

INTOLERANCE WITHIN MUSLIM SOCIETIES, THE CAUSES & THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

By

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The delegates at the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Malaysia in 2003 agreed on at least one thing: that the Muslim world was going through a very rough spell¹. One member said it was time for more dialogue amongst Muslims.² There is no doubt that this is correct today because there seems to be almost as much conflict within Islam itself as between Islam and the West. There are now often violent clashes in many parts of the Muslim countries between various sects of Fiqh and the Sunni and Shi'ite branches, especially playing out as a vicious civil war in Iraq at present. Reports of horrific brutality tell of massacres in the region where thousands have been killed as the two sides attack and counter-attack each other mercilessly.³ But is this a new dilemma or was it progressing to the present stage for quite some time now! Why did not the Arabs, so far advanced in civilization, so powerful in aims, not eventually being able to attain the leadership of the world's

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¹-page 09, "Internal Conflict"; Anonymous, Canada & the World Backgrounder 09-01-2006.

²- ibid

³- ibid

culture?¹ Bernard Lewis, in his magisterial volume, *What Went Wrong?*, writes, "In the course of the twentieth century it became abundantly clear in the Middle East and indeed all over the lands of Islam that things had indeed gone badly wrong."² But Bernard Lewis does not provide a clear-cut answer to his question, "What Went Wrong?"³.

Now one can see the new generation of Muslims around the world at odds with itself. It has started to challenge its older generation about many issues which it feels have been created or left unresolved by the Muslims themselves and not by the west as claimed by these elders. It is not so easy to be a Muslim now a days. Muslim Youth is looking for answers, as French Moroccan novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun discovered this when on seeing the TV images of 9/11 his daughter declared that she did not want to be a Muslim: "Muslims are bad; they killed a lot of people."⁴ While the bombings that took place in London, at Edgware Road and Aldgate, they also raised some other questions concerning the motives of the assailants and the ultimate targets of the violence that day. Reza Aslan in his new study has sharply framed an issue: "lost in the dialogue and debate over how four young Britishers could have inflicted such senseless carnage upon their fellow citizens was the startling fact that nearly all of the explosions were deliberately detonated in the city's most heavily Muslim neighborhoods."⁵ Interestingly these bombings started a new debate between Muslims. For example the interpretations of the London bombings greatly differed, and two divergent points of view concerning Islam came about:

¹-*"Islam and the Clash of Civilizations"*; Daniel, Wallace L, *Journal of Church and State* 07-01-2006.

²-Scholastik, trans. from the German by Richard and Clara Winson as *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy*. London, 1960.

³- *supra* 4, p. 4

⁴- *supra* 4

⁵-Reza Aslan, *"No God but God": The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* New York: Random House Trade Paperback Edition, 2006.

- A. One supported Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of a clash between civilizations, a conflict between Islam and Christianity; (or the West)
- B. The other viewed the attacks as part of an internal conflict within Islam itself. ¹

Reza is of the view that the primary struggle lies not between different civilizations but within them, in this case within Islam itself. He opines that the young terrorists aimed their actions as much at their own community and especially at the internal battle going on there over the idea of a pluralistic Islam as much as they were "part of the Jihadist war against the "West." ²

This is a disturbing fact for all of us as Muslims who have claims over the legacy of Islam being the religion of Peace and reconciliation. Now many non Muslims actually understand Islam as a concept which believes in the forced supremacy of its theories and it only preaches about futility of this world and hence every thing is a waiting in the hereafter. Jihad is word which every non Muslim now knows and knows well. From the interviews I conducted from my foreign friends about the meaning of the word they all said:

- a. It means War,
- b. And/or use of force by Muslims against those who are not Muslims so that they either agree to an Islamic Government or live according to the rules of Islam within a territory.

These people were all educated and busy. They watch the media very closely, read newspapers and travel around the world quite frequently. They have Muslim friends and have been to Muslim countries at least once in their lives so far. Yet above stated is the version of Jihad they seem to know! We in the Muslim world should get a wake up call from the above stated fact. But why 250 million Arab Muslims, living in weak and largely undemocratic states frequently suffering from bankrupt

¹-supra 4

²-supra 4 and 8

economies and collapsing infrastructures, should be in a position to mount any civilization conflict with anyone? .¹ Huntington never made this aspect clear yet he had predicted a clash of Islam and the West many years ago when no one could even imagine an event like 9/11 in New York.

While humane representations of Islam ease our conscience, they do little to address the problems within Islam itself. Instead of retreating to an imagined liberal utopia, we Muslims need to ask some tough questions about our faith. What, for example, makes so many pious Muslims such intolerant individuals? Many conflicts are blamed on the West, yet how can we justify our own inter-Muslim rifts going on in Somalia, Nigeria, Palestine, Sudan, Iraq etc. And Why Huntington's dangerous idea was accepted and believed so quickly by the predominantly Christian world? As one writer wrote "It is easy to dismiss the followers of all the non-liberal varieties of Islam as fanatics and fundamentalists. It is much harder and much more painful to see them as a natural product of what contemporary Islam has become."²

So what is to be done? Irshad Manji focuses on the need to reform Islam to bring it into the 21st century. She says, she hopes that the faith revives its tradition of self-criticism and introspection. ³ Muslims are in a state of crisis, but their most daunting problems are not religious. They are geopolitical, economic and social problems that have caused widespread despair and, in some cases, militancy, both of which are expressed in the religious terminology that Muslim masses relate to. While the past casts a long shadow over Muslims, it is the present that haunts them. ⁴

1-The West, Mediterranean Islam and the Search for a New Beginning; Antony.T.Sullivan, Middle East Policy, 10-01-1999.

2-The agony of a 21st-century Muslim; Sardar,Ziauddin New Statesman 02-17-2003,Volume:16. Number: 744, Page: 50)

3- 2004, " The Trouble with Islam", ISBN: 0312326998

4- Looking forward, and back; Haroon Siddiqui, The Toronto Star 08-20-2006

No doubt Islam has a whole History of Tolerance but it has been forgotten or obscured. Not many Muslim Scholars write about the modernism or Pluralism in Islam. If such writings are printed by Western University Professors, many conspiracy theories come about from Muslim academia that some one is out to destroy Islam. But we must realize that it may be important especially now for Westerners to understand that the Holy Qura'an specifically forbids any imposition of Islam on non-Muslims by force. It endorses free will, to the degree to which Muslims or "self-proclaimed Islamic regimes" have in fact violated such injunctions prescribing tolerance and religious pluralism. They have grossly transgressed against the most fundamental tenets of Islam itself. ¹

History Of Intra-Muslim Intolerance:

When did the differences amongst Muslims begin? Let us examine some very serious divisions amongst the Muslims in the post hijra periods, especially during 5th and 6th Century after the death of Holy Prophet PBUH. In his article "No God But God" Reza Aslan has analyzed the religio-political divisions between Muslims erupting and creating the religious sects, which actually fought for political power in the name of religion. He explains Muslim divisions into various groups over the period of history. For example:

- 1.The Kharijites, who divided the Muslim community into two groups: the "People of Heaven," who held their views of the divine Muslim community, and the "People of Hell."
- 2.Then came the Mutazalites - literally the Separatists - these thinkers were against strict, legalistic faith based solely on the notion of a Divine Law (the sharii) and worked to transform Islam into a more humanistic religion. They argued that with reason alone one could know how to act morally...there was no necessity to combine religion and statecraft. ²

1- supra 11, ; Antony T. Sullivan

²- supra 1,

3. Another group, the Asharites, thought otherwise. They rejected the idea that human reason alone can determine morality, hence religion and politics could not be separated. To a very large extent, the history of Islam during the classical period, from the seventh to fourteenth century, can be seen as one gigantic struggle between the Mutazalites and the Asharites.¹

In modernist history of Islam, two main competing schools of thought on the Holy Quran emerged as another division amongst Muslims:

- a. the Rationalists(Fiqh schools), who believed that religious truth must be accessed through human reason, and
- b. The Traditionalists (Al-Zahiri), who saw reason as unstable and claimed that eternal truth could only be known through divine revelation.

The result was that to the Rationalists, all knowledge, including religious knowledge, came mainly through use of reason, through the mind, which gave human beings the freedom to act, to choose between good and evil, belief and unbelief, and "what is sweet and what is bitter." In this school of thought, the individual had much of the responsibility for his salvation. In contrast, the Traditionalists believed the Holy Quran had to be read and interpreted literally, rather than symbolically. God's "attributes are from eternity," asserted the Traditionalist leader and founder of Islam's largest school of law, the Hanafi school.

These different interpretations alternated in their influence, but by the end of the thirteenth century, the Traditionalists had gained ascendancy in Sunni Islam. Their ascendancy had consequences for the development and progress of law and society in the modern Middle East, "Muqalid" movement came into being making it extremely difficult to incorporate "modern conceptions of democracy and human rights" into its

¹-supra 8.

framework. The conflict between Rationalists and Traditionalists underlies much of what is the current reformation taking place in Islam, a struggle that seems to be long-lasting and bloody.

In the 19th and 20th century the third group emerged which faced challenges from traditional Muslim civilization. It was the Modernist group. Large numbers of Muslim intellectuals reached out to Western Europe, seeking to learn the reasons for its economic and military strength. This group, the "Modernists," represented by Indian Muslim writer and intellectual Sir Sayd Ahmed Khan, who became convinced that European principles such as the "rule of law and the pursuit of scientific progress" had to be adopted and integrated, while at the same time Muslim cultural identities and values had to be preserved. Sir Sayyid and many others attempted to build a bridge reaching across these civilizations, taking the best parts from each of them. ¹

But the modernists were not without opponents. Other intellectuals saw their religion and culture as under assault by them, and they fought "with vehemence" the Modernist vision of a new Islamic identity. This radical faction found a name of Wahhabism, whose doctrines came to be known as "uncompromisingly puritanical vision of Islam." ²

In post Modern era ,during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 a small band of rebels calling themselves "al Qaeda," adopted a new ideology and went into opposition against the Muslim Governments who, they claimed, had sold the Islam out to foreign interests. ³

This background of inter-Muslim differences must be kept in mind before we enter into any meaningful dialogue with the west about improving relations. Now many things have meanings much different than their earlier usage. Many Muslims believe that they are in a state of conflict which is fundamentally a war against the "West," particularly after

¹- supra 4,p.4.

²- supra 4

³- supra 4.

the tragedy of September 11 and the London bombings. But Aslan interprets this clash differently, which he terms a struggle "essentially among Muslims over contending visions". "What is taking place now in the Muslim world is an internal conflict between Muslims, not a battle between Islam and the West." The battle has deep historical roots; it is a war between rival interpretations of Islam: " ¹

The Present Divisions Amongst Muslims:

French scholar Gilles Kepel mentions that most Muslims saw the 9/11 attacks in 2001 as devastating to Islam. Instead of strengthening the faith, he says, the terrorist strategy "has led to fitna - strife within Islam. The pitting of Shi'ite against Sunni, Arab against Kurd, has brought nothing but chaos to Iraq." For centuries, he says, Muslim societies have been pulled between two poles that have influenced the ebb and flow of Islamic societies -jihad (holy war) and fitna. Whereas jihad sublimates internal tensions and projects them outward toward the land of unbelief, fitna undermines Muslim society from within. ².What Muslim Ummah at the moment is going through, is a Fitna turmoil, not war with the West.

What is Fitna? It is actually internal conflicts within a group or nation. One does not need an outside enemy in such a situation. It is "Fasad fil Ard", which brings unrest and socio-economic problems from within. We can understand effects of the present disunity and discord between Muslims by the following demo graph of the Muslim world. The total GDP of the 56 members of the Islamic Conference, representing more than a quarter of the world's population, is less than 5 per cent of the world's economy. Their trade represents 7 per cent of global trade, even though more than two-thirds of the world's oil and gas lie under Muslim lands. The standard of living in Muslim nations is abysmal even in the oil-rich regions, because of unconscionable gaps between the rulers and the ruled. ³ It shows who is actually at loss due to this scenario. We are definitely not strengthening Islam by this.

¹- supra 1.p.5

²- supra 1.

³- Haroon Siddiqui,supra 14.

The Challenges:

Muslim world's crisis is in many ways its own created. A big part in that is that of Religio-political factions but these groups were able to capture the Muslim World due to generally very low literacy rate of the Muslim masses . In many rural areas, Muslims mostly believe that Holy Quran literacy is enough education for them and there is no need of formal education in high schools or universities.¹ Infact many people do not allow religious education by the State. It is currently fashionable among the politically insouciant to distinguish between "Westernized moderate" Muslims and "radical" or "extreme" Muslims. The distinction may have some merit, but it blurs a fundamental truth. All Muslims now subscribe to the same Quranic principles which however interpreted unite them as brothers in a common cause aimed at world domination, a spiritual force intrinsically hostile to the West and especially to the Christianity which formerly unified the West. One cannot ignore this de-facto teaching of Islam going on throughout the Muslim world, nor can one easily overlook the failure of moderate Islam to condemn the rhetoric and violence of the extreme.² Some extreme positions presently dividing the Ummah can be summarized in the following forms.

A. Rural And Urban Divide.

Although based on the holy Quran, Islamic law varies today by country and by geographic region. Attempts to relate the Shari'ah to modern times as a practical system of law are confronted with a chasm between a Westernized, modernist minority and the conservative mass of the Muslim population. The reforms adopted by progressive urban Muslim societies have little significance for traditionalist communities in the rural areas which constitute the great majority of its adherents. Officials

¹-Though this mind set is now changing and Arab Countries are now encouraging their youth to be university graduates in Post WTO World.

²-Indestructible Islam; Dougherty, Jude. P., Modern Age 10-01-2002. Volume:44, Number: 4, page 324.

interpret Islamic law in the light of their own education and training.¹ Muslims complain about the West's double standards, yet they have their own.² There are mushrooms of Fatwas of Kufr against each other in every Muslim country. Rural Muslims especially are very hostile towards the urban Muslim population due to belief that only they know correct Islam..

B. Intellectual Disunity:

Like Christian faith, Islamic faith soon felt the need of an intellectual interpretation, be it only in order to correct the literal interpretations of the Holy Quran upheld by the fundamentalists of those times."³ There soon emerged a school of Muslim theologians whose use of Greek philosophical insight to interpret the Quran was challenged by other theologians who repudiated the use of Greek philosophy. This controversy resulted in yet another generation of Arabic thinkers who, without losing touch with their religion, began to pursue philosophy for its own sake. Liberals and Neo-Cons have emerged in the Ummah and all of them want their philosophy to prevail.

As a result, these Muslims say that what others are describing isn't 'true' Islam. But these Muslims should own up to something: Prophet Mohammed himself said that religion is the way we conduct ourselves toward others. By that standard, how Muslims actually "behave" is Islam (Ikhlaqiaat)", and to sweep that reality under the rug of theory is to absolve ourselves of any responsibility for our fellow human beings."⁴

Muslims do suffer from deeper problems. Many are preoccupied with the minutiae of rituals (Should one wash the bare feet before prayers or do so symbolically over the socks?) at the expense of the centrality of the faith, which is fostering peace, justice and compassion, not just for

¹- ibid.

²- supra 14, The Toronto star.

³-History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, Gilson .

⁴- supra INTERNAL CONFLICT, p 10.

Muslims but for everyone. Many Muslims are too judgmental of each other, whereas a central tenet of their faith is that it is up to God to judge - Your Lord knows best who goes astray (53 30) (also, 6 117, 16 125, 17 94, 28 56, 68 7).¹

C. WOMEN ISSUES.

Whether anybody realizes this or not, but Muslim unity has been deeply effected in 20th century over women issues also. There is not only a discord among the two gender groups themselves but also amongst the Muslim Men also who believe that women are to be guided by men alone. In an article in The Washington Post one writer of feminist issues, Ms. Nomani mentioned that conservative Muslims see Islamic feminism as an insult. However, many moderate Muslims think the movement "fits with the religion's early teachings and offers one of our best hopes for countering extremism". Indeed, Muslim women who have joined the movement since it emerged in the 1990s have demands that Islam needs to go back to its progressive 7th-century roots if it is to move forward into the 21st century. But there is aggressive opposition from the fellow Muslims to such ideas. They see it as "westernization" of Muslim women which can only bring obscenity and sexual immorality to the Ummah. Whereas Muslim Women groups see this trend as making them a true partner in the development and progress of Muslim societies. Females see this as a positive aspect but Patriarchial Muslims see that as threat and totally against Islam. Hence we see many muslim Governments implementing policies of "no scarf" (Turkey, Al-Maghrib) or "no Driving" (Saudi Arabia) in Public ! The Western Countries get confused by such policies and when France bans the Head scarf in Public Schools, the double standards of Muslims themselves have to be clarified first before we burn the public property in the name of religion.

¹- Supra 14, The Toronto star.

D. Clerics And Governance Of State:

Another problem is the role of Islamic clerics in the governance of the state. Religious scholars in the Muslim world are good at delivering sermons and professions of faith but are weak at analysis ¹. It will be difficult for Muslims to make the "dynamic impulses" in the next century because these Clerics believe "authority is everything and skepticism is shunned. Some see no need to adapt. They argue that the Quran - is perfect and should remain the ideal guide."² There is too little ijtehad (religious innovation) as called for by Islam to keep believers in tune with their times. Theological rigidity and narrow-mindedness has led, among other things, to violent hostility toward the minority, as seen in the sectarian killings in Pakistan and now in Iraq.³ Secularism in the Muslim world is associated with oppression and suppression of tradition and religious people. Another problem observed by a Muslim Author is that traditional Muslims often equate secularism with Europeanization. So, to embrace secularism means to become "an appendage of western civilization."⁴ Any attempt by Muslim Scholars or the Parliament to interpret Islamic Laws is declared out rightly to be "western agenda", which is not correct. Many clerics are calling public on streets in Pakistan to protest about Women Protection Bill without even reading it, which has only introduced new procedures to conduct sexual offences in the country. No new Islam has been invented.

E. Jihad And More Jihad.

Contrary to the popular belief that the West is under siege from Muslim terrorists, it is Muslims who have become the biggest victims of

¹-Quote Hoffman. in Modernizing the mosque; by Engel, Richard, Insight on the News 08-17-1998, Volume: 14 .Number: 30.

² -ibid.

³- Supra 14 ,Toronto star.

⁴- Ghassan F. Abdullah (<http://www.secularislam.org/skeptics/secularism.htm> 2005)

the attacks of September 11, 2001. In reality, most Muslim states are powerless to address the international crises that their publics want addressed. Therefore their populations react the way the angry disenfranchised do - hurling themselves into the streets, shouting themselves hoarse and destroying property, without much concern for the consequences, and engendering even more hostility in the West toward Muslims and Islam. ¹ They call this Jihad. Political weakness of Muslim Governments has led to this turmoil. Dictatorships which are rampant in these countries have let their people down by not preserving their honor and dignity through no resolution of disputes close to these people's hearts.

The Holy Quran emphasizes that peace is much to be preferred to military conflict: "If [one's enemies] incline to peace, incline thou also to it and trust in God.... And if they intend to deceive thee--then surely God is sufficient for thee" (8:61, 62) But in the quest for absolute imitation of the Holy Prophet in every eighth-century detail, military struggle has become a pathological end in itself for many Muslims. Now all forms of violence (Violent videos of head chopping, suicide bombings) and oppression are justified to achieve the end in the name of the Prophet. But we forget to understand that the battles of the Prophet occupied less than a month of the 63 years of his life on earth. The two most celebrated confrontations - the Battles of Badr (624) and Uhud (625)-were over within a day!. The other main conflict, the Battle of Trenches, never took place. And apart from one minor skirmish, no one fought during the conquest of Mecca. ²

The problem of misguided Jihad arises from love of authority and teachings of self appointed religious leaders who don't fully understand the spirit of JIHAD. Now trained primarily in Afghanistan, Islamic militants receive little formal education and get a very distorted view of Islam, Julie Sirrs, a former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst said, "Oftentimes, training schools seem to be a funnel for jihad movements," she said, using

¹- Supra 14, TORONTO STAR.

²- Supra 12, Ben Joullen, in "agony of 21st century Muslim", p.51,52.

the Islamic name for holy war.¹ When we see the recruits of the Muslim militant groups in many parts of the Asia and Africa, they are now either teen age boys, child soldiers or those men who were unable to have a purposeful life otherwise. Promise of Heavenly Blessings act as an attractive incentive and these Muslims agree to fight in Jihad without really knowing the legal background of the conflict in which they are ready to kill or be killed in the name of Islam. Islam does not permit "private jihad" and the State is the authority to wage a military expedition against anybody. But now Muslims have made Jihad their own home affair. Militias and rebel groups have disrupted the peace of an average common person. Governments are forced to shoot at their own Muslim Populations just because some Leaders decided to take law of Jihad in their own hands. There is a struggle between militant groups and the Government troops in Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt etc.

F. Interpretation Of Shariah And Ijtihad:

A fatal category of mistake made by Muslims is their belief that everything about Islam is eternal. The right of the ulama to reinterpret the Holy Quran is also eternal. Thus, all human problems have been solved for all time by the Fiqh schools. Indeed, Islam itself is eternal. But the most common slogan among Muslims of all varieties, in every part of the world, is that "Islam has all the answers". This is from a people who have forgotten how to ask questions!²

At present, the bulk of the shariah consists of the legal opinion of classical jurists. It was formulated in the Abbasid period, when Muslim history was in its expanding phase.³ It was largely by scholars who formulated shariah firmly rooted in their times and was need based. Now the Ulema of present times believe in blindly following of those age old

¹-Islam's image problem; Smith, Geoffrey ,Insight on the News 07-24, 2000,Volume:16, Number: 27ISSN, age: 28

²-Supra 12, Sardar Ziauddin, P 53

³- ibid

interpretations without allowing any room for re-interpretations. As a book of guidance, Holy Quran is open to all. But Muslims have created a whole elite class of individuals who are the only ones with the right to interpret the Holy Quran. In Shia Iran, they go under the rules of "clergy"; in the other, Sunni Muslim communities, they use the term "ulama", or religious scholars. The repulsive notion that only the ulama and the clergy can interpret the Quran is a mistake. It keeps the interpretation of Islam firmly in the hands of a select group of obscurantist. The Koran declares unequivocally that no one has any special privilege of interpretation. But individual Muslim is thus denied agency. If the shariah is to be interpreted by only a select, then most believers have nothing to do except follow what they are told. Believers thus become passive receivers rather than active seekers of truth.

In its mission statement, the Institute for the secularization of Islamic Society (ISIS) says Islamic society has been held back by an unwillingness to subject its beliefs, laws, and practices to critical examination. ISIS adds that a lack of respect for the rights of the individual, and also by an unwillingness to listen to other viewpoints or to engage in constructive dialogue have also damaged Islam.¹ The result is that in reality when Muslim countries apply (or impose) the shariah - the demands of Muslims from Algeria through Pakistan to Nigeria – and the contradictions that were inherent in the formulation and evolution of this jurisprudence come to the fore. Now each country has different laws on Muslim issues. In one country Polygamy is legal whereas in some it is totally banned. Such divergent laws on same matter, in the name of Islam only bring more confusion to the Muslims and rest of the world.

G. Sectarian Divide And The Madrassas:

Linked to the differences of interpretations on shariah issues, is the sectarian divide. In order to explore the main challenge of the Muslim world let us examine the excerpts of an important interview of an Indian

¹- Supra 1, Internal Conflict.

Muslim scholar from a traditional practice. It is Mr Ali Asghar Engineer from India. He had to say as under:

“In the post-colonial period intra-Muslim sectarian differences have acquired a political dimension in many countries. Sectarian rivalries are often mobilized and employed in order to promote the political interests of the state and of certain groups and individuals. This has led, in several cases, to violence and bloodshed on a scale not witnessed before. In many Muslim countries today, Muslim sectarian minorities are actively persecuted by dominant sectarian majorities. The madrasa system, as it has come to be developed, today plays a major role in promoting sectarian rivalries, which often leads to conflict. Each madrasa is associated with one or the other Muslim sect, and the ulama of the madrasas see as one of their principal duties the rebuttal of other Muslim sects in order to stress their own claims to representing what they see as the only valid expression or understanding of Islam, as represented by their own sect. This is also reflected in the madrasa curriculum, where students are often taught to rebut the beliefs of other Muslim sects. Attacking other sects is not simply a religious exercise. Rather, it is intimately tied to questions of power and authority and access to material resources. If the ulama of one sect brand other sects as ‘deviant’ or ‘un-Islamic’ or whatever, it helps bolster their image among their followers as representatives of what they insist is ‘true’ Islam, which, in turn, brings them power and authority and material advantages as well.¹

What Are The Solutions:

Is this inter-Muslim and intra-Muslim discord going to continue? What can be done to restore the real spirit of Islam which actually stood for peace and harmony amongst people. Holy Quran addresses “Banni Adam” or “Al-Naas”, not just Muslims. Some of the solutions and recommendations one sees have to be customized by Muslims themselves and they ought to take charge of their own destiny now, rather than always blaming the west.

¹- Intra Muslim relations, Asghar Ali Engineer , interviewd by Yoginder Sikand , <http://www.svabhinava.org>

1. Democracy:

Is a democratic outcome likely in Islamic societies?. Why not? It is located in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH on social justice and respect for one's neighbors. But democracy cannot be imposed from outside, it must be developed from within. Islamic democracy will have to develop on the basis of Islamic traditions and values. Aslan¹(41) distinguishes between "secularism", which aims to remove religion from all aspects of public life, and "secularization", which aspires gradually to separate society and politics from being dominated and controlled by clerics. How can Muslims introduce democracy to their societies when there is no democracy within their religion? "Secularization" should be adopted by Muslim Politics which in no way means atheism. Iftikar Malik, a British political scientist and historian, and author of *Islam and Modernity*, suggested that a Muslim secularist could be a devout believer. Secularization wouldn't replace religion, only help to reinterpret it. For this Dictatorships in the Muslim Countries need to be replaced by Democratic Governments in which certain basic freedoms are ensured, especially freedom of Speech, expression and right to information.

Of course in Muslim countries the moral framework for democracy will be derived from Islamic ideals of pluralism and human rights, not from USA. State suppression in the name of secularism is not democracy.

2. Madrassa And Educational Reforms:

Sectarian publications must stop at once. The seminary Ulamas may not accept the beliefs of other sects as necessarily valid, they must allow others to choose to believe what they want to and must respect that choice.² Let them believe what they want, even that their own understanding of Islam is the only valid one, but they must not

¹- Supra 8, No God but God.

²- Ali Asghar

go about denouncing other people's beliefs. We should only teach the beliefs of our own sect in our madrasas, but we cannot condemn other sects or religions. Various Muslim sects need to be more exposed to what is happening in the world around them. Today we have a situation wherein madrasa students are sought to be rigidly insulated and isolated from, and ignorant of, the wider world, being cloistered within the confines of the four walls of the madrasas. This being the case, how will they ever realize the malaise of inter-Muslim differences which are self destructive.

The education reforms must be introduced in the Institutions in Muslim countries where Islam can be taught as a system, not as theology. One reason why Indian Muslims were lagging behind in progress was their unwillingness to learn modern subjects. They felt their language is Arabic, because it the language of Quran. Any attempts by the British to encourage to study in English language was considered an assault on Islam itself. the result was that after 25- 30 years of this adamant behavior, Muslims found themselves fit only for menial Jobs, who could play little role in country building .Whereas Hindu community, which moved with the test of time was better equipped to take leadership role along side the British. This resulted in victimization and marginalization of the Muslims in the long run later.

But huge differences exist on how to do the education reforms. Some Western Muslims would like to see major reforms in Islamic education, with an increased focus on the sciences. They complain that the Muslim world is resistant to change. "Arab Muslims are extremely defensive toward globalization," says Wilfreid Hoffman, a delegate from the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. "While the Western Muslims see it as a chance, Arab Muslims see it as an evil scheme. To make Islam relevant for the next century would imply quite a few reforms in the Muslim world, but I don't see these

coming." ¹ Islamic summit in Cairo also expressed that Muslims should learn to speak the language of the new times. Muslim countries must aggressively introduce progressive educational policies to introduce more "friendly" and "tolerant" Islam to the younger Muslims so that we can avoid events like London bombing.

3. Intellectualism:

It is heartening to see that Islamic movements have everywhere taken the initiative in reactivating that civil society, or "Third Sector," which Nasserist statism had done so much to destroy. ² Today, Islamist Arab intellectuals are spearheading discussion about limiting the power of the state and achieving an appropriate equilibrium between liberty and community. Shortly after the London attack, more than 170 of the world's leading Muslim scholars from about 35 countries gathered in Jordan's capital, Amman. As The Economist reported, they "agreed to minimize their own (previously sharp) differences and work together to promote what they regard as 'good theology' over some superficial, violence-promoting interpretations of Islam that have circulated, electronically and in print, all over the world. " They also agreed to a "mutual recognition" of Islam's eight main schools of legal interpretation, implying a mutual respect among rival versions of Islam. This is the need of the day. Such Inter-Muslim conferences should be held more regularly.

4. Youth:

Mr. Kepel very rightly said that it's the new generation of young Muslims in democratic societies, who can exercise democratic rights that are restricted or forbidden in countries where Islam is the majority religion, who may safeguard the future of Islam. Men and women with universalistic perspective, emancipated from the

¹- Supra 30, Modernizing the mosque; Engel, Richard page 38.

²- Supra 11, Antony T. Sullivan, Middle East Policy.

rebellious rage that endorses violence, and offering a new vision and a way out of the dead-end politics that have paralyzed their countries of origin." ¹

We must learn to trust our Muslim youth and should include them in decision making process at all levels. This is truly Islamic because wisdom is not always age bound. Boys involved in London Bombing are reported to be quiet, shy persons who never really socialized within community. It is important that social integration of the youth is encouraged and parents should not be over anxious to preserve their image. Islam is not anti-culture.

5.Ijtihad:

On the issue of different sectarian understandings of Islam, Ali Asghar's solution is very sensible. he is of the opinion that one must make a clear distinction between the Quran as the word of God, on the one hand, and different sectarian or individual interpretations of it, on the other. The former is divine, while the latter are human constructs. Being the work of human beings, these different understandings of Islam, as represented by the various sects, are naturally limited, not being free from human error and, sometimes, even human or material interest. Since God is beyond what we humans can ever conceive of Him, naturally we can never claim to fully or exactly understand His word, the Qurān. This means that there can never be a single, final and complete understanding or interpretation of Islam.

What Ali Asghar said is the true spirit of Ijtihad. It should be inculcated by the Muslims by involving academia, Islamic scholars, scientists, linguistics etc as well as the Parliaments. OIC can play a leading role too in bringing convergence of views of Muslims on Shariah issues. Ummah unity needs to be boosted through a better tolerant ijtihad.

¹- Supra Internal Conflict; Canada & the World Backgrounder

In the end one has to realize and accept one law of Nature i.e. everything is subject to change. Islam cannot survive as a static faith, buried in history. It was always meant to be a dynamic world-view, adjusting to change. In reality, the Shariah is nothing more than a set of principles, a framework of values that provide Muslim societies with guidance. But these sets of principles and values are not given; they are vigorously derived from within changing contexts. As such, the shariah is a problem-solving methodology of Islam rather than problem itself. It therefore requires individual believers and societies as a whole to exert themselves and to re-interpret the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to extract new strategies and solutions. Greater emphasis must be placed on the universality of Islamic teachings, and the duty before Allah to work for the welfare of humanity; first locally, then globally. Finally, all members of the community must contribute toward building an ethic of citizenship based on a foundation of civic responsibility. Islamic teachings emphasize that Muslims are to be a source of security and safety for their neighbors. A columnist, Sheema Khan stresses the need to repeat and remind ourselves of our faith's prohibition against the killing of innocent civilians time and time again at community events.¹

Muslims must learn something from history - to value human life; accept each other's religious differences²); respect other faiths; return to their historic culture of academic excellence, scientific inquiry and economic self-reliance; and learn to live with differences of opinion and the periodic rancorous debates that mark democracies. There were times in Islamic history when non Muslims were equal partners in country building. This mistrust of other communities should be done away with. We should learn to make friends and not foes. Many extreme viewed Muslims teach the youth not to be friends with Christians or Jews because

¹- Globe and Mail, July 2005.

²- Haroon, Toronto Star.

it is forbidden according to Holy Quran. They fail to understand the message of the Holy Quran. It does not prohibit human relations, helping each other in difficult times, or sharing joys. It only prescribes care in getting political advise from advisers of those communities during a conflict situation when the rival happens to be of their faith because religion is a strong catalyst of bonding. The adviser may not be able to give a dispassionate, unbiased, correct advice to the decision maker. Muslims should look after their own interests themselves and start the process with some self evaluation also. It said so in the Holy Quran that Allah will not change any nation which does not itself realize that there is need of urgent change within!! Time to act is NOW.