to the Council.

The Secretariat needs a team of efficient and dynamic staff headed possibly by an Executive Director who is accountable to the Council. To mobilize resources, ensure effective communication, coordination and implementation of AMAN Assembly mandates by engaging national AMAN and like- minded organizations. Given the diversity a sub-regional AMAN approach in line with ASEAN and SAARC seems to be desirable.

### **Journey Ahead**

This personal and collective story of AMAN 30 years might be helpful to the new generation

of members to understand that this journey was not easy and smooth. So many known and unknown well- wishers and members contributed immensely and never expected anything in return. They want us to go forward and invite new members and friends to take AMAN forward.

Let us pray for those generous and outstanding founding members who have departed from this world, that their soul may rest in eternal peace. At the same time we welcome the younger generation to lead in an inclusive way, with fresh ideas, energy, commitment and dedication.

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# Messengers of Peace: the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN)

**Dr. Clarence J. Dias**

New York, *February 19, 2020.*

In 1945, the United Nations was created. The Preamble of its Charter reads:

**We the Peoples of the United Nations, determined:**

- *to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and*
- *to regain faith in fundamental human rights in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and*
- *to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and*
- *to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,*

*And for these ends:*

- *to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and*
- *to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and*
- *to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and*
- *to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,*

**Have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims:**

*Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.*

Forty-five years later, a small group of (mainly) Asian and (mainly) Muslim scholars, intellectuals, and peace and human rights advocates gathered together in Bangkok sharing a common concern that many of the problems flagged in the UN Preamble above not only persisted, but had exacerbated alarmingly. We were diverse so far as age, gender, race, nationality and religion were concerned. But what we all had in common was deep alarm at the way in which religious faith and belief were being used by both governments and extremist groups in Asia to divide people and their communities, spread hatred and demonize "the Other". We were alarmed at the rapid erosion of values such as faith, trust, respect, dignity and fraternity and were being replaced by unabashed selfishness and greed.

The UN Decade on Decolonisation had indeed succeeded in decolonizing territory and some of the peoples of such territories. But a process of re-colonization of our minds, hearts, values and beliefs was well underway. The writing was on the wall, in plain and clear sight. But there are none so blind as they who will not see!

- ◆ The Cold War era offered all a false choice between capitalistic materialism and religion as "the opiate of the people". Alternatives such as non-alignment were not allowed to succeed.
- ◆ The (nuclear) Arms Race snuffed out the growth of a global non-violence movement.
- ◆ Attempts to negotiate a New World Economic Order were blocked by those benefitting from the Old, re-enshrined in GATT, IMF and IBRD.
- ◆ The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 cast a long foreshadow and left the World at the mercy of the unilateralism of the sole surviving Super Power. It also ushered in a decade of economic globalisation promoting self interest and selfishness as the 'values' of the 21st Century.
- ◆ Worst of all, through its hired-gun spokesperson Samuel Huntington, the FBI gave themselves a

new lease on post-Cold War life through the spurious theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" which has unleashed a Tsunami-like global wave of Islamophobia, as exemplified by the so-called Islamic Cartoons and Geert Wilders' Cartoon Competitions of 2016 and 2017.

As one of the privileged few to attend the AMAN Formation Competition in 1995, I would like to share my concerns at the time (and at present as well). They fall into 4 broad categories:

- (i) The Origins and Growth of Islamophobia
- (ii) The Origins and Growth of Islamic Extremism
- (iii) Intra-Islamic Sectarian concerns
- (iv) Intra-Faith Cooperation to promote understanding, respect, peace and conflict resolution.

From the very outset I have been convinced about the need for an entity such as AMAN. But its institutional structure seemed elusive at the time. Clearly too rigid a structure seemed premature and a global structure seemed to lack feasibility. A strong case could be made for a regional/sub-regional approach accompanied by national structures that would vary according to country context but should be bottom-up, starting as close as possible to the community-level. In sum, institutional development of AMAN could well be guided by the philosophy "let a thousand flower bloom". Today, in light of 30 years of experience and 30 years of achievements, it may well be time to re-visit the AMAN institutional development issue by assessing what has worked well and what has worked less well, as well as by attempting to ascertain what is needed and why.

Not much has changed regarding the tasks that AMAN should attempt to address:

- ◆ Promoting understanding of Islam and Islamic values both within and outside the Islamic community.
- ◆ Demolishing Islamic stereotypes.
- ◆ Capacity building regarding skills of mediation, conciliation and conflict resolution and directing such skills at existing conflicts in the Islamic world from community to country levels.
- ◆ Research on progressive Islamic reforms from within leading to the emergence of a present-day agenda for reforms from within.
- ◆ Identifying needs for and developing training materials.
- ◆ Sustaining and strengthening AMANA as a vehicle for communication about and with AMAN.
- ◆ Inter-faith consultations and collaboration on any of the above.
- ◆ Sharing of intra-faith experiences at addressing any form of religious extremism.

The road ahead for AMAN is a long and winding one. But that itself, should give cause for celebration and re-commitment.

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## *The 'Values' Approach To Islam*

**Dr. Chandra Muzaffar**

### **The Values Approach to Islam**

The 'values' approach, it should be emphasised over and over again, operates within the parameters of the Islamic faith, not outside it. What this means is that the Belief in God - the essence of the Islamic faith - is central to its world view. For belief in God is belief in the oneness of the universes, in the oneness of humankind, in the unity of word and deed, in the unity of values. Universal spiritual and moral values such as justice, freedom, love, compassion and equality would be some of the defining values of our approach. These values, rather than forms and

symbols, rituals and practices would be the bedrock of our faith.

Our understanding of Islam as a religion where the primacy of God means the primacy of eternal, universal spiritual and moral values would distinguish us from those who adhere to the *fiqh* oriented approach to Islam. The *fiqh* approach gives extraordinary emphasis to laws, rules, regulations, forms, symbols, rituals and practices. It does not even try to understand the meanings, the messages embodied in some of the rituals and symbols which are so important to religious people. As a case in

point, take the Hajj. The Hajj is not just a pilgrimage - a pilgrimage which requires the pilgrim to perform various rituals. Each and every Hajj ritual contains profound meanings related to life and living. The *sai'e*, for instance, is a ritual which relives an important episode in the life of Siti Hajr, the wife of the Prophet Ibrahim: her struggle to ensure that her child lives, is a reflection of the eternal struggle to endow life with dignity. The values approach to Islam also promotes universalism, not particularism. Its concept of the oneness of the human family transcends even religious dichotomies. Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue would be essential items on our agenda. The inclusiveness of the values approach contrasts with the exclusiveness of the *Fiqh* world view. By the same token, our openness to non-religious traditions, including secular thought, is diametrically different from the *fiqh* insistence upon a rigid religious-secular dichotomy. Since justice and compassion, among other universal values are the essence of our Islam, what is 'secular' is acceptable to us, as long as it does not transgress the principle of the oneness of God or *Tauhid*. Thus, electoral politics, which is a secular institution, is an idea which can be readily absorbed into Islamic society provided ethical norms are observed.

### **Legitimacy of the Values Approach to Islam**

Is our approach to Islam legitimate? It is. Because the Holy Quran is, in essence, a Book whose fundamental aim is to raise the spiritual and moral consciousness of the human being. To do this, it establishes the Oneness of God as an immutable principle of living. *Tauhid* becomes an eternal source from which we imbibe noble values. These values constitute the crux and core of Islam. Laws and regulations, like forms and symbols, embody these values and give them practical meaning but they are no substitute for the values themselves. For instance, prayer, so essential to the life of a Muslim, is, in a sense, a devotional practice which helps us focus upon God and therefore the spiritual basis of human existence, strengthens our commitment to moral values, and fortifies our inner discipline. If we performed our five daily prayers without being conscious of its deeper meaning, we are merely going through a ritual for its own sake.

Just as the Quran lays out a way of life (*ad-Din*) built around values, so the Sunnah expounds the concrete expression of these values in the life of the Prophet (may peace be upon him). To give an example of this, the Prophet it is known from his *Sirrah* (life) was fond of kissing and hugging children. While the

actual act of kissing and hugging is praiseworthy, what his conduct suggests to us is the importance of loving, and of showing our love for our children. Similarly, Muhammad was fond of certain types of food but whatever he ate he did so sparingly. It is his self-restraint in the consumption of food and indeed in other areas of life that we should emulate. We do not have to eat what he ate.

If the significance of the Sunnah lies in its underlying values, the greatness of the~ righteous Caliphs is also embodied in the values that they upheld. It is said that the second Caliph, Omar Ibn Khattab, was so committed to social justice that he set aside laws which no longer harmonised with the imperative of justice. The famous epistle of the fourth Caliph, Ali Ibn Talib, to his governor, Malik Ashtar reiterates the importance of justice, honesty, sincerity and compassion in administration.

Even after the first 30 years of 'righteous governance', the outstanding rulers in different periods were invariably those who put into practice good values. It is interesting that leading Islamic reformers throughout Muslim history also emphasised values. The earliest of these was Abu-Dhar Al-Giffari, the champion of the poor and the oppressed, who inveighed against the corruption of his Ruler and called for the restoration of the pure and pristine values associated with the Prophet's leadership. Many centuries later, there was Jamaluddin Al-Afghani who was totally committed to freedom and the emancipation of Muslim peoples from the shackles of colonialism. His disciple, Muhammad Abduh, stressed the importance of education and the inculcation of noble values as the most effective way of working towards the social transformation of the Ummah. Muhammad Iqbal, Malick Benabi and Fazlur Rahman were also more concerned about underlying values and principles rather than laws and rules in their quest for just, egalitarian Muslim societies guided by the Quran and the Sunnah. In fact, Fazlur Rahman often lamented the failure of Muslim intellectuals to develop a clear hierarchy of values rooted in the Quran which could serve as signposts for humankind.

Reformers apart, the other group within the Ummah that emphasised values and deeds - and not just rituals and words - were the mystics, the Sufis. It was because they were not enthralled by the externals, that illustrious sufis like Jallaluddin Rumi, Ibn Arabi and Shabistari could empathise with the underlying spiritual bond that unified the human family.

Through them, the universal spirit of Islam became a powerful reality, transcending the sectarian loyalties glorified by dogmatic and ritualistic Muslim theologians. To all these groups that fathomed the essence of Islam we should add the great philosophers and scientists of our civilisation who in almost every instance challenged orthodoxy and dogma in order to discover new ideas and develop fresh insights into nature, the physical world and sometimes into social processes. Al Razi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and even Ibn Khaldun would be among those distinguished Muslim minds which came into conflict with religious elites who derived their authority from perpetuating an Islam built around rituals, symbols and practices. There is no need to emphasise that it is because they were prepared to stand up against orthodoxy in their pursuit of truth and knowledge that Islamic civilisation flowered and flourished. It is only too apparent that a non-dogmatic approach to Islam which recognises the primacy of eternal, universal spiritual and moral values while acknowledging the importance of rituals, symbols and practices is the most sane and sensible way of living the religion in today's world. I had first expressed this view in an article written in Malay in a Malaysian journal way back in 1980. Over the last 20 years I have become more convinced than ever of the soundness of this position. The values approach to Islam - the antithesis of the rituals and symbols approach - is not only legitimate from the perspective of the religion but also necessary at this juncture in history.

### **Necessity of the Values Approach to Islam**

Because the rituals and symbols approach is so dominant, religious elites and the Muslim masses as a whole seldom go beyond the literal text to understand the philosophy or idea behind a particular injunction or exhortation. This has led to the growth of a certain kind of obscurantism in the Muslim mind. To illustrate our point, let us look at the attitude of religious elites to Islamic law. When they talk of enforcing Islamic law what they mean most of the time is the huge corpus of rules and dicta that had developed through the centuries within the different doctrinal schools (*mazhabs*). Sometimes, there is an obsession with fidelity to a particular school, to the exclusion of ideas from other *mazhabs*. Most religious elites do not even want to find out if a particular law has the sanction of the Quran. And indeed, there is a great deal in what is regarded as Islamic law - in the *fiqh* (Jurisprudential) tradition - that is different from the universal, humane spirit of

the Quran. The Quran does not classify non-Muslims as *Dhimmis* (the protected people) and relegate them to second class status. Neither does the Quran demand that women stay at home and not involve themselves in public affairs. On the contrary, it regards the woman as the progeny of Adam, a status it also confers upon the man. Women are also *khalifah* (vicegerents) placed on earth by God. As vicegerents, women, like men, are required in the Quran to uphold what is virtuous and forbid what is wrong. The Holy Book does not say that women can do this only within the confines of the home. Likewise, the Quran does not even hint that the apostate (*murtad*) should be put to death. The question of whether one believes in God or not is a matter of conscience. And yet the majority of Muslim theologians today would argue emphatically that the apostate should be put to death.

It is not just to counter obscurantism that one needs to develop a values approach. The Muslim world is confronted with colossal challenges. The vast majority of Muslims are poor; many are illiterate; many more lack the basic necessities of life. It is equally tragic that most Muslims live under authoritarian regimes which deny their people fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression. Many Muslim societies are also mired in corruption. Ethnic and social upheavals are not uncommon within the *ummah*. It is well nigh impossible to expect the rituals and symbols approach to address the myriad problems facing Muslims. What is needed is a new creative, dynamic approach which is inspired by spiritual and moral values (the most significant of which would be justice and compassion) and attempts to formulate specific policies directed towards the elimination of poverty or the eradication of corruption or the enhancement of human rights. It is important to link policies and programmes to values not only to ensure that the moral dimension of the goal at hand is sustained but also to emphasise that the task itself is an act of virtue.

A values approach would also be better equipped to deal with the challenge of globalisation. One of the consequences of globalisation is the proliferation of multi-religious societies everywhere. In a multi-religious society, the old dogmatic approach to religion will not do. If rituals and symbols are over-emphasised, religious boundaries will become more and more entrenched. On the other hand, if one's concern is with values and actual human conduct, one will be able to appreciate the unerring

truth: that in the ultimate analysis, human beings, whatever their religious background, have a lot in common with one another. In a multi-religious society, and indeed in a multi-religious, globalised world, this truth will emerge as a living reality.

### **External Challenges to the Values Approach to Islam**

We have shown why a values approach to Islam is so important in today's world. But the challenges facing such an approach are formidable. The concept and practice of development to which almost all Muslim governments are wedded is one of those challenges. Development is invariably measured in terms of growth rates or the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While incomes and standards of living are taken into consideration in measuring development, it is true that the total well-being of the human person is seldom the criterion by which one decides whether a society has progressed or not. In the values approach, on the other hand, it is the assimilation of moral and spiritual values at the level of the individual and community which would determine the civilizational status of a particular people. What this means in concrete terms is that a certain nation may have the highest percentage of millionaires but if divorce rates are astronomical, if juvenile crimes are rampant, if middle age suicides are widespread, then it is not a developed society. In contrast one could have a society where there are no millionaires and average incomes are modest but the level of education is high, the majority of the people lead healthy lifestyles, the family institution is secure, and there is a sense of community solidarity. Such a society would be one that is founded upon strong moral values. The present pattern of development which is essentially the development of things rather than the human being will not allow a value-based concept of development to take root.

The other external challenge which Muslim societies have to grapple with is of course globalisation. Like development, it is a process which did not originate within the Muslim world. Its underlying philosophical premises are in fact alien to Islamic thought. It is the conquest of markets, the accumulation of wealth, the display of affluence which drive globalisation. At the root of globalisation is the worship of money - money as an end in itself. This is why I have often characterised the ideology of globalisation as moneytheism. Needless to say, moneytheism is the antithesis of the spiritual anchor of Islam, namely monotheism, the belief in the oneness of God. While moneytheism

stimulates the insatiable desire for more and more wealth, monotheism seeks to restrain the human being, to check his desires. While moneytheism drives one to conquer markets with the help of machine and media, monotheism attempts to conquer the self with the aid of prayer and meditation, reflection and introspection. While money theism could lead to greed and avarice, monotheism could lead to spiritual liberation and material contentment. Monotheism, expressed through a values approach to Islam is undoubtedly the answer to both the excessively materialistic development orientation of most societies today, and rapacious globalisation which, in a sense, is an extension of the former. But it will not be easy to overcome these two major challenges facing the values approach espoused by AMAN.

### **Internal Challenges to the Values Approach to Islam**

What complicates the situation are the challenges from within the *Ummah*. By this one means challenges which are, by and large, endogenous. The dominant influence of the rituals and symbols approach to Islam is certainly a monumental challenge confronting Muslims who value the substance of the religion rather than its outward forms. The rituals and symbols approach has been part and parcel of mainstream Islam for centuries. How this brand of Islam became so powerful is a complex subject which would require a separate discussion. Suffice to say that the over-emphasis upon *fiqh* from the ninth century onwards was the beginning of a form of conservatism in Islamic thought which was reinforced by the traumatic defeats that the centres of Islamic civilisation suffered at the hands of the Mongols and later Western colonialism. The Mongol conquest of Baghdad and other great cities of antiquity also led to the massive destruction of famous libraries which in turn produced a mood of fear and caution that negated the earlier spirit of intellectual discovery and creativity responsible for the innovative dynamism of Muslim civilisation. Conserving and preserving what was left of the Islamic heritage, while eschewing change and reform, became the obsession of succeeding generations. It is this conservatism which explains the preoccupation with rituals and symbols since rituals and symbols help to define and protect identity especially in a situation where there is widespread apprehension that identity is under siege.

If anything Western colonial dominance made Muslims even more conscious of preserving and

protecting their identity. In a sense, colonialism had a much more devastating impact upon the Muslim mind. For while Mongol destruction was largely physical, colonialism was both physical and psychological. The West penetrated the Muslim mind as no other alien civilisation had penetrated it before. It created in the Muslim mind a deep sense of inferiority about its own history, values, way of life. Western civilisation was projected as a civilisation *par excellence*, far superior to Islam. Muslims became agonisingly aware of their status as a vanquished people. They clung on tenaciously to their rituals and symbols as a way of defending their identity against the colonial onslaught.

The post-colonial scenario has not helped to restore Muslim confidence. For Western dominance, especially in the realm of economics and culture, continues unabated. It is partly because of this, that Muslims have not ceased to define identity in narrow ritualistic and symbolic terms. It is, in their reckoning, the only way by which they can protect their distinct religious self within an environment over which they have no control.

Though Mongol invasions, colonialism and post-colonial dominance are all external to Islam, I have chosen to discuss their impact upon the Muslim mind under 'internal challenges' for a simple reason. It is the conservatism that has developed over the centuries as a result of these external threats that stands in the way of a values approach to the religion. And that conservatism is internal to the Muslim mind. It is deeply entrenched within Muslim society. It is a conservatism that is preserved and perpetuated by Muslim religious elites.

Conservatism embodied in the rituals and symbols approach is not the only internal challenge. An equally formidable challenge to the values approach is the power of Muslim governments. These governments which, as we have seen, are often corrupt and authoritarian, and will do everything in their means to crush the values approach to Islam. For such an approach, which would insist upon examining social realities from the perspective of justice and integrity, would be a threat to morally bankrupt Muslim rulers determined to keep themselves in power, whatever the costs and consequences to society.

### **Overcoming the Challenges**

However great the external and internal challenges we encounter, AMAN and other like-minded Muslim groups have no choice but to persevere. We must

continue to write and speak, to network and campaign on behalf of our cause. There is a lot more we can do. We realise of course that our resources are limited. We may not even be able to implement some of our plans. Nonetheless we should give some attention to the following areas:

*One*, AMAN should try to bring together open-minded, values-oriented individuals and groups within the Muslim community in Asia for discussions and deliberations at least twice a year. This will strengthen solidarity among progressive Muslims in the region and may even help to fortify our intellectual base.

*Two*, AMAN should also continue to organise annual training camps for young people. If we can bring together 40 to 50 young women and men below 30 years of age to reflect on contemporary challenges facing the Muslim world, it would be a stupendous achievement. The aim of these camps should not just be intellectual. They should try to inculcate positive spiritual and moral values in the young and to develop a deep bond of friendship among them. It is important to ensure that while the majority of participants in the proposed camps would be Muslims, there would also be a few non-Muslims who will provide that much needed exposure to 'the other', which is so vital for fostering an inclusive, universal outlook among young Muslims.

*Three*, AMAN should also launch an electronic journal which will carry, on a regular basis, news, information and analysis related to Muslim societies in Asia. The journal will also serve as a conduit which will help sustain and strengthen the bond among like-minded women and men in the region. At the same time, however, narrow, bigoted thinking on Islamic issues should be subjected to scrutiny through the journal. In this way, those who access our journal would have some idea of the sort of forces we are arraigned against and why there is a crying need for an alternative approach to Islam.

### **Hope for the Future**

The alternative approach - the values approach - will take a long while to become the mainstream approach to Islam. But that should not deter us. We know that in almost every Muslim country and even in societies where there are sizeable Muslim populations, a struggle is going on, between the superficial rituals and symbols approach and the substantive values approach. Perhaps there is no country in the world where this struggle is more dramatic than in Iran. The fact that those who

emphasise values - the reformists - have much more support within the populace than the conservatives is proof that in Iran, the movement for a reinterpretation of Islam is solidly anchored in the hearts and minds of the people. This is so in a number of other Muslim countries too. Perhaps that is where hope lies. In the end, it is the people who will ensure the triumph of a values approach to Islam.

\*This paper was originally presented, in November 2000, at an AMAN conference held in Dhaka, Bangladesh to examine the progressive approach to Islam. It has been revised extensively, for the purpose of this collection of essays.

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## *The Foundations of Religious Pluralism in Islam*

**Dr. Seyed Hassan Hosseini**

### **Many Revelations, Many Prophets**

In the Islamic perspective, the oneness of God has as its consequence not the uniqueness of prophecy, but its multiplicity, since God as the infinite created a world in which there is multiplicity and this includes, of course, the human order. For Islam, revelation and prophecy are both necessary and universal. Humanity, according to the Quran, was created from a single soul, but then diversified into races and tribes, for as the Quran states, ***“He created you [humanity] from a single soul” (39:6).*** The single origin of humanity implies the profound unity within diversity of human nature, and therefore religion based on the message of Divine Oneness could not have been only meant for, or available to, a segment of humanity. The multiplicity of races, nations, and tribes necessitates the diversity of revelations. Therefore, the Quran, on the one hand, asserts that ***“To every people [We have sent] a messenger” (10:48)***, and, on the other hand, ***“For each [people] We have appointed a Divine Law and a way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community”. (5:48).*** According to these and other verses, not only is the multiplicity of religions necessary, but it is also a reflection of the richness of the Divine Nature and is willed by God.

Religion (*din*), revelation (*wahy*), and prophecy (*nuhuwwah*) have a clear meaning in the context of the Islamic worldview and therefore need to be carefully defined in the modern context, where all of these terms have become ambiguous in ordinary discourse. The closest word to the English term

“religion” in Arabic is *din*, which is said by many to have been derived from the root meaning “to obey, submit, and humble oneself before God.” *Al-din* means religion in the vastest sense as the sacred norm into which the whole of life is to be molded. It is the total way of life grounded in teachings that have issued from God. These teachings reach humanity through revelation, which means the direct conveying of a message from heaven. Revelation, moreover, must not be confused with inspiration (*ilham*), which is possible for all human beings.

Islam sees revelation not as incarnation in the Hindu or Christian sense, but as the descent of the word of God in the form of sacred scripture to a prophet. In fact, the Quran uses the term “Book” (*kitab*), not only for the Quran, but also for all other sacred books and the totality of revelations. The Quran considers all revelations to be contained in that “archetypal book,” of *umm al-kitab* (literally, “the Mother Book”), and the sacred scriptures to be related in conveying the same basic message of the primordial religion of unity in different languages and contexts. Even when the Quran states that “the religion with God is *al-islam*” refers to that universal surrender to the one and that primordial religion contained in the heart of all heavenly inspired religions, not just to Islam in its more particular sense. There is, moreover, a criterion of truth and falsehood as far as religions are concerned, and the Quran’s confirmation of the universality of revelation does not mean that everything that has passed as religion yesterday or does so today is authentic. Throughout history there have been false prophets and religions,

to which Christ also referred, as well as religions that have decayed or deviated from their original form.

Islam sees itself as at once the primordial religion, a return to the original religion of oneness, and the final religion; the Quran itself calls the prophet of Islam the "Seal of Prophets." The two characteristics of primordiality and finality have bestowed upon Islam its trait of universality and the capability to absorb intellectually and culturally so much that came before it. It has also made spiritually alive the prophetic presences that preceded it, so that, for example, such figures as Abraham, Moses, and Christ play a much grater role in the spiritual universe of Islam that Abraham and Moses do in the Christian universe.

### **The Unique Truth of Religion in the Quran**

As it was mentioned, the word religion (Din) has various uses and meanings in the Quran. Sometimes the word is used in its original sense, pertaining to the Almighty. Sometimes by attributing to God, it applies to the divine nature (Al-Nasr, v.2), and sometimes it is pictured as the realm of God (Al-Tawba, v.193), (Al-Anfal, v.39), (Al-Araf, v.29).

But the main significance of the term religion refers to the faith and revelation. Although the term has been used for both true and false religions, since this division is easily found in Quran, many Quranic commentators believe that the first and essential meaning of this term applies to true and righteous and unique religion. The following Quranic verse indicates the emphasis of Quran on the truthful uniqueness of religion.

*"Allah bears witness that there is no God but he, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining his creation with justice; there is no god but he, the mighty, the wise – Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam, and those to whom the Book had been given did not show opposition but after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves; and whoever disbelieves in the communications of Allah then surely Allah is quick in reckoning".* (A'lay Imran, vv.18-19).

In explication of this verse and also other verses, Allamah Tabatabaie, who is one of the great philosophical Quran's commentators, stresses on the real oneness of religions. According to him, the differences between religions does not refer to the nature and essence of faiths, but to the various degrees of perfection. Based on the Quranic teachings, he emphasizes that the term Islam in its

basic sense, is equivalent to the real divine religion, of which other religions are manifested and revealed.

The verse No.67 of the sura Al-I Imran, which introduces the prophet Abraham as a Muslim, signifies the wide semantic meaning of the word Islam in the Quranic language.

*Ibrahim was not a Jew nor a Christian but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists.* (A'lay Imran, v.67).

The attribution of Abraham to the primordial faith "hanif" signifies that the only true and primordial religion is Islam. But as mentioned, this term has a wide meaning of "Submission to the Will of God", which applies to all divine religions. Indeed, this Quranic terminology is to emphasize on the true uniqueness of religion which manifests and reveals itself in different forms.

It is worthy mentioning that this attitude has been subject of much contemplation in mystical outlooks. For instance, Muhy al-Din ibn al-Arabi in several of his valuable works stressed on this point and benefited a lot from it. The impact of this Quranic-Mystical view is evident on some western schools of thought which have been influenced by the oriental schools. For instance, the principle of uniqueness has played a key role in some schools such as Perennial Theosophy and some of its representatives such as Frithof Shouan or Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

On the foundations of what we have called it the truthful uniqueness of religion and its diversity and plurality, it becomes clear that each religion (divine religion) is an exclusive manifestation of that absolute which reveals itself into different forms, that is relative absolute. Therefore, each religion is a relative absolute of such an absolute which can never be known or thought or found or revealed as it is in itself. It is evident then that if the term Islam, as used in the Quran and mentioned before, is interpreted regardless of the religious restrictions, as Quranic verses confirm it, the terms Islam, Religion, and Hanif (primordial), become equivalent, or at least synonymous with each other.

The essential consequence of believing in the principle of the oneness of religion is that all differences between the religions do not relate to the origin of faith. Rather, it is related to the different ways concerning the varying circumstances in which human being has had throughout history.

## Islam's Attitude Toward Other Religions in History

In light of what has been said of the Islamic conception of revelation and religious diversity, it is important to mention that before modern times Islam was the only revealed religion to have had direct contact with nearly all the major religions of the world. It had met Judaism and Christianity in its birthplace in Arabia and afterward in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt; the Iranian religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism after its conquest of Persia in the seventh century; Hinduism and Buddhism in eastern Persia and India shortly thereafter; the Chinese religions through the Silk Route as well as through Muslim merchants who traveled to Canton and other Chinese ports; the African religions soon after the spread of Islam into Black Africa some fourteen hundred years ago; and Siberian Shamanism in the form of the archaic religions of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples as they descended into the Islamic world. Centuries ago Zoroaster and the Buddha were common names among Muslims of the eastern lands of the Islamic world, especially Persia. Indian Muslims had come to know of Krishna and Rama a thousand years ago. The Persian polymath al-Biruni had composed a major work on India in the eleventh century, one that is still a valuable source of knowledge for medieval Hinduism. Furthermore, numerous works of classical Hinduism and some of Buddhism were translated into Persian centuries ago, including the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Chinese Muslim scholars knew the Confucian classics and many considered Confucius and Lao-Tze prophets.

The global nature of the religious knowledge of a learned Muslim sitting in Isfahan in the fourteenth century was very different from that of a scholastic thinker in Paris or Bologna of the same period. On the basis of the Quranic doctrine of religious universality and the vast historical experiences of a global nature, Islamic civilization developed a cosmopolitan and worldwide religious perspective unmatched before the modern period in any other religion. This global vision is still part and parcel of the worldview of traditional Muslims, of those who have not abandoned their universal vision as a result of the onslaught of modernism or reactions to this onslaught in the form of what has come to be called "fundamentalism."

Within this global religious context, it is, of course, the Jewish and Christian traditions with which Islam has the greatest affinity. The Hebrew prophets and

Christ are deeply respected by Muslims. The Virgin Mary is considered by the Quran to hold the most exalted spiritual position among women. A chapter of the Quran is named after her, and she is the only woman mentioned by name in Islam's sacred scripture. Moreover, the miraculous birth of Christ from a virgin mother is recognized in the Quran. Respect for such teachings is so strong among Muslims that today, in interreligious dialogues with Christians and Jews, Muslims are often left defending traditional Jewish and Christian doctrines such as the miraculous birth of Christ before modernist interpreters who would reduce them to metaphors and the sacred history of the Hebrew prophets to at best inspired stories.

The sacred figures of Judaism and Christianity are often mentioned in the Quran and even in prayers said on various occasions. The tombs of the Hebrew prophets, who are also Islamic prophets, are revered and visited in pilgrimage by Muslims to this day. One need only recall the holiness for Muslims of the tomb of Abraham in Al-Khalil, or Hebron, in Palestine, of that of Joshua in Jordan, and of Moses' resting place on Mt Nebo, also in Jordan. Some Muslims have occasionally criticized intellectually and also engaged militarily Jews and Christians, but they have not criticized the Jewish prophets or Christ (even if certain theological differences with followers of Judaism and Christianity did exist), at least not those who have heeded the call of the Quran and understood its message. Islam sees itself as the third of the Abrahamic religions, which are bound together by countless theological, ethical, and eschatological beliefs even though they are marked by differences willed by God.

To speak of the Judeo-Christian tradition against which Islam is pitted as the "other" is an injustice to the message of Abraham and also theologically false, no matter how convenient it might be for some people. There is as much difference between Judaism and Christianity as there is between Christianity and Islam. In certain domains Judaism is closer to Islam than it is to Christianity: it has a sacred language, Hebrew, like Arabic in Islam, and it has a sacred law, the *Halakhah*, corresponding to the *shari'ah*. Furthermore, they share an opposition to all forms of idolatry and to the creation of iconic sacred art, which would allow an image of the Divinity to be painted or sculpted. In certain other ways Islam is closer to Christianity: both emphasize the immortality of the soul, eschatological realities, and the accent on the inner life. Then there are those basic principles upon

which all three religions agree: The Oneness of God, prophecy, sacred scripture, much of sacred history, and basic ethical norms such as the sanctity of life, reverence for the laws of God, humane treatment of others, honesty in all human dealings, kindness toward the neighbor, the application of justice, and so forth. Islam is an inalienable and inseparable part of the Abrahamic family of religions and considers itself to be closely linked with the two monotheistic religions that preceded it. Islam envisages itself the complement of those religions and the final expression of Abrahamic monotheism, confirming the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, but rejecting any form of exclusivism.

### **The Quranic Attitude Toward the Divine Prophets**

Thus, the Quranic view about the revelations and prophets is pluralistic. Stressing upon the pluralistic revelation which the prophets received, the Holy Quran confirms its authenticity and righteousness. The following Quranic verses endorse this viewpoint.

*He has made plain to you of the religion what he enjoined upon Nuh and that which we have revealed to you, and that which we enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa and Isa, that keep to obedience and be not divided therein; hard to the unbelievers is that which you call them to; Allah chooses for himself whom he pleases, and guides to himself him who turns (to him) frequently. (Al-Shura, v13)*

and

*Surely we have revealed to you as we revealed to you as we revealed to nuh, and the prophets after him, and we revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqoub and the tribes, and Isa and Ayub and Yunus and Haroun and Sulaiman and we gave to Dawood Pslms. (Al-Nissa, v.163)*

The above Quranic verses clearly stress on the plurality and authenticity of the Divine revelation. Believing in the right path as the only for human being salvation, is the same concept which could be called the "Truthful Uniqueness of Religion". Notwithstanding, this truthful uniqueness of religion has by no means an exclusive meaning. Rather, it is an absolute which manifest itself to various and diverse forms.

There are also some other verses in the Quran which, in the words of the prophet Muhammad, were revealed in confirmation of other religions. Some such verses are as follow:

*Say: we believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqoub and the tribes, and what was given to Musa and Isa and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to him do we submit - And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers. (A'lay Imran, vv.84-85)*

The verse already quoted shows that all Divine prophets have the same mission or consider the following verses,

*And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim and Isaq and Yaqoub; it beseems us not that we should associate aught with Allah; this is by Allah's grace upon us and on mankind, but most people do not give thanks. (Al-Yosuf, 38)*

and

*Say: we believe in Allah and (in) that which had been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqoub and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Musa and Isa, and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to him do we submit. (Al-Baqara, v.136)*

These verses indicate that the teachings and doctrines of Islam is in line with the faiths of the former prophets. Accordingly, faith in the Divine teachings of the Quran and Islam necessitates having faith in other Divine religions as well. These verses stress on the point that the Divine teachings of all prophets are the same and identical. Perhaps nothing is more evident than the following verse in which it is maintained that belief in the teachings of all religions is a sign of God's grace, and discrimination between the prophets is a sign of blasphemy.

*Surely those who disbelieve in Allah and his apostles and (those who) desire to make a distinction between Allah and his apostles and say: we believe in some and disbelieve in others; and desire to take a course between (this and) that - These it is that are truly unbelievers, and we have prepared for the unbelievers a disgraceful chastisement. (Al-Nissa, vv. 150-151)*

According to the Quran's view about the Divine nature of prophets' teachings, the Quran's description of the Divine prophets is unique. It is by relating the stories of many prophets and mentioning the names of twenty-six great prophets, as well as by giving descriptions of the others, that the Quran

highlights the key and leading role of the prophets in saving humankind's life. At the same time, the Quran talks about the grandeur of certain prophets over others. This is also in conformity with the collective aim of dispatching the prophets and the manifestation of the Divine revelation in various religions, and the truthful uniqueness of religion. The following verses reveal the advantages of certain prophets over others.

*We have made some of these apostles to excel the others; among them are they to whom Allah spoke, and some of them he exalted by (many degrees of) rank; and we gave clear miracles to Isa son of Marium, and strengthened him with the holy spirit. And if Allah had pleased, those after them would not have fought one with another after clear arguments had come to them, but they disagreed; so there were some of them who believed and others who denied; and if Allah had pleased they would not have fought one with another, but Allah brings about what he intends. (Al-Baqara, v.253)*

and

*Your Lord best knows those who are in the heavens and the earth; and certainly we have made some of the prophets to excel others, and to Dawood we gave a scripture. (Bani – Israel, v.55)*

The grand prophets of God, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses Jesus, and Muhammad are evidently ranked higher on the rest of the prophets. It should be noted that this differentiation is not personal; rather it is based on the missions of the prophets.

*And when we made a covenant with the prophets and with you, and with Nuh and Ibrahim and Musa and Isa, son of Marium, and we made with them a strong covenant. (Al-Ahzab, v.7)*

### **The Quran and the other scriptures**

By confirming the Divine nature of the sacred books and scriptures of the prophets, the Quran emphasizes believing in them, too.

*And we sent after them in their footsteps Isa, son of Marium, verifying what was before him of the Taurat and we gave him the Injeel in which was guidance and light, and verifying what was before it of Taurat and a guidance and an admonition for those who guard (against evil). (Maidah, v.46)*

and

*And this Quran is not such as could be forged by those besides Allah, but it is a verification of that which is before it and a clear explanation of the*

*book, there is no doubt in it, from the Lord of the worlds. (Yunus, v.37)*

According to Allame Tabatabaie, both confirmation of the Torah in new testament, and also other pre-Islam scripture in the Quran, as mentioned in the verses, come from the point that in Islamic doctrines, the oneness of religion is central and focal. This implies that the differences between scriptures refers to the diverse manifestation and crystallization of an absolute revelation and religion.

### **Conclusion**

This theory claims to embody an answer to the problem of pluralism in religions which should be best understood by the principle of the uniqueness of religion. In other words, as the Real manifests itself in different forms, and since religion in this assumption is perfectly divine, all religions are considered as the diverse crystallization of the ultimate divine Religion and consequently, the uniqueness of Religion and plurality of faiths are not only contrary, but also integral to each other, since diversity is intended and willed by God. Indeed, God initiated various religions as the diverse forms of Religion in order to reveal the different aspects of the unique Religion. This principle could be called unity in diversity and diversity in unity which has played a crucial role in Islamic philosophy, as regards the description of existence and its ambiguity. In this respect, the Absolute is absolute, but each manifestation of the Absolute in the form of revelation such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam creates a world in which certain determinations of the Absolute, like the Quran in the case of Islam and Jesus in the case of Christianity, appear absolute without being the Absolute in itself. The term relative Absolute which first has been used by Schoun could explain the relationship between the Absolute and its crystallization.

The strength of such an account lies in fact that since all religions are manifestations of the ultimate Reality, every religion possesses the element of truth and presence.

One might criticize such an Islamic pluralistic attitude toward religions by refereeing to some Quranic verses which could be and have been employed to conclude exclusivism. To find a solution, I would like to mention two important Quranic principles with regard to the issue of religious pluralism, or precisely saying, Pluralism in Religion which have been clarified.

First, Quran explicitly endorses the universality of God's revelation, which plays a significant part in the Islamic understanding of other religions. This implies the validity of all divine religions and consequently the veridical diversity of truthfulness among all religions.

Secondly, and more importantly, is the Quranic emphasis on the uniqueness of Religion. One interesting point in the Quran is that the term religion has never been used in a plural form that signifies the importance of the uniqueness of Religion which manifests itself and its truthfulness in forms of different religions.

In these verses, 'The Religion before God is Islam' (3:19), or the verse "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam never will it be accepted of him" (3:85), the word Islam refers to the general meaning of Islam which is the submission to the will of God. On the other hand, many verses could be found in Quran which emphasize on the authenticity and validity of all religions.

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## *Islamic Civilization and Its Discontents*

**Ali Ahmed Ziauddin**

Terror in the name of Islam is the most discussed and frightening issue in the contemporary world. Scores of news and views constantly lambast the bloody, messy, and gruesome atrocities of the Islamic extremist outfits coming in different names and guises in different regions. Besides very few, most are instant reactions steeped in prejudice and also dismissive. There is however very little serious effort, except by a few recognized scholars with deep awareness of history, to explore the underlying causes in an unprejudiced and positive light, as to why this carnage is happening beyond the immediate causes of seeking revenge, power, and sensation.

Is the world witnessing the eruption of multiple fault lines buried deep in Islam's history? One wonders how a fringe group from among the heirs to a glorious civilization that gifted the world some of the key elements of the industrial revolution could turn so vicious and brutal. Or is it just the handiwork of some disgruntled diabolical minds to draw attention to whatever their cause might be by randomly killing innocent people mostly Muslims, but also across all other religious/sectarian divides? Or is it the inadvertent result of devious schemes of powerful states seeking global domination? All empires in history irrespective of region/religion pursued a similar policy. Or perhaps the present carnage is the cumulative effect of all these elements coming together at a particular juncture in history, which

happens to be the present time? This paper intends to investigate all these plausible causes for the rise of Islamic radicalism.

**Fault Lines** – Religions are not free of fault lines. So long as they are confined to the spiritual realm the inner conflicts remain concealed from public view. But the moment faith is conjoined with power, fissures come into the open. It's an inescapable dynamic. Without power, reach of faith is limited; with power its scope to abuse becomes limitless. Holding on to the status quo becomes the key concern, against which periodic resistance and intermittent reforms became a regular affair in all religions in the past; none however was peaceful. Islam is no different.

### **Ruptures**

History's prime lesson is that every power has a shelf life. And every power center that created a civilization had its ups and downs. The Islamic one is no different. Longevity of a particular power rests equally on political direction along with a host of material conditions. For the new Islamic powers the first proved a serious logjam. Beside the split over succession, another deep friction had appeared over how to interpret the Quran, the only reference point after the prophet. Was it to be taken literally or do the Koranic verses also have hidden meanings? The extensive empire that grew within a century of the

prophet's death, needed to be governed. Governing a vast geographical area containing multiple racial, lingual and religious peoples gave rise to numerous complex issues. Interpretations of the Quran were required to codify the Sharia laws in order to provide judicious governance. The Hadith was created out of this necessity. It was crucial that competent scholars did the interpretations rightly, but by then contending political forces had emerged. This meant the interpretations couldn't be fully free of current political influences that gave rise to the multiple schools of thought. All the contending groups claimed legitimacy citing one source or the other of the Prophet's traditions. So much power, wealth, and legacy were at stake, no claimant was willing to give in. Bloodshed was unavoidable.

After the first few centuries of rational and scholastic debates, doctrinal rigidity slowly crept in. The rationalist school of thought claimed it was possible to reach revelation by applying reason. The conservative school rejected this notion and claimed reason to be subject to revelation. For the latter group, sustaining the imperial status quo became the central concern, which was duly supported by all the contending powers that be. By the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, a rigid orthodoxy set in, articulated by Imam Ghazzali. As one of the foremost thinkers of Islam he led the assault on all rational approaches to knowledge.

For the next few centuries even if three large empires emerged, the doctrinal differences could not be resolved. In fact, they became permanent. So long as the imperial façade went on breathing life, the internal decay in the Islamic societies remained hidden because preserving the power centers became the key concern. In the wake of the industrial revolution the rot was exposed. A Dark Age slowly descended on the entire Islamic world across all doctrinal divides.

### **The multiple divides within**

The Shia-Sunni divide is as old as Islam itself. It originated from a political difference over the succession to the office of Khalifa, which eventually grew into a sectarian divide. During the early centuries of Islam's history these two sects were constantly locked in a life and death struggle. Once the dust settled after the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols, except for Shah Ismail's assault on Iran in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the sectarian tussle in other regions slowly gave way to a more live-and-let-live position. And with the waning of the Islamic world system the sectarian tension lay dormant for a few

centuries. Although sporadic violence did flare up from time to time, they were more the exception than the rule. This lasted most of the colonial period except when it suited the colonialists to set one sect against the other to restore control. During the nationalist phase in the wake of decolonization the divide still remained within wraps. It's only after the Iranian revolution that for multiple reasons the divide flared up all over again. Worried of a domino effect that had the potential to deny access to the oilfields, all successive US administrations ever since, found it handy to intensify the sectarian divide even further. In this endeavor the autocratic Sunni Arab regimes proved ready allies.

Indication of any resurgence in any given culture/society becomes visible first in the intellectual realm, with a burst of creative activity, based on its own foundation and merit. Hardly anything in that light is visible, besides doctrinal regression. Second, several theological/juridical schools, often offering contradictory interpretations of the Quran and Hadith, have created a cluster of socio-political support networks around them over nearly a millennium. These divisions are so deep that when Sultan Saladin was resisting the Crusaders, some Muslim Sultans in the region watched with folded arms, or worse, a few even connived to assassinate him. It's as absurd as seeking unity of all the Churches or the so many schools within Hinduism or Buddhism. This is a major impediment in constructing any genuine unity. Lastly, resurgence of a culture/society at present that shuts/imposes itself from or on others can only be partial or worse, intransigent.

Without taking these inbuilt constraint into consideration the rich Arab states started exporting their Wahabi/Salafist version of Islam across the world in exchange for fat contracts to the local rulers whether in Europe, America or in the developing world. The Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates in West Asia and Africa, the Jamaat Islami and its affiliates in South Asia, and Jemaah Islamiyah and its affiliates in South East Asia were recruited or willingly collaborated in implementing this Saudi project of socio-cultural and political intervention in the Muslim world. A large part of the Deobandi School, well-known for its relatively progressive outlook earlier, also succumbed to the pull of petrodollars in order to recreate the Islamic World System. The nationalist and secular discourse was on the retreat. For a decade or two the inner content of this export item remained hidden in philanthropy and missionary activities, i.e., until 9/11.

Of course, till then even if the US intelligence agencies were fully aware of the monstrous message in the export item, they looked the other way for two reasons. One, the US was using these same monsters as foot soldiers to strangle the Soviet Union and counter the socialist influence in the Muslim world. And two, the US-Euro corporate world was also getting fat shares of petrodollars, whether through arms/business deals, bank deposits, or endowments. All the while the bigoted monsters whether with arms or alms were preparing to seize power in respective Muslim states to resurrect an Islamic Empire. Thankfully, it never happened but the intent is still alive and kicking. These extremists groups are spreading tentacles far and wide.

Every Muslim state is struggling to strike a balance between Islamic identity and ethnicity in the cultural arena while trying to separate state and religion in the political arena. So far the result has varied between the likes of a regressive Islamic state such as Saudi Arabia to the claimed secular states such as Tunisia/Turkey/Bangladesh or Indonesia, which allow different obscurantist versions of Islam to play a major role in state affairs. Likewise, every Muslim individual/family/society is struggling to define the role of Islam in their lives. In a way reform has already begun.

### **Reactions to the feeling of loss**

If Afghanistan was the recruiting and training camp of the Islamic radicals, post-invasion Iraq became their breeding ground. Ever since the collapse of the USSR, America had been itching to teach the recalcitrant states and their leaders a good lesson. Saddam topped the list and 9/11 gave the US the opportunity on a platter. An already weakened Iraq after an eight year war with Iran, sustained bombardment by NATO, along with severe sanctions during the entire nineties was an easy target for military invasion, whatever the excuse. Consequently, thousands perished or were maimed as collateral damage and tens of thousands of children starved to death or died for want of medicine, but all that was considered worth it by the then US secretary of state Madeline Albright, just as in recent memory Vietnamese toddlers were napalmed. One begins to wonder, were these deaths and destruction any less barbaric than the dastardly deeds of the suicide bombers in New York, London, Paris, Brussels, or Manchester? Or looking a bit further, was the colonial project across the seas in its inception any less brutal?

A proud nation lay humiliated with jobless millions. Despair gripped Iraq, a fertile ground for the Islamic radicals to breed, organize, and operate, where none was present earlier. As if this wasn't enough the Shia-Sunni split was actively engineered. Within just a quarter of a century, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria were bombed into the Stone Age by NATO. Yes, local causes were aplenty but US imperial logic and geopolitical strategy were the main reasons for invasions, because war is a racket. In addition the systemic decimation of the Palestinians goes on unabated in spite of all the lofty rhetoric of the Western leadership. And the repression of Muslim minorities in different parts of the world under whatever pretext under the guise of a broad Islamophobia in the West definitely affects the Muslim's psyche negatively.

All these aggressions have contributed to the cause list of the various brutal Islamist outfits' agenda of revenge just like the crusaders motivation a millennium ago. Without keeping this wider perspective in view while trying to discern the rage of the Islamic extremists and how to handle it correctly will be extremely difficult. ISIS, Al Qaeda, Al Nusra, Taliban, Boko Haram or affiliated groups can and must be traced and destroyed, but a host of other similar outfits may replace them, unless the above root causes are addressed. While the world media in general and nearly the entire mainstream Western media in particular, fiercely condemn the cowardly but ghastly acts of suicide bombers, it conveniently forgets the earlier ruthless bombings of the states mentioned above by NATO; and the ongoing killing of innocents by drone attacks.

One of the main reasons for Islam, like other major religions, to have spread and survived across continents was its willingness to accommodate diversity. The wider it spread the more diverse cultures it incorporated. Over fourteen centuries the world have come to recognize an ethnic Indonesian or a South Asian or an Arab, or a Moroccan and so on who submit to the faith of Islam but not the illusory Islamic Umma. The various Islamic extremist groups claim the latter identity to be primary; this weakens the cultural diversity, invoking Islam at their convenience. They want to impose a rigid brand of Islam uniformly over the entire Muslim world. This sucks out the heart and soul from the religious texts and replaces it with a literalistic/legalistic version of Islam that cloisters within elaborate rituals, throttles free-thinking or reduces Islam to a kind of penal code. While the vast majority of the Muslims being

moderate reject this narrative they are nonetheless struggling to define the role of Islam in their respective societies. While they strive against the demons of ignorance/intolerance at multiple fronts from the individual to the collective at varying scales, they are however at a loss how to reform.

Muslims, faced with overwhelming western influence on all fronts and helpless in global affairs, wants to retain an identity that reminds them of past glory while deriving modern benefits. The trend among a vast majority of ordinary Muslims unable to figure out the real causes for Islam's decline is to resort to strict rituals and some sort of uniformity in attire. This is a common trait found in all declining powers in respective dark ages.

Islamic extremism in the western countries is rooted mainly in country specific socio-political causes. But there is certainly a shared feeling of being torn apart by multiple pulls of identity. The mainstream Muslims are mainly economic migrants. As an underclass most live in secluded communities, giving birth to a ghetto mentality. They are unwilling or unwelcome to integrate, nor can they resist the cultural influence of the host societies. Whatever the nascent national/ ethnic identity they carried from home either gets lost or is kept in abeyance to avoid drawing unnecessary attention. Hence, they choose to link with the globally recognized cultural identity of the Arabs like the Hijab and the Jubbahs, which has nothing to do with religion. Courting of the wealthy Arabs by the western governments is also probably an incentive for such choice of attire. This somehow gives them an illusion of entitlement as well as retaining whatever little is left of their lost identity and heritage, which incidentally isolates them even further.

This general frame of mind is the breeding ground of alienation, which in turn can trigger a host of reactions, of bitterness, desperation, and delusion. The young and the vulnerable among them can be easily induced by a little indoctrination and financial incentive to become monsters. In some cases a fringe, sneered and ignored by the wider societies, become easy prey of extremist recruitment. There are a number of extremist networks of various fundamentalist schools, endowed with fat purses to wage a campaign of hatred against the Western societies. But funnily the sermons of these preachers sound quite similar to the hate filled sermons of the Cluny priests in France who encouraged people to embark on the crusades a millennium ago.

Incidentally, a growing number of Muslims in their own countries outside the Arab world are increasingly adopting Arab culture. How to explain this trend? In the face of globalization while the nation and its cultural attributes are slowly receding, the state agencies are getting ever more unaccountable and alien cultural practices are slowly replacing local culture. While Arab culture is penetrating Muslim societies, rock culture is intruding in other developing societies. Arab attire is getting popular for a variety of reasons ranging from modesty to fashion to a kind of protest statement to a false idea of Islamic solidarity. Influence of the migrants living in the Arab countries has a lot to do with such cultural intrusion. Attire meant for a desert climate has no religious compulsion to be copied either voluntarily or imposed in cool or tropical climates. This probably gives an illusion of entitlement as being part of a larger whole.

Lastly, there is another response, the Tabligi Jamaat, which believes the moral and egalitarian traditions of the Prophet and his immediate successors can and should be replicated even now. Although this movement was originally a wing of the Deobandi School, it developed a life of its own. This faction mostly stays away from jockeying for political power, hence their influence is limited. But in recent times they are increasingly confronted by the radical Islamists. They consider their prime duty to spread the central message of the Prophet, which was the quest for God as pure spirit without any temporal condition and not to succumb to the temptation of power and wealth. Apart from a handful few, the rest of his successors proved otherwise.

Like all other religions Islam too got corrupted and quite early in its life than other faiths and became a handy tool of the tyrants. This certainly doesn't mean the moral/egalitarian values, are invalid. Rather they are resources of accumulated wisdom, which need to be interpreted contextually. This will of course require a major reform effort with multiple dialogues at different levels. As explained in the beginning if all religions underwent several reforms so can Islam, fortunately, it is not unheard of in Islam as opposed to the claims of the fundamentalists. The time is now ripe to take lessons from others and select where and how to initiate reform.

### **Reform in Islam**

Contrary to a popular misconception, reform in the rules of governance in Islam was a regular affair in the first few centuries of its existence. Governing a

growing empire containing multiple racial, lingual, and religious people required a whole new set of rules of business, than what was in practice during the prophet's time. In the process, reform became a continuous affair. The key task was to discern/interpret the Quran and the Prophet's Traditions in order to make it relevant to the expanding Islamic polity. But with expansion grew several centers of power. Each center engaged a group of scholars for this purpose. Thus, contending schools of thought emerged with different findings and interpretations. It's difficult to imagine they were free of political influence. However, difference of opinion was tolerated and scholars engaged in creative thinking by practicing *ijtihad*, i.e., rational approach to knowledge. This was possible so long as the ruling classes felt secure with no serious threat from abroad. Yes, there was regular dynastic challenge from within but that did not threaten to dismantle the empire.

The most pertinent issue today is defining the role of religion in public life, if at all, how far its reach should be allowed. If the role of religion is to provide moral governance, it has failed miserably in each and every Muslim majority state. Although the Prophet and his immediate successors exercised power guided by moral and egalitarian policies, within just half a century it was buried in the blood soaked sands of Karbala. All the succeeding rulers governed in the name of religion but discarded all morality and egalitarian practices into the gutters to maintain the status quo. Of course, this is not an exclusive phenomenon in Islamic societies. All religion-based societies/states did the same. But in the wake of European Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, and a series of socio - political revolutions/reforms, the Church's power was drastically curtailed and its dependent monarchies were either uprooted or dismantled. Slowly religion was separated from state and assigned to the private/cultural sphere. Islamic and all ex-colonial societies are yet to fix such division of devotion. All are struggling to decide the role of religion.

At varying scales all these societies use religion in the realm of politics as well as in the cultural sphere. The ruling elites pretending to value religious morality in politics gives it a constitutional role without practicing its essence, i.e., social justice and egalitarianism, while the reactionary underclass use religion as a weapon to counter the elitist narrative. Neither wants to separate religion and politics, though for very different reasons. Most governments

in Muslim majority states like in rest of the developing world are mired in corruption, and lack genuine popular support. Fearing the wrath of the Madrasa based religious bodies they try to accommodate or succumb to the medieval demands of these groups, no matter how obtrusive.

But without separating state and religion a modern society based on human reason is difficult to achieve. Here invoking Ibn Khaldun the 14<sup>th</sup> century Maghreb political philosopher, might be very relevant. In his view *Siyasa Aqliya*, i.e., a state governed by human reason is an option. This applies to all societies across all religions and regions. European Renaissance evolved a similar socio-political outlook, which gradually gave birth to liberalism, a beacon of hope to all humanity. If Muslims adopt a similar pattern in their respective societies they would do a great service to themselves and to the rest of humanity. Endurance demands such reforms.

Muslims will have to get over the ridiculous idea of a pan-Islamic supra-nation, and emerge as political nations within respective states, based on humanity, ethnicity, class or regional affinity. They will have to get rid of the mental frame of victimhood. The present turmoil across the Islamic world is primarily the result of many centuries of complacency and doctrinal rigidity. Yes, colonial and post colonial regressive world order played its part, but this cannot be a perpetual excuse. The only way the Muslims can escape their long slumber is by recreating an atmosphere of freedom of thought by adopting scientific education. Only then the often vocal but mostly whispering suspicion of Muslims in general by the followers of other faiths will cease. These are the keys to peaceful coexistence. Islam like other faiths has a role in the realm of spiritual quest but surely not in politics. The latter can only lead to regression. For creating a moral society all faiths must come together through interfaith dialogues and not in isolation.

While Muslims need to address their innate constraints, followers of other faiths should also realize that these historical burdens are not exclusive to Islam alone. They too traversed a similar road at some point or other in their evolution, and some still suffer predicaments of their own. Interactions between civilizations were never easy and none are exclusive. Competition, friction as well as sharing were the norm. These competitive exchanges made positive contributions in history. European liberalism enabled learning in general, and science in particular. The Islamic world will only enrich by engaging with

this tradition. And the West by engaging can also learn that Islam is not a house full of zealots, it has a long tradition of tolerance, and learning.

It is possible to defeat the Islamic terrorist organizations militarily, but unless the root causes, i.e., the deep scars of injustice incurred on the body politic of Islam over the past century but especially in the post colonial period as mentioned in this paper, are addressed earnestly and quickly, new outfits may keep on sprouting. Yes, the Muslim majority states must also take the initiative to separate religion and politics, weed out the Wahabi/Salafi influences, and put a full stop to romanticizing their long lost glorious past. Moreover, so long the western governments go on patronizing and arming the Wahabi state of Saudi Arabia, which is the fountain-head of all other forms of Sunni Islamic radicalism, the world will not be free of the extremist menace. By resolving these serious concerns with dignity a harmonious future is possible.

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## Islam And Humanism

**Md. Abdul Momen Sarker**

In postmodern world people are losing their interest in doing good for others because of their greed towards gaining power and pelf. For this capitalism centered disposition people's relationships are, of late, in rueful rift. Everyone is engaged in his/her own world. Because of the rise of power and pelf in the world some of the world leaders, including Donald Trump, feel paranoid, and plan to paralyze their rivals often occasioning woeful wars causing sanguinary situations. The effect evokes German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's articulation "God is dead" for the Enlightenment had eliminated the possibility of the existence of God. In postmodern era power and money, not God, are ensuring the existence of supremacy of fellows in status, dignity, respect and so on.

The current cultural syncretism crisis being another impediment manifests the inimical and iniquitous effect in people's liberalism and nationalism tampering and besetting peace in the world. Being

happy is the ultimate goal of every society. Forcibly imposed cultural customs cause conflict. This conflict frequents among the ethnic groups or the minority, for example, evangelizing the minority, who do not at all think their ways of life need any change, or need to be modified. But they are formidably forcefully and forcibly interfered by the influential group. Resultantly the minority group suffer the inhuman woes effected in the harms occurred in the ethos of their culture.

The religion "Islam" is related to the concepts of wholeness, submission, sincerity, safeness and peace. In religious context, it means "voluntary submission to the Almighty". Islam also sticks to surrendering to truth and goodness. Equity, brotherhood, mutual assistance, justice, decency, passion, compassion, sympathy, empathy, being the auspicious attributes of humanity, are the fabulous fortes of Islam. To be a true Muslim he/she should infallibly be imbued with these moral virtues. The

Quran and the hadith serve as the primary source of moral and ethical guidance in Islamic theology. In particular, respecting parents and elders, having love for the younger, greeting people in correct manner, showing kindness to fellow people, caring for the sick, asking permission before entering into others' house, speaking the truth, and avoiding rudeness and false speech have been emphasized. The typical Islamic teaching is that imposing a penalty on an offender in proportion to their offense is permissible and just; but forgiving the offender is better. To go one step further by offering a favor to the offender is regarded the highest excellence. Muhammad said, "The best among you are those who have the best manners and character". To the Muslims, the examples of moral virtues set by Muhammad and his companions serve as guidance both practically and theologically.

In the religion of Islam the idea of social welfare is one of its principal values, and the practice of social service at its various forms has been instructed and encouraged. A Muslim's life remains incomplete if not attended by service to humanity. The following verse of the Quran is often cited to encapsulate the Islamic idea of social welfare: "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity, to fulfill the contracts which we have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing" (Quran 2:177)

Regardless of a neighbor's religious identity, Islam tells the Muslims to treat their neighboring people in the best possible manners and not to cause any difficulty to them. The Quran tells the Muslims to stand by their neighbors in the latter's everyday needs. Muhammad is reported as saying, "A man is not a believer who fills his stomach while his neighbor is hungry. One typical hadith on neighbors reads as follows: Narrated by Abu Hurairah (rm): The Prophet said, "By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" It was said, "Who is that, O Allah's Apostle?" He said, "That person whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil." Another hadith is coherent here: "Gabriel kept on recommending me

about treating the neighbors in a kind and polite manner, so much so that I thought that he would order me to make them my heirs." — Muhammad, 'Sahih al-Bukhari, 8:73:44. So people's passion for power and pelf can easily be pacified through the application of Muhammad's assertion.

The protection of minority rights is regarded as imperative under Islamic law which is in harmony with other international laws for the minority. In human history, racial discrimination has long been a cause of injustice. One important aspect of Islam is that it regards human beings as equal children of Adam. As a religion, Islam does not recognize the racial discrimination among people. In his Farewell Sermon, Muhammad repudiated the discrimination based on race and color. Islam recognizes no distinction among human beings based on color, language or tribe. All are considered equal in relishing human rights.

To conclude it can be said that, Quranic injunction forbids the Muslims to underestimate others. Assuming that there will be natural differences in social status and income among individuals which are the natural outcomes due to the differences in personal talents and efforts, a sense of brotherhood towards fellow Muslims and a general sense of humanity towards every human being have been suggested to be cultured to further establish equality in society.

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# Islam Encourages Family Planning and the Reproductive Rights of Women

Qutub Jahan Kidwai

In response to the Assam government's recent decision against providing government jobs to people having more than two children, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) chief Maulana Badruddin Ajmal has said that Muslims will continue to produce children and they will not listen to anyone. The maulana from Assam is merely reiterating the conviction of many among the ulema in India that Islam is opposed to family planning. However, as an activist and scholar and basing myself on the Quran, Hadith and the Shariah, I debunk such claim.

The Holy Qur'an deals with a number of subjects. Above all it is a book of moral guidance. An important criteria of modernity is use of reason and the power of intellect. The Holy Qur'an has never devalued reason, but has urged us to reflect deeply, to think with our own intellect and not to follow blindly the traditions of their forefathers[1].

The concept of Islamic law is a complete legal science. The corpus of Law is called *Shariah*. The study of the Principle of Jurisprudence known as *usul-ul-fiqh* is the study and critical analysis of the origins, sources and principles of Islam. Sunni Islam bases *Shariah*, besides the Holy Quran, on *Sunna* (sayings) and *Hadith* (doings) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, then on *Qiyas*, genealogy and finally *Ijma*, consensus. The legal foundation of Islamic law is based on the fundamental values of *Adl*, *Ihsan*, *Rahmah* and *Hikmah*.

The Holy Qur'an talks about these values in an imperative way. One verse says, "And surely Allah enjoins justice and benevolence to others" (Qur'an 16:90). Thus justice is very central to the Islamic value system. It is this concern for justice that makes the Holy Qur'an show deep concern for the weaker sections of society. A woman certainly belongs to this category due to patriarchal systems. One finds in the Holy Qur'an full support for sexual equality in several verses. There are verses on the right to choose a partner and marriage, on marriage dower,

divorce, maintenance of wife, economic rights, property rights etc. Therefore I wish to highlight the right to reproduction in this paper.

This subject is rarely discussed or publicized among the Muslim community. To have progeny is also associated with the worship of Allah where our religious leaders *Ulama* say giving birth will take one to paradise. Secondly they are against aborting the fetus and preventing pregnancy, calling it a sin. These days the *Ulama* issues *Fatwa* (dictats) against the use of contraceptives and family planning. Muslim women suffer from high mortality rate during child birth and if they survive their health status is poor. The *Ulama* argues that the Holy Qur'an clearly states "*don't kill the child the God is the provider*". Therefore it's a sin to use contraceptives or go for abortion. I am going to counter their claim with the help of the given verses and narration from the classical sources of renowned jurists in the history of Islam.

## Reproduction in Islam

The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's speeches have confirmed in a very accurate scientific manner conception and the stages of creation in the womb. "*He makes you in the wombs of your mothers in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness.*" (Qur'an 39:6)

The creation of man from a mingled fluid-drop (*nutfa amshaj*), first stage of conception, as coined by the Holy Qur'an, which says; "Verily We created man from a drop of a mingled fluid-drop (*nutfa amshaj*), in order to try him: so We gave him (the gifts), of hearing and sight." (76:2); "then of that fluid-drop (*nutfa*) We created a leech-like clot" (23:14). Thus, the stage of *alaqa* is the second of embryonic stages, and is mentioned in the Qur'an in several verses. He, the Almighty, says: "Was he not a drop of sperm emitted (in lowly form)? Then did he become a leech-like clot; then did (Allah) make and

fashion (him) in due proportion. And of him He made two sexes, male and female.”(75: 37-39). This is the second stage of conception as given in the Holy Quran. In a sunah called al-alaq, i.e., a leech-like clot, Allah says: “ (We) Created man, out of a leech-like clot.” (96: 2). The third stage of *mudgha* comes after the stage of alaq. This coincides with the Holy verse “And of that clot We made a (fetus) lump” (23: 14). One of the characteristics of the *mudgha* is that it elongates and changes shape.

“Oh mankind! If you have a doubt about the Recreation (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a chewed-like lump of flesh, formed and unformed, in order that We may manifest (Our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term And clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature (child who is born) So blessed be Allah, the best to create” (23: 14).

“After the development of the cartilaginous skeleton, clothing it with muscles, and the head and the limbs are distinguished, the embryo changes into a human creature.” (22: 5). The baby which is born is termed as *walada* or *aulad*. The highly important thing to note here is that the Holy Qur’an prohibits killing the child which is born.

### **Contraception and Reproductive Rights in Islam**

The Qur'an and *Sunnah*, prophetic traditions which are both considered primary sources of authority in Islam, do have unambiguous and explicit teachings relating to family planning. Within Islamic legal philosophy, issues that require independent intellectual exertion in light of a changing context and varying individual circumstances are called *ijtihadi* issues. *Ijtihad* is based on the assumption that in dealing with issues that are not explicitly addressed in the primary sources, jurists, informed by the spirit of the Qur'an, use their moral capacities for creative reasoning and judgments to arrive at relevant legal solutions. This opens up the possibilities for more dynamic Islamic approaches to understanding the issues of family planning in the current context.

“Kill not your children, on a plea of want, we provide sustenance for you and for them” (Qur’an 6:151). It is important to look at the context of revelation of this verse. This verse was a response to the pre-Islamic Arab custom of burying female children alive. It was therefore a condemnation of infanticide and of the deep misogyny of that culture. Proponents

of family planning have argued that these Qur'anic verses are used to counter all family planning initiatives and are therefore a misreading of the text. It is highly important to understand the language of the scripture.

Contraception has a long history in Islam that needs to be situated in relation to the broader Islamic ethos of marriage and sexuality. Historically the various Islamic legal schools with an overwhelming majority have permitted coitus interruptus, called *azl*, as a method of contraception. This was a contraceptive technique practiced by pre-Islamic Arabs and continued to be used during the time of the Prophet with his knowledge and without his prohibition. The only condition the Prophet attached to acceptability of this practice, was that the husband was to secure the permission of the wife before practicing withdrawal. Since the male sexual partner initiates this technique, there needs to be consensual agreement about its use by both partners for two primary reasons: firstly, the wife is entitled to full sexual pleasure and coitus interruptus may diminish her pleasure. Secondly, she has the right to offspring if she so desires. These requirements speak to the priority given in Islam to mutual sexual fulfillment consultation as well as consultative decision making between a married couples in terms of family planning.

As early as the 9th century, female contraceptive techniques such as intravaginal suppositories and tampons, were also a part of both medical and judicial discussions in Islam. While medical manuals listed the different female contraceptive options and their relative effectiveness, legal positions differed around whether the consent of the husband was necessary prior to the use of female contraceptives. However, it is clear that in classical Islamic law (which informs contemporary Islamic jurisprudence law) the majority position in eight out of the nine legal schools permits contraception.

Due to this broad-based legal admissibility of contraception in Islamic law, Muslim physicians in the medieval period conducted in depth investigations into the medical dimension of birth control, which were unparalleled in European medicine until the 19th century. Ibn Sina in his book "Qanun" lists 20 birth control substances and physician Abu Bakr al- Razi in his book "Hawi" lists 176 birth control substances. The admissibility of contraceptive practice in Islamic history at the level of both theory and practice is abundantly evident in both its medical and legal legacies.

While different legal scholars discussed the acceptability or reprehensibility of particular individual motives for using contraceptives, this discussion did not contest the overarching admissibility of contraceptive practice. The scholar Al- Ghazzali (d. 1111) supported the use of contraceptive practice for a number of different reasons, including economic factors where a large number of dependents would impose financial and psychological hardship on the family. He reasoned that a large family may cause one to resort to unlawful means to support these excessive responsibilities. Fewer material burdens, he adds, are an aid to religion.

He also supported the decision to use contraception in order to protect the life of the wife, given the possible physical dangers that childbirth posed to the life of the mother. In addition, he considered the need for the wife to preserve her beauty and attractiveness for the enjoyment of the marriage as a reasonable justification for contraception.

While the last mentioned rationale may characterize a patriarchal emphasis on the primacy of the wife's appearance to the enjoyment of the marriage, it nonetheless simultaneously illustrates the high levels of tolerance for contraceptive practices in the Islamic legacy. This is reflected in the fact that there are many other influential jurists and theologians in different historical periods who discussed the admissibility of contraception (*azl*) for similar and additional reasons.

Another issue is breastfeeding. A wife has the right to deny breastfeeding of their new born child and the husband is duty bound to provide a midwife to breastfeed his baby, Quranic verse {Surah 2. Verse 233:}

"The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided ye pay (the mother) what ye offered, on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what ye do." [2].

"And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women." [Noble Qur'an 2:228]. The Qur'an, in addressing the believers, often uses the expression, 'believing men and women' to emphasize the equality of men and women in regard to their respective duties, rights, virtues and merits.

It says: "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward." (Qur'an 33:35).

Thus, reasoning, wisdom and intellect are a core part of the Islamic system. The dogmatic understanding has harmed the very spirit of the Divine revelation.

### Conclusion

Thus, faith though fundamental to leading a meaningful life is insufficient by itself. It needs to be enriched by reason. Faith and Reason are two wheels of religion and both are equally necessary. The Qur'an therefore rightly stresses the role of critical reflection - what it calls *tafakkur*, *tadabbur* or *hikmah*. The element of trust leads to Faith and trust itself is a virtue which helps in evolving, progressing and enriching life. Many rationalists believe that Faith and Reason are antagonistic. The Goal is laid down by fundamental values and values are arrived at either through intuition or revelation.

The Qur'anic narrative of Joseph's planning and preservation of food in anticipation of famine is an act of agency that does not demonstrate a lack of trust in God's sustenance. Similarly there are prophetic traditions that address the combination of human agency with trust in God as is reflected in the Prophet's advice to a man to tie up his camel and then trust in God; or the caliph Umar's statement that reliance on God means to plant the seeds in the earth, then trust in God for a good crop. Family planning, including contraceptive usage, may be seen as the extension of the human capacity to plan, to respond to and to actively make choices in terms of contextual needs and emerging realities.

The notion that God's unity is reflected in the equality and unity of human kind provides a basis for a strong critique of sexism and gender hierarchy. The Qur'an explicitly asserts the fundamental equal

worth of male and female believers as well as the fact that gender relations are intended to be cooperative and mutually enriching. This ethos of reciprocity between women and men is further reinforced in the Islamic understanding of man and woman relationship.

Muslim scholars have argued that the Qur'anic view of the inviolable sanctity of every human being, both male and female, implies a duty to protect each person's physical, emotional, psychological, social and intellectual integrity. This implies that the whole range of explicit violations of women's personhood, including physical violence against women, honor killings and cliterodectomy constitute a transgression of spiritual sanctity of the individual and therefore of a disregard for the principle of *Tauhid* (Oneness of God). Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are prohibited in Islam.

The Holy Qur'an, authenticated traditions and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, *Ijma* and *Qiyas* (analogy) and the contemporary ethical principles emphasized in Islamic Shariah, should be observed when providing reproductive and sexual health services for Muslim families or communities. The Family is the basic unit in Islam. Safe motherhood, family planning, quality reproductive and sexual

health information and services and assisted reproductive technology are all encouraged within the frame of marriage. While the Shia sect permits egg donation and surrogacy the Sunni sect forbids a third party contribution to reproduction.

It is important to highlight such issues which empower women with the help of religious sources. Also there is great need to have objective examination of the Quranic teachings. On the methodology of understanding the Holy Qur'an, it proves that Religion or Revelation doesn't mean only ritual but an inclusion of reflection, wisdom and intellect too. Reason, along with faith, enables us to liberate ourselves from ignorance.

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# COVID-19 and the unfinished agenda of funding zoonotic diseases in Southeast Asia\*

**Dr. Rosalia Sciortino**

In the last months, we have seen a growing number of philanthropists and private foundations pledge their resources to control the COVID19 pandemic and ameliorate its impacts. From Jack Ma to Bill and Melinda Gates, from Dato Sri Tahir to Jack Dorsey and Zuckerberg, billionaires have acted to provide assistance.

Among the choir of praise for the 'generosity' of the planet's richest and their foundations, some have voiced critical remarks. Such amounts, no matter how staggering, are tiny when compared to the givers' fortunes; less wealthy individuals donate

greater proportions of their incomes; donations are a fraction of public funding and official development aid (ODA); much of philanthropists' wealth is based on the exploitation of loopholes in the same economic system that is creating unprecedented inequities (as highlighted by this very pandemic); commitments do not necessarily results in actual donations or may just shift funds away from other programs; and taxes would be a more effective and fair method than reliance on gratuities out of accumulated wealth to fund social safety nets and public health.

Public discussion would also benefit from closer scrutiny of the effectiveness and strategic value of the approaches proposed. As we think about long-term responses beyond the immediate crisis, we may want to look back to now-forgotten initiatives. There is a history of strategic engagement with the prevention and control of emerging viruses, especially in East and Southeast Asia, from which we may learn about programs' strengths and shortcomings.

International foundations identified the risks associated with zoonotic infections quite early. In 1999, the Rockefeller Foundation began work in Southeast Asia—and later in Eastern and Southern Africa—to monitor the emergence of new infectious diseases with pandemic potential. At the time, global preoccupation focused on HIV/AIDS, with attention to more familiar infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria and dengue concentrated in particular locations. Yet, experts and practitioners on the ground became concerned about the likelihood of new zoonotic outbreaks with transnational health and economic impacts disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. It was argued that China and its surroundings could become a hotspot – owing to rapid market integration, increasing density and mobility of human and animal populations, wild animal trade and commercialisation of livestock. Responding to these concerns, the newly established regional office of the Rockefeller Foundation launched the Cross-Border Health (CBH) component of its 'Learning Across Boundaries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)' program, integrating the surveillance work with grant-making on regional dynamics and their trans-national ramifications.

CBH granted an average of USD \$2 million annually to GMS partners to build contextual knowledge and regional intervention capacity on transnational flows of diseases. It also funded advocacy of public health policies that would take into account gender and other societal structures. It stressed the needs of the less privileged, particularly migrants and ethnic minorities in mountainous border areas where infectious diseases are rife. Learning from the HIV epidemic, civil society groups were considered key stakeholders in building community resilience and it was stressed that mitigating fear and discrimination toward persons infected with, or affected by, infectious disease was crucial to control transmission. CBH's centre-piece was the establishment of an inter-governmental

disease-control mechanism named Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Consortium (MBDS) in time to play an important trust building role in the control of the SARS outbreak in 2002 and the avian influenza (H5N1) outbreak in 2003. Eventually, other funders joined forces in supporting MBDS and fostering inclusive health policies.

The SARS and H5N1 epidemics and their spread from China to Southeast Asia triggered a flurry of donor-supported initiatives in the region. The Asian Development Bank allocated a sizeable amount of resources in grant and loan funds to the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to enhance health system responses to major public health threats. Significant resources, were also invested by bilateral donors – such as the now-defunct AusAID and USAid agencies—to strengthen animal health surveillance and routine detection in people, as well as tackling the socio-economic drivers of zoonotic diseases.

Over time, foundations and other grant-making institutions consistently supported collaborative transdisciplinary knowledge and institutional capacity building. In 2006, the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) launched the Asian Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research (APEIR), involving leading government, non-government and academic institutes in Southeast Asia and China. The network undertook policy-relevant research on emerging infectious diseases from an eco-health perspective, including on the thriving wildlife trade and its health, socio-economic and environmental impacts. Once it was recognised that wildlife has multiple functions and can be a source of protein for the poor, regulatory measures were argued for, rather than abstract bans—a finding that counters current frantic calls for the abolishment of wet markets, even those with no wild game.

Ten years after SARS and H5N1, this concentration of resources and approaches was recognised as having contributed to better preparedness and progress in achieving the core capacities required to detect and respond to emerging infectious diseases. The emergence of a shared concept of *One Health* (implying transdisciplinary collaboration between professionals in promoting human, animal and environmental health) was seen as significant progress towards a more comprehensive approach to zoonotic diseases. There was optimism that countries could work together to fill the missing gaps through closer cooperation.

Gradually, however, funding initiatives declined in value and intensity due to internal and external factors. A leadership transition at the Rockefeller Foundation led to the premature ending of the renamed Disease Surveillance Networks (DSN) Initiative and IDRC's AIPER was impacted by the closing of the regional office in Singapore. Some donors decided, sometimes hastily, that the desired goals had been achieved. More generally, there was a reduction of international aid and, above all, a retrenchment from the social sector in favour of economic, infrastructure and technological investments. Some data suggests that, aside from a spike in funding for Ebola responses, health aid remained largely flat between 2010 and 2016 and declined thereafter.

This decline was even stronger in Southeast Asia, now regarded as ready to "graduate" from aid (growing inequities, persistent vulnerabilities, and unresolved development challenges notwithstanding). Some foundations left the area and those who stayed embraced a more technocratic agenda less responsive to socio-cultural and institutional contexts and less supportive of local organisations, especially civil society groups. Program interaction with China was also reduced, owing to polarised views, more restrictive rules for overseas foundations and the significant growth of Chinese foundations.

Priority setting favoured mother and child health, reproductive health, and the three high-priority communicable diseases (HIV, malaria and tuberculosis). There was a novel emphasis on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) due to their rise in Southeast Asia, and concern about the related increase in health expenditures lead to a focus on Universal Health Care (UHC). Much needed investments in health financing schemes, however, too often came at the cost of former programs to strengthen health services. The privatisation and marketisation of health care—pursued by governments and donors alike—weakened interest in public health provision.

With regards to infectious diseases, funding in the region became more narrowly targeted to malaria and to a lesser extent dengue fever and tuberculosis. Other sanitary emergencies caught global attention, from H1N1 in the US to the Ebola outbreak in Africa. As the impact of SARS and H5N1 had been contained, attention to Asia lessened. Experts had warned that the capacity to predict and identify biological threats remained essential, even if the

memory of SARS was fading. They were largely ignored.

COVID-19 comes thus in the midst of an unfinished agenda and makes the promising investments of the early 2000s look like a missed opportunity. Despite the popularity of conspiracy theories, the emergence of a new virus in China linked to wild game is not a total surprise. For international philanthropy and aid (as for governments and other stakeholders), it may be worth reflecting on why we were unprepared.

Learning from the past to plan a 'better future' after COVID-19, health and health care ought to have greater relevance in international aid. While donor funding is a small part of global spending on health, it is still an important supplement to government and private resources in low and lower-middle income countries such as the majority of those in Southeast Asia. A return to higher levels is needed. An open discussion should begin on the efficiency of concentrating resources in a vertical approach for a particular disease rather than adopting a broad-based horizontal approach that builds the system's capacity to deal with a wider range of health problems and their underlying causes. As strong national health systems that act for the common (and not private) good have proven essential during the current crisis, governments and donors should invest in them without further delay.

Foundations and semi-public grant-making organisations provide comparatively small financial resources. Past experiences have shown, however, their capacity to be responsive to local needs, directly support home-grown initiatives and organisations to address them, invest in critical issues, and use their convening power to maximise impact. They have dared to try untested approaches and propose alternative visions. The question is whether today they are still positioned to provide strategic, bold and socially-engaged funding as they used to in the 1990s and early 2000s.

During that period, foundations' programs linked medical interventions to issues of equity, rights, socio-economic justice and governance systems and supported civil society groups to ensure more balanced and rights-based decisions. This integrated and transformative funding approach is extremely relevant today when COVID-19 is highlighting the urgency to address the profound divides and fragility of vulnerable groups and to ensure civic space while promoting health safety. After the shrinking of direct funding to civil society in the last decade, a U-turn in

donor practices is needed to stop the ongoing financial undermining of the third sector.

Past programs also remind us that if geographical and disciplinary boundaries are to be overcome, we need to invest in building the capacity to do so. COVID-19 has shown that the trust fostered by previous programs has waned and countries will have to regain it in order to coordinate COVID-19 containment strategies and their repeal, and the sharing of expertise and resources. Future research and action further require changes in the sectoral allocation of funds and the recognition that applied science is intrinsically related to socio-cultural and political processes. As governments and donors race to find better

treatment, a vaccine and technological data-science tools, we should recall that to contain this and future epidemics and address their root causes and impacts, funding social interventions is equally important. Doing so, philanthropy can seize the opportunity not only to overcome the COVID-19 crisis, but also to contribute to a more eco-sustainable and just future.

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## *Racial riot least desired now\**

**Abdur Rahman Chowdhury**

The three months of horrendous human tragedies unleashed by Covid-19 resulted in the death of over 110,000 people in the United States. About 500,000 people have been infected and many are still struggling in hospitals. More than \$6.5 trillion in household wealth vanished during the first three months of the year as the pandemic tightened its hold on global economy. The Federal Reserve Chairman characterized this as the biggest economic shock in the United States. Towards end May, the deadly disease appeared to have come under some restraints and the local governments began to lift restrictions on the movement of the people. The economy which was shattered by months-long shutdown began to regain some strength. It was estimated that about 40 million people have lost jobs and unemployment level reached 20 per cent. Some 26 million people sought unemployment benefit in the month of May. CARES Act, passed by the Congress and approved by the President, encompassed several rescue packages including a stimulus package providing \$1200 to individuals having less than \$90,000 annual income and additional unemployment allowances of \$600 per week to those lost jobs, enabled people to meet their most pressing needs.

New York which was the epicenter of Covid-19 began rolling back the shutdown from the outskirts of the city and allowed small businesses to resume activities. Manhattan, the busiest part of the city

seemed to have returned to business as usual. About 90 per cent of 20 million people who lost jobs in April said they expected to return to their jobs, a sign that economy might soon return to normal. Employment in restaurants and hospitality sector started to rise with 1.2 million jobs added as hotels began to see occupancy rates pick up. Employment in construction increased by 464,000 as buildings work began to increase in many states. In the health sector 312,000 jobs were added in April and May.

As people began to see some light at the end of long tunnel, an unarmed young African-American man was murdered by a white police officer in the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25. The man was overpowered by three police personnel and was grounded. Derek Chauvin, the police officer held his knee on the neck of George Floyd for several minutes. George was begging for mercy and told he could not breathe. Derek Chauvin repositioned his knee on George's neck and at one stage the two other police officers mounted on George. When the police team realized George stopped talking and showed no sign of body movement, they called an ambulance and sent him to the hospital. Upon arrival at the hospital, the attending doctor pronounced him dead.

Why was George arrested? The police haven't yet submitted any official complaint apart from a dubious payment of a bill with a \$20 counterfeit. When this brutal episode was happening, someone

captured the horrendous act in cell phone and shared the same among his friends and acquaintances. The video became viral and people in the neighbourhood and then all over the country rose in protest of police brutality. There was strong demand to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Governor and the state administration were dragging their feet and took more than five days to announce that Derek Chauvin would be charged for committing homicide. Meanwhile, the people beyond ethnic divide and across the country rose in revolt, damaged properties and in the mayhem, shops were looted. Realizing the depth of the crisis, the state administration transferred the case to the Attorney General.

President Trump, not surprisingly, remained quiet when the situation was getting intractable and spread to major cities including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Washington D.C. His inaction infuriated the demonstrators, and, in several locations, the police shot at the demonstrators and sprayed tear gas. Trump exacerbated the situation by advancing justification that "when looting starts, shooting starts".

As anger and grief mounted, demonstrators assembled adjacent to the White House and condemned Trump's acquiescence of police atrocity against the people of colour. Bewildered and frightened, Trump ordered taller fence around the White House and commissioned the military to push the demonstrators away from the Lafayette Square. Defence Secretary Mark Esper and the Joint Chief of the Military General Mark Milley accompanied President Trump to the Church and photographed with Trump holding a copy of the Bible. This was an unprecedented action and the military, for the first time in recent history, was called in to deny people of their constitutional right of peaceful demonstrations. Defence Secretary Esper regretted his parade with the President stating that he didn't know where the President was heading for. General Milley apologised and said, "I should not have been there. My presence in that moment and in that environment created the perception of the military involved in domestic politics."

Nearly 500 former officials who served in diplomatic and national security services issued an open letter denouncing Trump's response to nationwide protests over racial injustice. They wrote, "Our military is composed of and represents all of America. Misuse of the military for political purposes would weaken the fabric of democracy, denigrate those who serve in uniform to protect and defend the Constitution, and undermine our nation's strength abroad."

The procrastination of the local governments in indicting the police personnel involved in strangling and ultimately killing George, and the incendiary remarks by Trump set an impression that this is just another murder of a black person that would go unpunished. The demonstrators pointed out that nearly 500 people have been shot and killed by police during the five months of this year-an average of about three a day. They rightly demanded an end to this mass murder and suggested "police reform" among others. The proposals that dominated the discussion have been "defunding the police" and "abrogation of the police department". Trump signaled he would reject calls for wholesale change.

Neither defunding nor abrogation of the police department seem to survive final consideration. Defunding does not imply starving the department to extinction. It suggests diversion of a portion of the budget to social services and establishing linkage with the communities. There are 18,000 police departments in the US and what is recommended is to restructure these and bring under the command and control of the State administration. Outright abolition is not suggested. What is overdue is a reform in the police service and review of the myriad functions entrusted to the police. Domestic violence, breach of traffic regulations, eviction/relocation of the homeless, surveillance of mentally sick persons etc., could be assigned to an unarmed auxiliary force. Trainings of police on engagement, counseling and techniques of reaching out would make law enforcing and auxiliary forces effective and community friendly. The use of lethal weapon should be a choice of last resort. Mayor of Atlanta rightly observed, "Police should conduct as protector not as warrior."

It is apocalyptic that some states including New York, Minneapolis, Illinois, Georgia, Florida have decided to undertake police reform and declared "choking" illegal. Activists are still skeptical - they believe police departments are still too resistant to call for change, and too protective of bad actors.

The death of Rayshard Brooks on Friday night (June 12) during a scuffle with the police at Atlanta resulted in another round of protests in the country. Police rushed to a Wendy on a complaint that a man parked and was asleep in the drive-through. The officers carried out a sobriety test on the man, identified as Brooks. When he failed the test, police tried to arrest him. The scuffle began, and Brooks grabbed a gun from police and ran. Police followed, and Brooks apparently turned back toward the police

and fired, at that point the officer fired at Brooks. Brooks was injured and later on died at the hospital.

Rolfe, the police officer who shot the gun has been fired and Devin Brosnan, the other police officer involved in the scuffle has been placed on administrative leave. Atlanta Police Chief Erika Shields resigned on the following day.

Brooks - an African American, was born and raised in Atlanta. He had troubled years but recently settled down and returned into the routine of working hard. A man was murdered because he was asleep in the drive-through would be a legitimate cause for anger.

But it would also be pertinent to examine when the suspect fired at the police, what should the officer have done? The unrest over police actions will impede Covid-19 recovery process and prolong economic meltdown.

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## *How do we get out of this mess? Rethinking America*

**Lorin Peters**

“When Our Final War Has Begun” describes the likely result of our current strategies, which make nuclear war and annihilation in the long run almost inevitable. Most of the data in that first document is relatively objective and verifiable. This second document is on how do we get out of this mess. Most of the thoughts in this essay are my non-expert opinions and observations, but based on teaching alternatives to violence since 1972.

North Korea’s successful test of an intercontinental missile, along with its development of a primitive nuclear bomb, is rapidly forcing the US to a point of no return. The US claims the right to prevent our enemies from acquiring the weapons we already possess (this claim is part of how an empire controls other nations). Our leaders may claim North Korea forced us to attack and risk starting a nuclear war. A nuclear war risks turning into a MAD war (Mutual Assured Destruction war, according to nuclear deterrence theory) and probably ending most species, including ours.

Fortunately, there is a way to save, literally, our world.

The obvious solution is: abolish nuclear weapons. We have already abolished several other dangerous types of weapons – chemical, biological, cluster bombs. President Reagan significantly reduced the number of nuclear weapons, with his “trust, but verify” doctrine. Most Americans are not aware that

in 2016 N Korea voted Yes on the UN resolution to ban nuclear weapons. America fiercely opposed that banning resolution (someday we will probably regret that decision). Until 2018 America conducted the largest war games in the world every year in S Korea. N Korea repeatedly offered to sign a peace treaty with America if only we would stop threatening them with these games. The world will be vastly better off without nuclear weapons. (That is why in 2018 the UN approved the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons).

Are we willing to abolish our nuclear weapons?

No. Because that would require that we relinquish our empire and our control of the world. Why will we not relinquish our empire? Because we have been seduced by our greed and our life-style. And because we are ignorant of the dangers of empire. Those dangers are why the Prophet Eissa warned, “Those who live by the sword will perish by the sword.” (Gospel of Matthew 26:52)

Can our leaders be educated to those dangers?

Probably not. Our ignorance is willful. Willful ignorance is a subconscious avoidance of reading or listening to things that threaten our worldview. During the drafting of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, Nikki Haley, our UN Ambassador, protested outside the UN, “There is nothing I want more for my family than a world with

no nuclear weapons. But we have to be realistic". Haley has apparently avoided learning about nuclear winter famine. Who is being unrealistic? Who is living in an alternate reality? This is what willful ignorance looks like.

In order to figure out how to get out of this nuclear mess, I would first think about how we got into it. What are the major factors that created it?

One of the factors is that we believe we need not listen to other peoples.

Some Americans apparently still believe that we need not listen because we are white. A larger number believe we need not listen because we are superior as a nation, eg, our constitution, laws, political institutions, economy, technology, customs, values, religion, ...

In 1966 I was serving in the Peace Corps in Thailand. I remember vividly reading an editorial in the Bangkok Post explaining that, while America had good intentions in Vietnam, our war there could not work. What we were trying to do in Vietnam could not be done by war. I suddenly realized at that moment that the American way of understanding the world was not the only possible worldview.

Donald Trump believes we need not listen to the Paris Agreement on climate change. Out of 198 nations, only Syria and Nicaragua did not sign that agreement. He believes we do not need our treaty with Iran to not build their own nuclear weapons. He also believes we do not need the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia that Ronald Reagan negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. Mr Trump believes we need not listen.

Mike Kim, a retired naval commander who spoke at our neighborhood church last year, said that when he attends his annual reunion with his Annapolis classmates, they tell him that every time they sail into a foreign port anywhere in the world, they feel hated, or at a minimum, unwelcome. Are we listening?

Our first task is learning to listen. For example, the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Will this be difficult? Yes. Because empires do not listen to other nations. They just tell other nations what to do.

A second factor is that we glorify our greed. Ronald Reagan campaigned on the slogan, "Put yourself first". Our culture tells us countless stories to justify our greed. "Money is the source of all security". "Money can solve any problem". "No amount of money is too much".

But the Scandinavian countries have discovered that there is a better source of security. In 1934 Norwegian workers and businessmen made a "basic agreement," that is neither communist nor capitalist, based on the values of equality and freedom. They all agreed to set taxes high enough (currently 40%) to provide equality and security for all citizens, including immigrants.

Norway provides a full year of maternity leave, full childcare from age one, all education including grad-school, all needed vocational training, full workers' rights, help with housing, full healthcare, eldercare, rehabilitation for all prisoners, funding for all religions, Muslim as well as Christian. There is no poverty or homelessness. The only beggars I saw in Norway were some Roma who refuse any social contract. Government is completely transparent. The amount of everyone's salary, private as well as public, is available publicly.

The result is that Norway has a higher rate of entrepreneurship than America does, because if your idea fails, you are still completely secure. Norway is even beginning to experiment with providing funding for services for people in other nations.

A third factor is that we have been acting like an empire.

We did not make a public or conscious decision to be an empire. But our invention of nuclear weapons gave us the power to control the world. And acting like an empire was the inevitable result of this power plus our greed.

The bad news – empires cause immense suffering. The greed of empire is by nature limitless exploitation and impoverishment of other peoples and their labor and their resources. The 'other peoples' being impoverished includes middle-class and poor Americans. So we have some heavy lifting to do - restoring the wisdom buried in all religions, creating an actual democracy, building the beloved community.

The good news – empires always fall. Because the greed of empires is limitless, we know neither when to stop, nor how to stop. Our empire is very near its end (see Johan Galtung's "The Fall of the US Empire"). Donald Trump's greed is a precise reflection of America's greed. That is part of why he was elected. He is exaggerating our empire's injustice and instability, and thereby accelerating its fall.

A fourth factor is that we have failed to control our greed politically.

The political institution which controls greed is democracy, both domestic democracy and international democracy. We vote. But only Democrats and Republicans get into Congress (OK, somehow Bernie Sanders got in). That leaves many other points of view unrepresented. But in a genuine democracy, all points of view are represented and voiced proportionally. For example, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans represent me., So my votes never count. I am not allowed to participate in our political process. (Do we not have an American precedent for “No taxation without representation”?)

An actual democracy requires a parliament in which all parties are represented. The prime minister is usually chosen by a coalition of several parties, and can be dismissed whenever there is a vote of no-confidence. Our US Senate creates a very unequal distribution of representation – one voter in Alaska has the same power as 53 voters in California. But the strongest impediment to democratic representation is our winner-take-all elections. Because of the role of campaign money in how people vote, we have ended up with a government that gives far more power to our elites than to our non-elites (“99%”). If I have enough money, and I persuade 1% more of the voters to vote for me, my power goes from 0% to 100%. That is why it's called “winner-take-all”. The current battles in Washington illustrate these impediments very clearly.

A fifth factor is that we have failed to control our greed spiritually.

The Prophet Eissa said, “Judge a tree by its fruit”. (Luke 6:44) St Paul added, “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”. (Gal 5:22) Many American ‘Christians’ trust in our military and war, instead of trusting in God and gentleness and peace. Many ‘Christians’ live in materialism and luxury, instead of living with self-control and generosity.

Religion in America has failed. Few, if any, churches challenge materialism or greed as strongly as the Prophet Eissa did. He flatly rejected those who were not able to give their wealth to the poor. (Matthew 19:21..., Mark 10:23..., Luke 18:24...). This is a very high standard. I’m working on it, but I’m only half way there. When he said, “Whoa to you who are rich, you have already received your reward” (Luke 6:24), he was simply explaining how the real world works. Greed always creates resistance, which

always leads to enmity and collapse. When Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) tried to fake their kindness and generosity but were found out, their world shattered and they died of shock.

Gandhi was easily the most famous and powerful man in India. Because he was obviously holy, many thousands of Indian women gave him their jewelry. Yet when he died, all he owned was a pair of sandals, a pair of spectacles, two cloths and one staff. Martin Luther King said “The greatest Christian of the modern world was a man who never embraced Christianity”. Eli Stanley Jones, the most famous missionary in India, said, “When Christendom went astray, God raised up a Hindu... Gandhi the Hindu calls us to the Cross”. “The only Christian in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a Hindu”.

Gandhi embraced the wisdom and truth in all traditions. He insisted that all of his followers listen every day to, or at least read from, the scriptures of all the major traditions. This is the Gandhian spiritual discipline I try to practice. I am not good at it. But I am not at all discouraged. It is the straight and narrow path, to the beloved community.

A sixth factor is that we rely on violence.

The Prophet Eissa said “Resist evil, but not with violence” (Matt 5:39) (This was originally mis-translated as “Resist not evil.”[4]) Because righteous violence is still itself evil. In the 66 AD Jewish rebellion, over one million Jews were killed, but not a single Jewish follower of Eissa – they had all left Judea because they recognized that, although the cause of the rebels was just, their violence against the Romans was still evil.

But since Constantine, Christians have been free to kill others, including other Christians. Every Sunday my church bulletin says “Pray For Those Serving Our Country,” and lists all our parishioners in the US armed forces. Sadly, the reality is that since Vietnam they have been defending, not our country, but our empire. Violence is used mostly to “defend” the wealth of the greedy.

A seventh factor is that our technology has increased much faster than our wisdom or ethics.

Technology has increased the power of weapons exponentially. So our ability to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants has decreased exponentially. From stones to clubs to spears to arrows to guns to cannons to bombs to nukes. From Cain killing Abel to Hiroshima.

Most of the scientists on the Manhattan project

intended their bomb be used only if Hitler developed one. They became “the sorcerer’s apprentices” (I will share that story soon). Robert Oppenheimer, the ‘father of the atomic bomb,’ lost his security clearance because he opposed allowing any national government, including ours, to possess them. “We have become scientific giants, and moral midgets.” (Arthur Koestler) During the 1990s, I heard Charles Schwartz, Professor of Physics at UC Berkeley, say, “100% of the current jobs in physics are working, directly or indirectly, for the Dept of Defense.” He was attempting to warn his students of where our technology is taking us (I am a graduate from UC Berkeley in Physics).

The idea of a Hippocratic Oath for scientists was raised by Joseph Rotblat in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995. The Student Pugwash Group proposed, “... I will not use my education for any purpose intended to harm human beings or the environment... I recognize that individual responsibility is the first step on the path to peace.”

I don’t know if correcting all seven of these factors is necessary for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Establishing a genuine democracy seems essential to me, in order to get our greed under political control. I suspect we need to at least address each of these seven factors.

Different Americans have different gifts. My gifts seem to be in spirituality, in nonviolence, and in science (physics), but not so much in political strategy. I have been working in these three areas for most of my life. I shall continue to discern to what specific role am I called? What are your gifts? To what role are you called?

Martin Luther King said we have only two choices, “nonviolence or nonexistence”. Violence is not an option. It leads to more and more violence until it leads to war. War leads to more and more powerful weapons until they lead to nuclear weapons. Nuclear war leads to nonexistence. Our only option is to learn to resolve our conflicts without violence. This is called “nonviolence”. It is not easy. But we will learn it. Or we will not survive. The master of nonviolence was, and is, Gandhi. He offers us our best chance of survival.

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# Responsibility to Protect

**Mel Duncan**

A few years ago I was walking along West 15<sup>th</sup> street near Loring Park when a panicked young Native American man ran by me and into the street. Immediately a Minneapolis Police squad car pulled next to me. One officer jumped out, tackled the young man in the middle of the street and started pounding his face into the pavement. I walked into the street telling the officer that he was using excessive force and that I had his badge number. The other officer quickly escorted me back to the curb while informing me that I would be arrested for interfering with the arrest. I stood yelling while the beating continued for the next few minutes.

As I stood on the curb at 38<sup>th</sup> and Chicago the other night (where Mr Floyd was killed), I recalled that incident. What if I had refused to leave the middle of 15th street? I might have been clubbed or tased or arrested. But would the young man have been spared the beating?

As I looked at the eight feet between the curb and the spot where George Floyd was murdered, I wondered what if the people on the curb, when their yelling went unheeded, had refused former Officer Thao’s demands to stay away? I am not blaming anyone, but imagine if someone had stepped nonviolently into the street and lay down as closely to Mr. Floyd as possible? They probably would have been sprayed or clubbed and/or arrested, but would that act of civil disobedience have created enough of a diversion to get former Officer Chauvin to remove his knee? What if two people had lain in the street? What about three?

For the past 20 years I have helped create Nonviolent PeaceForce (NP), an international nongovernmental organization with Special Consultative Status at the UN. Our specially trained unarmed protection teams are invited by civil society to areas of violent conflict to protect civilians and work with local groups to

protect themselves and prevent further violence. NP's peacekeepers have saved thousands of lives in South Sudan, Iraq and Sri Lanka among other places.

In addition to being nonviolent, we work on a nonpartisan basis that means, we protect people from assaults by rebel groups as well as violence perpetrated by the government. Strategically we use a series of nonviolent methods that have proven to be effective in some very violent situations including state based violence.

Several applications of what is called unarmed civilian protection could apply in Minneapolis but let me focus on one. What if people were trained to directly and nonviolently intervene when they encounter police brutality?

We cannot wait any longer for reforms and police training. If a government cannot or will not protect its citizens then civilians have a responsibility to protect. I am not advocating for armed vigilantes. Such violence will promote more violence. And as NP has demonstrated in war zones, disciplined nonviolent interventions are more effective.

When encountering police brutality there are effective steps that one can take to intervene. In such interventions, straight white people will encounter far less risk than people of color or others who are marginalized.

Depending on the severity of the abuse, these steps have to be taken very quickly or even skipped: 1. Center oneself. This could include a deep breath or quick prayer. 2. Assess the situation. What is the danger? Who's in danger? 3. Delegate. Ask others to video and report. 4. Recognize the humanity of all involved. 5. Try to de-escalate the violence. 6. Create a distraction for the police. 7. Nonviolently place your body between the perpetrator and the victim or get as close to the victim as possible. This usually means quickly going to the pavement. Invite others to join you.

People can be trained to take on this responsibility. Granted, they wouldn't be everywhere but they could stop some of the violence. And such disciplined actions can ignite people's imaginations.

It is but one tool in a new approach for real community safety and protection. Interveners risk injury and arrest, but as Congressman John Lewis observed, "Sometimes you have to put yourself in harm's way. You may stir up some violence but you will not engage in the violence." And you could save a life.

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## INTERVIEW: 'The Only Thing We Are Challenging is Inequality'

**Martin Macwan**

**The protests, which are still ongoing, must have inspired hope that people can unite for a common cause.**

Martin Macwan, a Dalit human rights activist in Gujarat, has organized a gathering on 25 December 2019 to take to the public a message about how the amended citizenship law and proposed nationwide National Register of Citizens negates the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution. Ultimately, these two policies—one proposed, the other already a law—negate the message and life's work of the first law minister, BR Ambedkar. Macwan tells Indian Cultural Forum and NewsClick how exactly this is taking place.

**Why did you pick 25 December for your event?**

I picked 25 December because it is also Manusmriti burning day, [Manusmriti Dahan Divas] the day Ambedkar set afire the Manusmriti. It struck me that the ground, or justification, pleaded by the government in both the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA), is of religious persecution. We are doing nothing about the religious persecution taking place in our own country and we want to solve the problems of other countries. We want to tell people about this double standard. Not many in rural areas know what the CAA and the NRC are all about. We

want to explain why we consider it a direct attack on the Constitution.

**Why did you choose this moment?**

This moment, after the clearing of the amended citizenship bill and the proposed NRC is the first time that it has become clear what exactly the challenge before us is.

The only weapon the Dalits, the minorities and all marginalized people have is the Constitution, in particular Article 14 which enshrines equality as a fundamental right. If that is taken away, there would be very serious consequences. The secular character of the country is under attack and it would harm everybody.

When Ambedkar set the Manusmriti afire, it was 1927. He and his followers came under virulent attack from time to time such proposals. Now, at this time, police brutality is peaking. Does this worry you?

Frankly, I am not worried. For the last 40 years I have worked in this field and yes, this is a most difficult time. I do sense that the police are a little nervous about the whole thing [the protests against the CAA/NRC]. But I told them too, that this is our job, to inform people what the bills are all about. We cannot sit silent in such an emergency situation. This is no small measure but the biggest challenge to the Constitution and the character of the country. The majoritarian sentiment would dictate that CAA and NRC only affect the Muslims, but tomorrow it can be someone else, it will be the Dalits, the women, and other marginal sections...

**What exactly is the message you're going to try and disseminate?**

The Prime Minister, without a pause or change in the inflection of his voice, keeps telling lies. How can you trust the people in power when they do this? We have severe malnourishment in India, highest-ever unemployment. What is more, among tribals the malnourishment is static at 61%, significantly higher than in the general population. This is why the North-east is angry about the CAA and NRC. It is also a build-up of rage over time. For, the worst-off communities in India are the tribals. See what happened in Gujarat, first for the Narmada [Dam project] and then for Sardar Patel's statue, we drove out the tribals. The tribals cannot even set up shops near the statue to secure their livelihood. This is the state of the poor. We live in one country which is really two nations. Come to rural areas, where only caste rules, where the wishes of the majority create a situation of crisis for the poor every day.

**How would you simplify these complex situations, and two complex laws, with a long history unique to every region, which serve different interests? How do you get people to relate to the dangers of its provisions?**

This is something I have learned from the rural people, with whom I have worked and lived since the 1980s. I was a student of St Josephs' College, dreaming of doing my Masters and PhD, but I had a funny professor of political science. He said that I can get a degree but if I want knowledge I will have to stay in "real" India. He told me that once I get this knowledge, it will be irreversible; and so, it has been for 40 years. I never pursued my studies after my bachelors. I now understand why Gandhi told Gokhale to hold off on his plan to start a newspaper until he had seen what India is like.

Last month I was in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. I saw the living conditions in Jharkhand, I saw people who roll bidis to make a living in West Bengal—you roll 1,000 bidis to earn just Rs 120. So, we talk about development, we unleash dreams with no boundaries, but the gap between the haves and the have-nots is ever-widening. Development and inequality co-exist in a cruel reality in India and that is why I am propagating the truth about this law. Yes, we use a language that people can understand to do so, we have prepared a six-page note that explains everything.

**Is this not the job of the government; to explain what new laws can mean?**

It is. And it is the job of educators. It is also the job of schools, but we all know what is going on with school curricula. No more research is happening in universities. This is also why people don't know anything about these new laws and proposals. I have taken up a study of how primary education has changed over the last 60-70 years. I already notice is that stories that painted a picture of communal harmony are missing in our text books. What people of my generation were taught 45 years back is now completely absent in our school books. We know school curricula create a new generation and inducts them into citizenship. What kind of lesson are we teaching them today?

**Does it worry you that your message will not get through, somehow, or that there will be polarization as a result of your gathering?**

A few months back I was in Delhi University to

deliver a talk and the professor who had invited me got very worried when I arrived. 'The room is full of RSS people,' he told me. He said that they had trouble earlier in such situations. But when I spoke, there was no trouble—the students simply said that they had not known about many things I spoke of. For example, about our study of Untouchability, in which we found that 90.2% of Dalits—who are Hindus—are not allowed to enter temples in Gujarat. So, what does Hindutva or Hindu Rashtra mean for them, when within religion they face so much discrimination? The problem lies with the Dalit Christians in Kerala, with the Goans, who have separate cemeteries by caste. The very fact that we talk about religious persecution means that we don't understand religion.

### **Why do you say that?**

Because religion has become a platform to practice politics of subjugation. That is where the problem is.

Now, the home minister has repeatedly said that the Muslims are safe, that their citizenship will not be challenged by the NRC...

The question is, what does one do with the other things the home minister has said? For example, in Parliament, he said that the CAA will provide relief to lakhs of [persecuted non-Muslim] immigrants, but then when the figures were revealed, it turned out that Pakistan—which we are so concerned about—had hardly sent any immigrants to India in the last few decades. Besides, we know that Bangladesh and Sri Lanka make up 90% of our refugees, but they have been left out of the CAA.

So, you have a government that creates a mountain out of a mole hill, which continuously creates havoc to color the minds of people with communal feelings. I met police, judiciary and other government officials throughout my travels and saw high levels of prejudice and fear. This is the kind of system that is being built in India today. If you create divides, don't let even young people intermingle, socialize, have friends across religions, and then talk about the majority all day, then, ultimately, everybody becomes a minority.

### **In what way does everybody become a minority?**

Well, because even all Hindus are not equal. Not only temple entry, we have found in our study, published in book form as *Bhed Bharat*, that in 65% of villages, those Dalits who have been elected as village representatives, are denied access to common water sources. Many are made to sit on segregated

chairs, use separate teacups. Now look at backward classes or the OBC section of our society. For a 500-village study of malnutrition we are doing, we find many problems. For instance, the government of Gujarat claims that it has undergone the most "progress". It says that 2.76 lakh Gujaratis are malnourished, but the government's own National Family Health Survey (NFHS) says that Gujarat has 10 times higher malnourishment than that.

Even though the NFHS is not a door-to-door survey of all homes but a sample survey...

Yes, even then it shows 10 times higher malnourishment than the state government admits. The interesting thing is that in non-tribal areas, it is the OBC children who are most malnourished. Now, OBCs are 40% of our society's population. So, we say that we are all Hindus, but the fact is that the stratifications in Hindu society are deep.

It could be said, as a counter, that the divisions within Hinduism are an 'internal' matter of the Hindus, who unite, at least on occasion, for certain projects...

The idea is that after Independence we are all guided by the Constitution. Recall that Gandhi and Ambedkar thought about this issue differently. Gandhi felt that for the nation to change, it is the conscience, or consciousness, that must change. But Ambedkar felt that you cannot govern by conscience alone. You need rules and regulations. A system has to be in place. You need a judiciary... The idea of "sin" as a violation of a moral code is very different from the idea of "crime" as a violation of a guaranteed right.

### **What, then, can be an alternative and more accurate way to frame these debates on CAA and NRC?**

The alternative we always suggest is that people and governments keep their religion in their private sphere. You cannot have a public religion favored by a democratic society. Unfortunately, the government is trying to marginalize the Constitution itself. The Constitution guarantees and confirms this essential separation, but the government is trying to do away with it.

### **And this is why you have called people together to discuss Ambedkar in the context of this new law and the NRC?**

This is why we have called our first meeting of village leaders, 500 select people, to put before them this discussion and to have a debate so as to arrive at a program of action. For this, we are working with everybody; with people from all walks of life. Our definition of 'attendee' is anyone who believes in

equality and practices equality. [Such people can] come with us if they are ready to share. Our only challenge, therefore, is to inequality.

The protests, which are still ongoing, must have inspired hope that people can unite for a common cause. They did turn violent in places but on the whole the outpouring was intense and dedicated to the idea of equality.

Yes, this aspect does inspire faith, especially because it has come from the students, the youth. Right now, because of social media, people are seeing through the aura that has been painted around certain institutions, around the situation in the whole country in fact. For instance, people know that JNU has students from very poor backgrounds, no matter what the government says. Students of JNU get to meet, and

visit each other's homes. They have seen the reality about their fellow classmate's journeys to the big city. Many students have learned a lot from self-experience. It has matured them. They saw in CAA and NRC the stirrings of something terribly bad.

Fundamentally, even if they cannot articulate it as such, they have realized that secularism is for everybody not just minorities?

Yes, young people realize that if we are talking about modernization then we have to change our way of thinking as well. Orthodoxy and modernity cannot live together.

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*MARTIN MACWAN; Dalit human rights activist in Gujarat, India.*

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## *Thirty Years in the History of the World and the History of AMAN's World*

**Compiled by Clarence J. Dias and M. Abdus Sabur**

- 1990 February,   Dissolution of the USSR.
- 1990 February,   Nelson Mandela released from imprisonment lasting 27&1/2 years.
- 1990 November,   AMAN was formed.
- 1991 July,        The Bush/Gorbachev Summit negotiates the strategic arms reduction treaty.
- 1992 February,   Bush and Yeltsin proclaim a formal end to the Cold War.
- 1992 December,   The North American Free Trade Agreement was signed.
- 1993 October,     China breaks the nuclear test moratorium.
- 1993 November,   the European Union was formed.
- 1994 April,       Thousands killed in the Rwanda massacres.
- 1994 October,     US sends armed forces to the Persian Gulf.
- 1994 November,   Russians attack the secessionist Republic of Checheniya.
- 1995 April,       Federal Government building in Oklahoma City is bombed in a terrorist attack.
- 1995 September,   France explodes a nuclear device in the Pacific.
- 1996 March,       UN Tribunal charges war crimes by Bosnian Muslims and Croats.
- 1996 July,        terrorist attack in the city park during the Atlanta Olympics
- 1996 September,   Militant Taliban leaders seize the Afghan capital Kabul.
- 1997 January,     Car bomb outside Algiers cafe kills more than 30 and injures many. Hours earlier, Islamic militants massacred 36 villagers south of capital, decapitating some.

- 1998 May, India conducts 3 atomic tests despite World condemnation.
- 1999 June, Conservatives Gain Ground in Europe. Win votes to become majority in European Parliament. Result is a crushing defeat for center-left governments.
- 2000, AMAN's General Assembly in Bangkok, Thailand
- 2000 February, Reformists win control of the Iranian parliament for the first time since the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- 2000 May, Former Indonesian president Suharto under house arrest, charged with corruption and abuse of power.
- 2001 September, September 11 terrorist attacks on the US.
- 2001 October, US launches the "Global War on Terror" with daily bombings in Afghanistan.
- 2002 February, India's worst Hindu-Muslim violence in a decade rocked the state of Gujarat after a Muslim mob fire-bombed a train, killing Hindu activists. Hindus retaliated, and more than 1,000 died in the bloodshed.
- 2002 April, International Criminal Court wins UN ratification; U.S. refuses to ratify.
- 2003, AMAN's General Assembly in Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand
- 2003 March, U.S. and Britain launch war against Iraq.
- 2004 April, U.S. troops launch offensive in Falluja in response to killing and mutilation on March 31 of four U.S. civilian contractors.
- 2004 September, Chechen terrorists take about 1,200 schoolchildren and others hostage in Beslan, Russia; 340 people die when militants detonate explosives.
- 2004 December, Enormous tsunami devastates Asia; 200,000 killed.
- 2005 July, London hit by Islamic terrorist bombings, killing 52 and wounding about 700. It is Britain's worst attack since World War II.
- 2005 October, A 7.6 earthquake centered in the Pakistani-controlled part of the Kashmir region kills more than 80,000 and leaves an estimated 4 million homeless .
- 2005 August, The Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) sign a peace accord to end their nearly 30-year-long civil war.
- 2006, AMAN's General Assembly in Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2006 January, Militant group Hamas wins 74 of 132 seats in Palestinian legislative elections.
- 2006 February, A Danish newspaper challenges taboos against illustrations of Muhammad by printing several negative cartoons depicting him. Angry demonstrators throughout the Muslim world smash windows, set fires, and burn flags of Denmark and other nations whose newspapers reprint the cartoons. July, 2006 India test-launches a missile with a range of 1,800 miles
- 2006 July, More than 200 people die and hundreds more are wounded when a series of bombs explode on commuter trains in Mumbai, India during the evening rush hour
- 2006 July and October, North Korea test fires missiles over the Sea of Japan and explodes a nuclear device in the North Korean mountains.
- 2006 January – December, In Iraq, a coalition of Shiites and Kurds dominates the new government. Sectarian violence wracks the country, killing tens of thousands, with fatality rates rising throughout the year; some observers describe the situation as a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites.
- 2006 July, Hezbollah, a Lebanese militant group, fires rockets into Israel.

- 2007 February, The International Court of Justice rules that the slaughter of some 8,000 Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs in Srebrenica in 1995 was genocide (Feb. 26).
- 2007 February, The U.S. begins its "surge" of some 30,000 troops to Iraq to stem increasingly deadly attacks by insurgents and militias.
- 2007 March, David Hicks, an Australian, pleads guilty to providing material support to al Qaeda. He's the first Guantánamo Bay detainee to be convicted by a military commission.
- 2007 August, Two pairs of truck bombs explode about five miles apart in the remote, northwestern Iraqi towns of Qahtaniya and Jazeera, killing at least 500 members of the minority Yazidi community, making it the single deadliest insurgent attack of the war.
- 2008 August, As many as 90 Afghan civilians, 60 of them children, die in an airstrike by coalition troops in the western village of Azizabad. It is one of the deadliest airstrikes since the war began in 2001, and the deadliest for civilians. The U.S. military refutes the figures, which were confirmed by the UN.
- 2008 September, Asif Ali Zardari, leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party and the widower of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, wins 481 out of 702 votes in the two houses of Parliament to become president.
- 2008 November, More than 170 people are killed and about 300 are wounded in a series of attacks on several landmarks and commercial hubs in Mumbai, India. Indian officials say ten gunmen carried out the attack. It took Indian forces three days to end the siege. Deccan Mujahedeen, a previously unknown group, claims responsibility for the attacks. Pakistan officials deny any involvement in the attacks, but some Indian officials hint that they suspect Pakistani complicity.
- 2009 June, As a signal of the United States' diminishing role in Iraq, and in compliance with the status of forces agreement between the U.S. and Iraq, U.S. troops complete their withdrawal from Iraqi cities, including Baghdad, and transfer the responsibility of securing the cities to Iraqi troops. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki names June 30 "National Sovereignty Day" and declares a public holiday.
- 2009 July, Rioting in Urumqi, China between two ethnic groups—Muslim Uighurs and Han Chinese—kills at least 156 people.
- 2009 October, Two suicide bombings in Baghdad, Iraq kill at least 155 people and wound 500 others. These are the deadliest attacks in the country since 2007, and raise the question of the safety of Iraq.
- 2009 December, President Barack Obama announces that the U.S., China, India, Brazil, and South Africa have reached an agreement to combat global warming. The accord that will set up a system for monitoring pollution reduction, require richer nations to give billions of dollars to poorer nations more greatly affected by climate change, and set a goal of limiting the global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius above pre industrial levels by 2050
- 2010 January, After more than a week of intense air strikes, Israeli troops crossed the border into Gaza, launching a ground war against the militant Palestinian group, Hamas. More than 430 Palestinians and 4 Israelis have been killed since the fighting began Dec. 27, 2008.
- 2010 February, Multi-country offensive launched in Afghanistan as thousands of American, Afghan, and British troops storm the city of Marja, Afghanistan in an attempt to destroy the Taliban's latest haven. The attack by the 6,000 troops is the biggest offensive in the country since the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001.
- 2010 February, Multi-country offensive launched in Afghanistan as thousands of American, Afghan, and British troops storm the city of Marja, Afghanistan in an attempt to destroy the Taliban's latest haven. The attack by the 6,000 troops is the biggest offensive in the country since the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001.

- 2010 March, Two female suicide bombers, acting just minutes apart, detonate bombs in two Moscow subway stations, killing at least 39 people. This is the first terrorist attack in the capital city since 2004, when Moscow experienced a string of deadly violence. Authorities attribute the attacks to the mostly Muslim north Caucasus region.
- 2010 April, Militants launch an assault on the United States Consulate in Pakistan. Six Pakistanis are killed and 20 are wounded; no Americans are harmed. At least five suicide bombers mounted the attack, though they were unable to reach the inner area of the compound. Azam Tariq, a spokesperson for the Pakistani Taliban, claims responsibility for the attack, saying they were acting in retaliation to American missile strikes and Pakistani military operations in the area.
- 2011, AMAN's General Assembly in Pattani, Thailand
- 2011 February, Unrest in Middle East Spreads to Bahrain Violence erupts in Bahrain as protesters, inspired by recent events in Egypt and Tunisia, select Feb. 14th as a day of protest to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the National Action Charter. Bahrain is the most recent country facing upheaval among its citizens, mirroring the instability in Yemen, Iran, and Libya.
- 2011 May, Osama bin Laden Is Killed in Pakistan U.S. troops and CIA operatives shoot and kill Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a city of 500,000 people that houses a military base and a military academy. Following a firefight, the troops descend upon the compound and shoot Osama bin Laden after he reportedly refuses to surrender.
- 2011 September, Saudi Arabia Grants Women the Right to Vote King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia grants women the right to vote and run for office in future elections. The new ruling will not go into effect until the next election cycle in 2015. Still, this is a big victory for women in a country where they are not allowed to drive and must have a male chaperone with them in public at all times.
- 2012 March, Vladimir Putin wins the presidential election in Russia, claiming 64% of the vote. It will be his third full term as president of Russia.
- 2012 March, A U.S. soldier goes on a door-to-door rampage in Afghanistan, brutally killing 17 civilians, including nine children.
- 2012 June, Egyptian election officials declare Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, the winner of presidential election.
- 2012 June, Hosni Mubarak, former president of Egypt, is sentenced to life in prison for being an accomplice in the killing of unarmed protesters during the January 2011 demonstrations.
- 2012 August, After 19 years of negotiations, Russia joins as the newest member of the World Trade Organization.
- 2012 September, Armed gunmen storm the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya, and shoot and kill U.S. ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens and three other embassy officials.
- 2012 October, Hugo Chávez is elected to a third term as president of Venezuela.
- 2012 October, In Pakistan, Taliban members shoot 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai in the head and neck. The shooting occurs while Yousafzai is on her way home on a school bus filled with children. She was targeted for her outspokenness against the Taliban and her determination to get an education.
- 2013 April, The Boston Marathon Bombings
- 2013 April, The Rana Plaza Factory in Bangladesh collapses killing 1129 people.
- 2013 June, The UN releases figures that the death toll in the Syrian Civil War is approximately 100,000 about half of whom are citizens.
- 2013 August, Assad uses chemical weapons on his people and others.

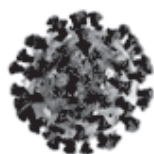
- 2013 December, The death of Nelson Mandela.
- 2014 January, The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as successor to Al Qaeda. ISIS has taken control of large areas of Iraq and Syria and is spreading an extremist violent ideology exemplified by its high-profile beheading of several Westerners.
- 2014 March, The Ebola virus outbreak creates a global epidemic crisis.
- 2014 May, Narendra Modi wins the election and becomes Prime Minister of India
- 2014 September, Pro-democracy protests erupt in Hong Kong
- 2015 January and November, Serious terrorist attacks in Paris rock European concern. The January attack targeted a satirical newspaper, recalling memories of the 2005 Islamic Cartoons unrest . ISIS claimed responsibility for both the attacks.
- 2015 June - July, The European Refugee Crisis hits its peak as tens of thousands of refugees fleeing war-torn Syria, other countries in the Middle East and Africa seek refuge in Europe.
- 2015 June, The US Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional several laws banning same-sex marriage.
- 2015 June, Donald Trump enters the race for the Presidential nomination of the US Republican Party.
- 2015 December, The San Bernardino, California shootings: radical Islamic terror strikes America.
- 2016, AMAN's General Assembly in Malaysia
- 2016 January (BurkinaFaso), March (Brussels), June (Istanbul), July (Nice) and December (Berlin), ISIS terror attacks rock the world.
- 2016 November, Donald Trump wins the US Presidential elections.
- 2016 December, The brutal civil war in Syria approaches its 6-year mark claiming over 400,00 lives and creating more than 5 million refugees.
- 2017 January, Millions of people worldwide join the Women's March in response to the inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States. 420 marches were reported in the U.S. and 168 in other countries, becoming the largest single-day protest in American history and the largest worldwide protest in recent history
- 2017 November, North Korea conducts its 12th ballistic missile test of the year.
- 2017 April, In the Nangarhar airstrike the U.S. drops the largest non-nuclear weapon, at an ISIL base in the Nangarhar Province of eastern Afghanistan.
- 2018 April, President Trump pulled the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear pact.
- 2018 June, Migrant children had been separated from their parents as part of President Trump's "zero tolerance" border policy.
- 2018 June, President Trump traveled to Singapore to meet with North Korea's Kim Jong Un, becoming the first sitting U.S. President to meet with a North Korean leader.
- 2018 December, a deadlock over funding for President Trump's border wall led to a partial shutdown of the federal government, which continued to the end of the year and beyond.
- 2018 December, The MeToo Movement Goes Global. The #MeToo movement took off in the United States last year in the wake of the sexual abuse allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. In 2018, the movement went global as millions came forward to share their stories in: Italy, Spain, France, and in Arab-speaking countries and around the world. The 2018 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to Congolese physician Denis Mukwege and Yazidi assault survivor Nadia Murad "for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict." China, Russia, and sub-Saharan Africa are among the places where the effort to highlight and end sexual abuse and harassment hasn't taken off. The question now is whether the #MeToo movement will make a lasting difference. For that

- to happen, governments, businesses, organizations, and most important, people will all need to change.
- 2019 March, a white supremacist live-streamed his attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, that left fifty-one people dead.
- 2019 May, Narendra Modi won a stunning victory in India's parliamentary elections, as his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) increased its majority amidst the highest voter turnout in Indian history. The size of the victory prompted speculation that Modi would push an aggressive Hindu nationalist agenda.
- 2019 August, Modi rescinds the autonomy that Kashmir had enjoyed since independence and that was enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The move was accompanied by a compulsory curfew and blackout, and the arrests of more than 5,000 people in the Muslim-majority region.
- 2019 December, Indian Parliament passes the Citizenship Amendment Act, a controversial law creating a path to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from elsewhere in South Asia while denying citizenship to Muslims already residing in India.
- 2019 December, The Jamia Milia Islamia Attack. Hundreds of police officers forcefully entered the campus where students were staging a peaceful protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act and detained more than a hundred students during the confrontation with the protesters. The police used batons and tear gas to disperse protesters. The police also entered the university library and washrooms and in the process of the violence ransacked parts of it. About two hundred people were injured and were admitted to AIIMS and the Holy Family Hospital.
- 2019 September, President Trump announced that peace talks with the Taliban were "dead," a position he reversed three months later.
- 2019 December, The US House of Representatives vote to approve 2 Articles of Impeachment of President Donald Trump. The charges will be filed before the Senate in 2020.
- 2019 December, Aung San Suu Kyi appeared at the International Court of Justice in The Hague to deny abundant evidence that Burmese troops had committed genocide against the Rohingya, triggering new calls that she be stripped of her Nobel Peace Prize.
- 2019, Protesters Take to the Street. "The Year of Protests" may be the best summary for 2019. Hong Kong's gained the most attention. But protests rattled many other countries including Algeria (February), Sudan (April), October (Chile, Lebanon and Iraq), and November (Iran). Protests also rocked Bolivia, India, Nicaragua, and Russia. Millions of people continue to risk their lives to make governments responsive to their wishes.
- 2020 January, South Korea and the United States have engaged with a new North Korean regime, run by Kim Jong Il's son Kim Jong Un, though it's unclear whether engagement has deterred North Korean aggression.
- 2020 January, The United Kingdom leaves the European Union.
- 2020 February, The US Senate acquits Trump of impeachment charges.
- 2020 March, Corona virus (Covid-19) outbreak defined as pandemic by the WHO.

# *HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY through AMAN*

AMAN is committed to the most disadvantaged people and communities, irrespective of religion, gender, ethnicity and national identity.

AMAN decided to step forward and take a position against injustice, persecution and human rights violations in general are extremely frequent, and speak in defense of the voiceless.



## **COVID-19 EMERGENCY STATEMENT**

The enactment of extensive lock downs and forced closure of private business activities following the Covid-19 health emergency, and the lack of a welfare plan able to compensate daily earners for their economic losses, created an unprecedented crisis between the poorest of the world.

For this reason, AMAN highlights the urgent necessity for a widespread assessment of needs, and invites community-based organization to get involved in the areas that require an immediate intervention. AMAN also reiterates its commitment in providing relief, in all its forms, where needed.



## **PERSECUTION OF THE UYGHUR COMMUNITY IN XINJIANG**

The enactment of extensive lock downs and forced closure of private business activities following the Covid-19 health emergency, and the lack of a welfare plan able to compensate daily earners for their economic losses, created an unprecedented crisis between the poorest of the world.

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*The full statements are available on AMAN's Facebook page: @AsianMuslimActionNetwork*

# *Asghar Ali Engineer Research Fellowship Program*

## **Introduction:**

Asghar Ali Engineer was a founding President of AMAN who led the organization since its inception in 1990 until his demise in 2013. He was a pioneer and source of inspiration in the promotion of liberative, progressive and compassionate Islam aimed at developing societal harmony and peace. Through his steadfast commitment in combating extremism and communalism has subjected him to attacks and humiliation, he has never been deterred in the continuous struggle to rise awareness and support the liberation of oppressed and discriminated communities.

In memory of his great contribution, AMAN has decided to launch this Fellowship Program to support young scholars to undertake objective research work on issues affecting society in general and the women, religious and ethnic minority communities in particular.

## **Life and contributions of Asghar Ali Engineer**

Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013) was a scholar, activist and writer. His activism and writings spanned many years and encompassed a number of issues including, but not confined to, communalism, gender rights, interfaith understanding, structural and social reform. He is remembered as a creative interpreter of Islam and a champion of secular values enshrined in the Indian constitution.

Asghar Ali Engineer upheld the 3D's Democracy, Diversity and Dialogue essential for any meaningful engagement and cooperation to address common problems and concerns. As a committed and engaged scholar he was concerned with the growing violence and intolerance in society. He made ceaseless efforts to bridge the divide among antagonistic communities towards the development of just and inclusive societies. He also made invaluable contributions to the interpretation of Islamic religious texts and concretized the core humanitarian values of Islam in addressing challenges confronting contemporary with a view to nurturing sustainable development, human rights, justice and peace.

## **Focus of the Fellowship:**

- A) Intra, inter-faith, inter-ethnic understanding and peace,
- B) Democratic, accountable and just governance,
- C) Gender justice and minority rights,
- D) Protection of the environment,
- E) Application of non-violent approaches for conflict transformation.

## **Advisers:**

**Prof. Dr. Amany B. Umar Lubis: Rector of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia**

Assoc. Prof. Noor Aisha Bte Abdul Rahman:  
National University of Singapore

Prof. Chaiwat Satha-Anand: Thammasat University,  
Thailand

Prof. Zenab Banu: Mohan Lal Sukhadia University,  
India

Prof. Kazi Nurul Islam: Dhaka University,  
Bangladesh

**Eligibility:** Masters and PhD Students

**Applications deadline:** 30 November 2020

## **For more information:**

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# 30 YEARS OF AMAN

Readdressing Inequality and Injustice  
and Promoting Peace



AMAN 5th Assembly, 2015; Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia