

Comment

Islam and Inter-Faith Engagement

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Islam is being projected as intolerant of other faiths. This perception of Islam is based on certain selected events, not on Qur'anic teachings or Prophet's *ahadith*. It is one thing to judge a religion by its teachings and another to see it in the light of some instances of intolerance by some individuals. Also, such events are often picked up selectively to suit certain politically motivated assumptions.

First of all it is necessary to closely study the normative and contextual position of Quran. Then we have to study certain historical events of tolerance or intolerance, also in proper historical context. Also, one has to study the Qur'anic approach of engaging with other religions. What Qur'an emphasizes as common with other religions and what it differs with. Does it find anything in common with other religions or totally rejects them? And what is its position where it totally rejects any religion?

Qur'an and other religions

Qur'an was revealed over a period of twenty-three years in two cities Mecca and Madina. The revelations began in Mecca. Mecca was an international trade centre of great significance in that area. The main tribes of Mecca, particularly the Quraysh, were among those carrying on trade with the Roman empire that was predominantly Christian. Then in Madina and in some other parts of Arabia, there were Jews. Thus Arabs were in touch with these two great Biblical religions. Arabs, for various reasons, had refrained from adopting these religions, though few Arabs on the border region had embraced Christianity in its monophysite form, different from Roman version.

In Mecca of course there were no Christians or Jews. The Meccan Arabs were all idol worshippers, having no revealed truth or scripture. The Prophet (pbuh) was born and brought up in Mecca. He rejected idol worship and because of this he faced stiff opposition from his own tribe and close relatives.

Despite severe persecution from his opponents he proposed to his persecutors that ‘for you is your religion and for me is mine’ (109:6). Thus Qur’an never imposed anything on unwilling hearts. Surah revealed in Madina followed the same principle. ‘There is no compulsion in religion – the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break’. (2:256)

Thus Qur’an lays down a principle here: there is no compulsion in religion. Religion has something to do with ones heart and soul and appeals to ones inner conscience; and thus can never be imposed. All Qur’an does is to make right path distinct from path of error and leave it to the people to accept the right path or that of error.

The Meccans did not possess any higher truth; they were immersed in superstition woven around various gods and goddesses. The upper class Meccan merchants were by and large hedonists – making super profits, enjoying life and hardly cared for morality and truth. The masses suffered due to poverty and neglect and found some solace in superstitious beliefs. The Qur’an tried to address this situation in Mecca and exhorted the Meccans to believe in revealed truth and not to consider this worldly life as an end in itself. The upper class Meccan merchants ridiculed the very idea of any revealed truth. Material pleasure was an end in itself for them.

Other religions were there i.e. Judaism and Christianity in the area. Qur’an termed Meccans who possessed no higher truth as unbelievers (*kafirs* – literally those who hide truth) and Christians and Jews who possessed revealed scriptures as *ahl al-Kitab* (i.e. people of the book). The Qur’an accepts all Biblical prophets from Adam to Christ and calls them all either as *anbiya*’ (plural of *nabi* – prophet) or *rusul* (plural of *rasul* – messenger).

In fact Qur’an requires Muslims to believe in all the prophets and forbids them to believe in some and not in others. Thus Qur’an says: ‘Those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers and desire to make a distinction between Allah and His messengers and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others; and desire to take a course in between – these are truly disbelievers and We have prepared for disbelievers an abasing chastisement’ (4:150-51). That one should not make distinction between one prophet and the other is repeated in verses like 2:136, 2:285 and 3:86.

Thus Qur’an accepts truth content of all previous religions as this truth was brought by Allah’s messengers. Qur’an mentions various prophets by name in chapters like ‘The Family of al-Imran’ (chapter 3); ‘Yunus’, ‘Jonah’ (chapter 10); ‘Ibrahim – Abraham’ (chapter 14); ‘Al-

Qasas', 'The Narrative' (chapter 28) and so on. The running thread of the Qur'an is the concept of what many Qur'anic scholars like Shah Waliyullah, Maulana Azad and others have called *wahdat al-din* i.e. unity of religions.

Shah Waliyullah has developed this concept in his *opus magnum Hujjat Allah-i- al-Balighah*.¹ He extensively argues on the basis of Qur'an which says, 'To every nation We appointed acts of devotion; which they observe, so let them not dispute with thee in the matter, and call to thy Lord. Surely thou art on a right guidance.' (22:61). This is again repeated in the verse 2:148 which says, 'Everyone has a direction to which he turns (himself), so vie with one another in good deeds.'

The clear implication of this verse is that there are different directions (and also different ways) of saying ones prayer. That is not the essence, it at best is symbolic. However, what is of substance is good deeds. Thus different communities may continue to pursue their ways and directions of prayer but what is more important is to excel each other in good deeds.

The Qur'an has expressed this in yet another way in verse 5:48 wherein it says: 'For every one of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie one with another in virtuous deeds'.

This verse clearly implies that Allah did not create all human beings as one community but created them as different sects and communities with distinct ways. If Allah had willed He could have created them all as one community but He did not do so to test them whether they can live in peace and harmony despite these differences and vie one with the other in good deeds.

Thus Qur'an clearly accepts plurality of religions and ways of life and different laws and treats it as a challenge for humanity to live and coexist with tolerance towards each other and strengthen forces of peace and moral order. Values and moral order is much more basic than differences of faith and devotion. So Qur'an in no way adopts hostile attitude towards other religions.

It also exhorts its followers 'Abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance. Thus to every people have We made their deeds fair-seeming.' (6:109)

¹ See chapter on 'Essence of religions is one and laws and ways are different' in Shah Waliyullah *Al-Hujjat al-Balighah* (Deoband, India, nd) vol. I. pp-212-16.

In this verse Qur'an adopts very practical view towards other belief systems. It says one should not abuse those who worship other than Allah as they will also abuse Allah out of ignorance and thus it would lead to conflict or violence and spirit of coexistence will be destroyed. It then makes very important statement that for every people or community we have made their deeds fair-seeming i.e. every people think their way of belief and their way of living is best. Let everyone believe what they want to believe and all of you will ultimately return to Him and He will decide who was right and who was wrong.

This is very practical approach to maintain peace and promote coexistence in the world as world is plural and any belief system which exerts its superiority is bound to result in conflict. Each religion and religious belief system is unique. There may be outward differences but there is inward unity and it is this inward unity which is emphasized by the Qur'an on the basis that all religions have been brought by Allah's prophets and each people have their own law and their own road. According to ones hadith Allah has sent in all 1,24000 prophets and he has sent His prophet's to all nations (13:7).

It is interesting to note that on the basis of the verse 13:7 many *sufi* saints in India maintained that Allah must have sent His prophets to India too. How can he forget a great country like India? Thus, they concluded that Ram and Krishna who are highly revered in India, might have been guides sent by Allah to Hindus. Mazhar Jan-i-Janan, a great *sufi* saint of Qadiriya silsila in 18th century India had cogently argued that Hindus are monotheists as according to Hindu *Shashtra* (scriptures) *Ishwar* (god) is *nirankar* and *nirgun* (i.e. without shape and without attributes) and, according to Mazhar Jan-i-Janan, it is highest form of *tawheed* (i.e. oneness of God). He also argues we should not take Hindus to be kafirs just because they worship idols.

He then argues that *kafir* is one who possesses no truth as pre-Islamic Arabs possessed none and refused to accept it when it was revealed to the Prophet (pbuh) and hence they were denounced as kafirs. But Hindus possess truth in the form of Bedas (Vedas) and Hindu scriptures do not prescribe idol worship. It is popular practice among Hindus who cannot conceive of abstract God and hence need idols to reach God who has no shape or attributes. Thus, according to Mazhar Jan-i-Janan these idols are like Sheikh for sufis who act as a guide to reach God.²

² See *Mirza Jan-i-Janan ke Khutut* tr. From Persian into Urdu by Khaliq Anjm (Deli, 1989) pp-131. And also see pp- 131-34.

Thus the basis of inner unity of all religions provides very helpful attitude for living together and respecting each others faith. There were other religious thinkers in India who promoted mutual understanding. The most important thinker was Dara Shikoh who studied Hindu religion through its original sources. Dara Shikoh was a Mughal prince appointed as successor to the throne of India by his illustrious father Shah Jahan but was defeated by Aurangzeb, his brother, who became the emperor of India.

Dara Shikoh translated *The Upanishads* from Sanskrit into Persian and named it *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Great Mystery). He argued in this Persian translation that Hindus are monotheists and he said after Qur'an he found concept of *tawheed* in *Upanishads*. He maintains that the Qur'anic verses 56:77-79 refer to *Upanishads*. He feels certain that the hidden book (*kitab-i-maknun*) is a reference to this very ancient book.³ Dara's *Majma'ul Bahrayn* is a classical work of Islam's engagement with other religions in India.

In this book Dara Shikoh compares religious terminology of Islam with Hinduism and conclusively shows that difference is of language, not of actual ideas behind it. He often refers to Hindus as *muwahhidun-i-Hind* i.e. monotheists of India. He says that monotheists of India also believe in *qiyamat-i-kubra* (i.e. the Great Day of Judgment) and in Hindu scriptures it is referred to as *mahapralay*. According to Dara Shikoh Hindus also believe in heaven and hell and that after residing in heaven and hell *mahapralay* will occur. He also quotes verses from Qur'an like 72:9, 34:79, 68:39, 55:26-27 and 72:9 to prove his point.⁴

Dara Shikoh also compares the concept of *mukti* with the *sufi* concept of *fana fi' Allah* i.e. annihilation in Allah as ultimate liberation and quotes the verse from Qur'an 72:9. He then throws detailed light on the concept of *mukti* (liberation) in Hindu religion and considers *brahmada* (the universe) as the God. According to him *brahmada* in Islam is referred to as *Alam-i-Kubra* which manifestation of Allah.⁵

Thus there have been very positive efforts by some Muslim thinkers to engage with other religions. They upheld the Qur'anic spirit in this regard. While the Qur'an differs from Christians and Jews on

³ See Introduction to Dara Shikoh's *Majma'ul Bahrayn* (Co-mingling of Two Oceans) by M.Mahfuz al-Haq (reprinted by The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1982), pp-13.

⁴ See Asghar Ali Engineer 'A Muslim View of Hinduism' presented at a seminar in Glasgow University, Scotland.

⁵ *Majma'ul Bahrayn*, *op.cit.*, pp-106-07 quoted in Asghar Ali Engineer, *ibid*.

certain crucial points, yet advises Muslims to engage with them in a manner which will promote understanding, not conflict. Thus Qur'an says, 'And argue not with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) except by what is best.' And this verse further emphasizes commonness among these religions when it says, 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.' (29:46)

Again emphasizing commonness between Islam and people of the book, Qur'an says, 'O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but Allah and that we shall not associate aught with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah: bear witness. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness, we are Muslims.'

The Prophet wrote letters to Heracleus in the year 6 A.H. (Bukhari 1:1) and similar letters were written to other potentates among whom was Muqauqis, the king of Egypt. According to Maulana Muhammad Ali, 'In this verse the Jews and the Christians are called upon the basic principles of the faith of Islam. The reference in the sentence *some of us shall not take others for lords* is to the practice prevailing then among Jews and Christians, and at present among Muslims too, to take religious leaders as invested with divine powers, which is more clearly enunciated in 9:31: 'They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah (9:31)'.⁶

We find in the Qur'an verse like 2:136 which states, 'Say, we believe in Allah and (in) that which has been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Abraham, and Ishmael and Issac and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Moses and Jesus, 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.' (2:136)

This is very significant verse which shows commonness between these faiths and respect in which Muslims should hold all these prophets and are told not to make any distinction between one prophet and the other. It is part of their belief and one must act accordingly. Those who show any distinction cannot be true Muslims.

However, there are verses in the Qur'an which some can cite to show differences from Jews and Muslims and Christians too. Thus, regarding Jews, verse in the Qur'an states, 'Thou wilt certainly find the most violent of people in enmity against the believers to be the Jews and the idolaters; and thou wilt find nearest in friendship to the believers to

⁶ *The Holy Qur'an* tr. By Maulana Muhammad Ali, Lahore, 1973, p.150 (footnote 446).

be those who say, We are Christians. That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not proud.’ (5:82)

Why Christians are described as friends and Jews as violent the reason is clearly explained. It is not because Jewish religion is more inimical to Islam and Christianity less so. Reason is more about political struggle between Muslims and Jews. The Holy Prophet had tried his best to woo Jews when he migrated to Madina. He entered into a covenant with them and gave them full freedom to follow their own religion. He even prayed in the direction of Jerusalem. But Jews never took kindly to the Prophet nor to the Muslims.

They saw Prophet and Muslims as ones who were dominating Madina over which they had hegemony till then. The Meccan Muhajirs also were expert traders and the Jews feared these migrants will capture their trade. The Jews also often acted as arbiters between Aus and Khazraj, the two main tribes of Madina.

The Jews violated the covenant and conspired with the *kuffar* (unbelievers) of Mecca who attacked Madina. As per the covenant the Jews should have cooperated with the Muslims in defending Madina. Instead they helped Meccan *kuffar* and thus earned enmity with the Muslims. On the other hand Christians so far had cooperated with Muslims. The Negus of Abyssinia had given refuge to Muslim migrants to Ethiopia before they migrated to Madina. Also, when a Christian delegation from Najran met the Prophet (pbuh) led by Abdul Masih, he (Prophet) met them inside his mosque and Prophet treated them with respect.

The verse also refers to Christian priests and monks who were not proud and always engaged in worshipping God and so there was no question of any political clash. So controversy with Jews and calling them violent in enmity is not on account of their religion but on account of their socio-economic and political clash with Muslims in Madina. The Jews of Madina never extended their hand of friendship towards Muslims despite all sincere efforts.

At one level the Qur’an treats all human beings on an equal plane whatever their creed or colour or nation or tribe. It considers all as equally honourable. Thus a verse in Qur’an declares, ‘And surely We have honored the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We provide them with good things, and We have made them to excel highly most of those whom We have created.’ (17:70)

Here all human beings are equal. Qur’an also exhorts Muslims not to discriminate between people on any ground – race, language, nation etc. All colours, languages and races are signs of God. Thus says the Qur’an ‘And of His signs is the creation of heavens and the earth and

the diversity of your tongues and colours.’ (30:22). Thus black colour is as much creation of Allah as white and Arabic as much as other languages. So no one should claim superiority over the other.

The Qur’an also takes very practical view that all human beings cannot believe in one religion or the other. They are bound to incline towards different faiths. It poses question to the Prophet ‘If thy Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Will thou then force them till they are believers?’ (10:99). In another verse Qur’an puts the same thing little differently: May be thou will kill thyself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they believe not in this announcement.’ (18:6) Read these two above verses with ‘there is no compulsion in religion’ (2:256) and Qur’anic approach in plurality of faiths becomes very clear.

The Qur’an nowhere intends that all should accept Islam. It is not practical at all. Thus the only way is to ensure freedom of faith, on one hand, and harmonious coexistence, on the other. The truth of this assertion is being witnessed in the contemporary world. Plurality of faiths is on the increase mainly due to economic migrations from poorer underdeveloped to highly developed nations.

Islam and western world

At one time Europe and North America were mono-religious, mono-cultural though Europe was multi-lingual. Today both Europe and North America have become multi-religious and they have developed a theory of multi-culturalism as people of different religions and cultures are on the increase and they are substantial minorities in these regions now.

Among others Muslims are the largest minority both in Europe and in North America. Naturally it leads to religious tensions. In European history there have been political clashes between Muslims and Christians. Crusades are part of European history and it is on account of these crusades that stereotype ‘sword in one hand and Qur’an in the other’ persists in the European psyche even today. And thanks to the ongoing conflict between USA and the Middle East, this conflict has still not been resolved.

If anything it is getting exacerbated in recent times and 9/11 attack has further intensified it. The extremists among Muslims resort to violence in response to violence by the West in the Middle East and it has become a vicious circle. Strong prejudices have been created against Islam in this region. The Muslim extremists invoke slogan of *jihad* (wrongly of course) to commit violence in western countries and this strengthens the stereotype that Islam is religion of violence and war and does not want to co-exist with other religions, especially Christianity.

We have seen above how wrong this impression is. But this is very widespread impression throughout the non-Muslim world. What happens in history cannot be ascribed to Islam. I have already discussed in detail elsewhere⁷ that what happens in history is empirical reality, not religious truth and that religious teachings should be compared with religious teachings and history of religion with history of another religion and not with teachings of that religion.

Islam always coexisted with Judaism and Christianity peacefully on religious plane though there were clashes between Muslims and Christians in medieval ages (and not between Islam and Christianity). These clashes were among the ruling classes and not among Muslim and Christian masses. The western press projects clash of interests as clash of religions and, on the other hand, the Muslim 'fundamentalists'⁸ too make it appear as religious clash.

There is no clash of civilizations either as Prof. Huntington⁹ would like us to believe. The main thesis of Huntington is fundamentally based on wars and clashes between Christian and Muslim rulers, and not on clash of religious teachings. Even in medieval ages there were no clashes of religion, mostly clashes of empires – Christian and Muslim. Both Jews and Christians held important posts in Muslim administrations. Jews and Christians always lived in peace in Muslim countries though they were persecuted in Europe and were forced to live in ghettos. They never faced such persecution in Islamic countries.

Ahmed M.H. Shboul observes in his paper 'Arab Islamic Perceptions of Byzantine Religion and Culture', 'Given the religio-political and military character of the rise of the Arab Islamic power, the sympathetic and tolerant attitude of Islam toward Christianity and Christians, and the actual history of the Arab-Byzantine military conflict, can one describe this conflict, during the period of the Arab conquest and after, as simply or even principally a religious conflict? It is my submission that such a description would be inaccurate and misleading.' He then quotes Norman Daniel 'it is already to beg the question to speak of a religious war, before we have established that that is what it was'.¹⁰

⁷ See 'Islam as Religion and Islam as History' in *Islam and Modern Age*, X:4 (April 2007).

⁸ Here I am using 'fundamentalism' in the pejorative sense in which western media uses though in Islam fundamentalism has positive connotation.

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*, Penguin Books, 1996.

¹⁰ See Jacque Waardenburg (ed.), *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions – A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.125.

Mr. Ahmed further points out, referring to complex issues involved in Arab-Byzantine wars of conquest, 'It is also true that Arab-Byzantine sources speak of economic, political, and tribal factors in this conflict. In a real sense, early Arab Islamic sources seem to depict the war more as a conflict between 'Arab and Byzantines' rather than between 'Muslims and Christians' – a fact that is also confirmed by Syriac sources. At the practical level large numbers of Christian Arab warriors from Syria joined the Muslim armies against the Byzantines, while other Christians (and Samaritans) cooperated in several ways with the advancing Muslim Arabs.

Thus we see even in medieval ages the wars fought between Christians and Muslims were not of religious but political and ethnic nature in which Christian Arabs cooperated with Muslim Arabs. We need to change erroneous perceptions of these wars between Christians and Muslims. It will have far reaching consequences for contemporary nature of conflict. Islam as a religion engages tolerantly and meaningfully with other religions, especially Christianity and Judaism.

Today a large number of Muslims live in Europe and North America. A substantial number of Muslims live as minority in the world, mostly under democratic dispensations. Thus there is great change between medieval and contemporary reality. In medieval ages Muslim empire was spread in large parts of the world and most of the Muslims lived under Islamic dispensation though there were some Muslims living in minority as well during those days.

Thus whole *fiqh* (jurisprudence) literature developed then by the Muslim jurists had its own context. Firstly Muslims were in majority. Secondly Muslims were rulers and Muslim regimes were monarchical and non-democratic. Thus whole corpus of *fiqh* in respect of Muslim and non-Muslim minorities must be reviewed and new *fiqh* should be evolved which should fit into new context. The concepts of *darul harb* (domain of war) and *darul Islam* are totally outdated today.

The new *fiqh* has to be evolved keeping in mind democratic regime, on one hand, and on the other human rights and minority rights regimes, on the other. Our jurists should not mechanically repeat the opinion of medieval jurists who were working in a very different context. They responded to various problems in the light of their own experience. We have to respond in the light of our own context.

The Quranic concept of *ahl dhimma* (people whose responsibility was on Muslim rulers for their safety) for the people of the book was very creative. For these services to protect them Qur'an suggested what is called *jizyah* (a levy for protection of the *dhimmis*). However, it does not hold any more. The very concept of *ahl dhimma*

cannot be applied today in the changed context. The Qur'anic concept of *dhimmi* was contextual, not normative.

Today all minorities have been guaranteed equal political rights under the second generation of UNO charter of rights and international law. The new minority *fiqh* has to take this into account. Non-Muslim minorities are as much entitled to these rights as much as the Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries like European countries, North America, India and several other countries.

The minority regime also guarantees religious and cultural rights. Of course under Qur'anic concept of *ahl-dhimma* religious and cultural rights were guaranteed but not political rights. Now even political rights have to be guaranteed. Minorities are thus accorded full citizenship in addition to cultural and religious rights. Thus new minority *fiqh* has to take all this into account and Muslim countries also should make these rights available to their Christian or Jewish or other minorities. All of them should be treated as citizens with full political rights and also given full religious and cultural rights. Unfortunately in some Muslim states non-Muslim minorities do not enjoy full citizenship rights, though they are free to practice their religion. While in some Muslim countries, they are not free to maintain their religious places or establish places of worship.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, wants all religious places to be equally protected and allowed to be flourished. It says, 'those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allah will help him who helps Him.' (22:40).

Thus the Qur'an guarantees perfect religious freedom not only to Muslims but to all other religions like Christianity and Judaism. Synagogues and churches should be protected along with the mosques. Minority rights must be guaranteed both when Muslims are a minority and when non-Muslims are in a minority. In medieval *fiqh* this spirit of Qur'anic injunction, clear as crystal, was lost because of arrogance of power, more than anything else.

This Qur'anic spirit needs to be revived in minority *fiqh*. Large number of Muslims live as minority today in this globalised world and in most of the countries of West they enjoy equal citizenship rights. Islam today is flourishing in secular democratic countries though in practice there are some problems also.

Secular democracy has its own impact on laws and belief systems which have evolved under secular democracy. Thus secular

democracy in western countries is impacting on Islam too. There is interesting parallel with communism. Communism also developed as an authoritarian system in the Soviet Union. People had no basic freedoms. But communism in Europe was greatly influenced by democratic West and some communists developed the concept of Euro-communism which was more open and respectful of other systems and democratic in nature.

Similarly, there is great need for developing concept of Euro-Islam which will respect pluralism, multi-culturalism and will be open to other faiths and would respect other faiths. It will also adjust itself to western way of life though not necessarily accept it. There is also the question of practicing *Shari'ah* law. Most of the Muslims insist on practicing *Shari'ah* law as they have inherited. This creates complex problems.

The *hijab* controversy has rocked many European countries including France and England. French government has banned *hijab* in educational institutions which itself goes against the concept of multi-culturalism, but Muslims also have to re-think some of their practices. In U.K., for example a school teacher refused to take off her *niqab* (which covered her face) even inside the class room insisting it is her religious belief.

This is simply not true. The Qur'an nowhere requires women to cover their face. It only insists on lowering the gaze and dress modestly (see 24:31). No Islamic jurists have insisted on covering face. All agree that face and hands could be kept open. At the most it is a cultural practice developed in highly feudalized society and is being forced on their women folk.

In minority *fiqh* there should be rethinking on these issues. No one suggests that Muslim women should adopt western way of dressing (which men have readily adopted without any problem), but that they should go for modest dressing which will not make their sexuality focus of attention.

However, traditional Muslims go by opinion of certain jurists rather than by the injunctions of the Qur'an. The *niqab* is not at all in keeping with the Qur'anic injunction nor has it anything to do with Islamic teachings on sexual conduct. It is part of culture in certain Arab countries like Saudi Arabia which is mechanically imitated by Muslims in other countries as they think Saudi Arabia is a model Islamic state.

Such behavior creates problems between westerners and migrant culture. Of course, Europe and other countries of North America have accepted multi-culturalism, and even religious pluralism, yet if one insists one would not go for any compromise tensions will arise between

the two cultures. Without violating basic principles one but should work for give and take.

In medieval *fiqh* there are surely feudal cultural elements which do not suit modern democratic culture based on human rights and women's rights. The new *fiqh*, based only on normative Qur'anic injunctions, if developed, will go a long way in accommodating modern values and Muslim women will have much greater latitude. In western society basic freedoms play very crucial role and medieval culture, being feudal, limits role of basic freedoms in life and imposes authoritarian culture, calling it 'divine'.

However, Euro-Islam will have to come to terms with role of basic freedoms in western society and shall have to develop a *fiqh* for democratic culture. As Qur'an requires Muslims to respect other religions, it also requires them to respect other cultures, if they do not violate core Islamic morality. The Muslim intellectuals will have to play a creative role in non-Muslim societies for developing its new *fiqh*.

In Muslim countries traditional ulama have great influence and hence it is very difficult to bring about any change but in European countries conditions are different. No doubt traditional 'ulama are being imported to these countries also and they deliver their traditional sermons in the mosques. And many Muslims do get influenced by these sermons and want to practice traditional *Shari'ah*.

Traditional Islam appeals to them for another reason also. That reason is sense of alienation which pulls them back to their traditional native culture. Also racial attacks further aggravate this sense of alienation and it becomes very difficult to bring about accommodation between two different cultures. Of late political situation has also become quite hostile to Islam and Muslims.

Some Muslim youth are getting drawn to al-Qaeda network for very complex reasons and who are responsible for political policies towards Islamic world, particularly in the Middle East. Today Islam is being equated with violence and fanaticism, thanks to these acts of violence.

The Qur'an lays great stress on wisdom so much so that it says, 'And whoever is given wisdom, he indeed is given great good' (2:269) Why Muslims do not use wisdom to respond to the situation they are faced with. Responding with violence results in great loss of innocent lives and creates more hostility for them. Can we match the ability of western powers to use violence with bomb explosions here and there? Instead if we use wisdom we can work to build favorable opinion in these countries and isolate the western rulers in the world opinion.

There are thousands of people in the western countries who oppose American neo-imperialist wars. One must build on their support. Resorting to violence earns media hostility as well, wisdom lies in using media sympathy through peaceful means. Thus there should be zero tolerance for violence.

The medieval Islamic *fiqh* lays more stress on *jihad*. Jihad also got distorted in the medieval environs wherein things were decided by sword and there was no concept of rights of people. This *fiqh* should be rejected and new *fiqh* should lay stress on peace and human rights. Peace is very central to Islam. *Salam* (peace) is integral to Islam as it is Allah's name also.

Thus in new *fiqh*, *salam*, *rahmah*, *hikmah* and *adl* (peace, compassion, wisdom and justice) should be central values. And these values as integral part of new *fiqh* should be taught in all madrasas. These are most fundamental Qur'anic values. This will change the image of Islam. It will be more humane and will command respect from its worst enemies.

This might appear utopian to many but it is this Islam which will lead to honourable solution for our complex problems and will ensure peaceful coexistence in this war torn world due mainly to powerful American interests. We must remember we strengthen American hands by responding through sporadic violence. Let us hope that these ideas will generate response from new generation living in western countries.