

Living Islam

by Akbar S. Ahmed

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Reflections on Family Issues

The Muslim family

The central institution of Muslim society is the family. In the West, the Muslim family structure is often seen as oppressive and backward, an obstacle to modernity. For their part, many Muslims are concerned about the frequent breakdown of marriages in the West, and worry that their own societies may be heading along a similar route. Muslim families today have to cope with the problems of rapid urbanization, and the pressures of living in cities and in cramped accommodation. Although there has been an alarming increase in the divorce rate among Muslims, none the less Muslim marriages tend to be far more stable than Western ones, because they are based on an entirely different set of assumptions.

These assumptions are founded in the Muslim notion of the cosmos. As there is order and balance in the universe, there is a similar natural pattern in society which is reflected in the Muslim household. In a conceptual sense, one mirrors the other. Thus each individual member plays an equally significant role in his or her own capacity which is related to the other members of the family. Each person is special and yet different. It is the difference that ensures the balance and harmony.

The proper behaviour of all the members of the family is constantly emphasized in the Qur'an and *Hadith*. Ideal behaviour encourages dignity and modesty in the family. The father, the mother, the children and the elders all have a positive and defined role to play. In each case the model of ideal behaviour comes from early Islam. The Prophet was both the ideal son and later the ideal husband and father. The women of his household - like Khadijah

and Fatimah - provide the ideal for Muslim women.

For Muslims, then, the family is **the** central institution; it is at the centre both of theology and sociology: 'The family is a divinely-inspired institution that came into existence with the creation of man. The human race is a product of this institution and not the other way round' (Ahmad 1974: 13). Not surprisingly, the most intricate rules and regulations guide family life. About a third of the legal injunctions in the Qur'an deal with family matters. These aim to produce the attitudes and behaviour patterns that Islam wants to foster in society. And they cover different generations: a Muslim family is an extended family, normally with three or four generations within its circle.

Islam is the religion of equality. This principle is never more explicit than in the Quranic instructions to men and women on how to become good Muslims, '*If any do deeds of righteousness - be they male or female - and V have faith, they will enter Heaven*' (Surah 4: verse 124). In Surah 33, verse 35, the equality of men and women, the need for both to believe, to speak the truth, to be humble, to give alms, to fast and to be modest, is emphasized by constant repetition of the words 'men . . . and women . . . !

Even in the controversial area of divorce it is necessary to point out that both men and women have the right to divorce. The first divorce initiated by a woman was granted by the Prophet himself on grounds of incompatibility. This gives women tremendous leverage in society.

At the same time, men have duties towards the women of the family. A wife must be maintained by her husband, even if she has means other own. This practice is used to explain the inequality of inheritance - a man receives a larger share of a family legacy than does a woman.

Muslims are known to be extremely affectionate

towards their offspring. Little girls and boys are constantly spoiled, sometimes to the point where it is harmful to them. In particular grandparents dote on grandchildren. As the young are loved, the aged are revered. With age people gain in status and influence. It is the duty of every child to care for parents: *'Show kindness to parents . . . Lower to them the wing of humility out of tenderness'* (Surah 17: verses 23-4).

Mothers in particular evoke a very strong emotional response of affection among Muslims. **Heaven**, the Prophet had said, **lies beneath the feet of the mother**. The following lines were dedicated by me as a young man to my mother:

*When I walk at night alone,
in the deep wadis of her sobs
or when I know that each time I drive fast
or delay reply to her letter
when I know that at midnight
she sits up praying to her God
to keep me warm and whole,
when I know that she will still bless me
though I give her eyes cause to tears
when I know that all my warts and ways
will turn to gold at her simple touch
then I see through her the God she sits
rotating her beads to
and then I know that her God
will always be there for me to reach out and
touch.*

Arranged marriages

As most young Western couples select their own marriage partners, the arranged marriage appears odd and outdated to them. Although most Muslim marriages are arranged even today this does not mean that marriages are forced upon young people. What it does mean is that parents and senior relatives often discuss various possibilities, yet all the while consulting the person involved. This allows them, over a period of time, to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the future partner. In Islam both partners must clearly and before witnesses agree to be married; no one can be coerced into marriage. Usually marriages take place within the extended family or even the same ethnic or tribal group. It is difficult in such marriages for husbands to be mean or cruel to their wives because husband and wife are related and such behaviour

would cause adverse comment in the family. After all the uncles and aunts of the wife would also be the uncles and aunts of the husband. Arranged marriages are perhaps one of the reasons why Muslim marriages are so stable. There are few comparative statistics but many young Muslims even in the West enthusiastically support the notion of arranged marriages, particularly in the light of the high statistics of divorce in the West.

Are arranged marriages still viable among Muslims living in Western societies or highly Westernized families in Muslim cities? We already hear of more divorce cases in this generation than in the previous one. Is this a trend? If so, will the trend spread to the more traditional rural areas also? Does it indicate a breakdown of the arranged marriage system? These are questions that need to be addressed by all Muslims today.

Muslim dress and the hijab

Islamic clothing affects Islamic thinking and vice versa. As the Qur'an teaches modesty for both men and women (Surah 24: verses 30-1) clothes are meant to emphasize modesty and dignity both in men and in women. Thus clothes that either suggest the contours of the body or expose it are avoided except, perhaps, among some members of the fashionable, the young or those who live in cities.

Modesty is also behaviour, speech and conduct. It is in this context that respectable men and women wear clothes that appear formal and dignified. They need to cover all parts of their body. Flowing robes are probably the best method to do so. To see a *sheikh* or an *ayatollah* in his robes is to see a person of dignity, learning, authority and grace in his own society. Loose clothes are worn because they allow people to say prayers which include prostration, bending and sitting. It is not easy to do these things in tight-fitting clothes. Loose clothes are also worn because of dietary patterns. Most Muslims, because they are often up early at dawn for prayers, tend to rest in the afternoon; for most the afternoon meal is usually heavy, and the midday sun makes work difficult. There is also the forces of tradition. People often tend to wear what the previous generation wore before them. It does not mean that there is no change. Even in the rural areas of Pakistan, men and women once wore *pyjamas* or *shalwars* which ran literally into yards and yards of cloth. Now the *shalwar* is much tighter and neater, although to outsiders it looks very baggy.

Muslim women appear to be divided on the subject of the veil. The covering of the face by a veil has never been universal in the Muslim world. Country women go to the fields without a veil, women in some parts of the Muslim world have not adopted it, others during the last decades have discarded it, yet others rediscovered it. But the Quranic injunction to modesty, however it is applied, cannot be set aside. Its interpretation has varied, and does vary, but its importance is basic. One interpretation of what constitutes modesty is the long skirt and headscarf worn by many young women - a stricter interpretation than that of some of their mothers. The *hijab* or veil presents us with some useful sociological insights into Muslim society. Its source as an Islamic dress is debated. **The true veil is in the eyes of the men** is a saying of the Prophet. Tribal society, as Arabia was in the seventh century when Islam came to it, would have two or three distinct features regarding women which we can reflect on with a degree of accuracy. Women would have been far more free than we can imagine. This is a tribal characteristic. People are related on the genealogical charter and everyone knows everyone else. Molesting a woman or raping her would mean committing virtual incest.

Although the notions of female honour and sexual conduct are highly developed in the Muslim tribal areas, there is no concept of the veil, which begins to appear once you come nearer the towns. Indeed a woman in the tribal areas will come up and shake hands and say, 'How are you, brother, would you like a cup of tea?' She has the kind of confidence which would be difficult to find in her better-educated sister in the city. Although the *hijab*, *chador* or even the *pardah* are not in early Islam according to some scholars, in time they became associated with Islam. These customs were assimilated from the conquered Persian and Byzantine societies and were considered to reflect the Quranic spirit. It may well be that seclusion and veiling reflected the upper-class, urban women who would protect themselves from the gaze of those in the bazaars and in the fields. Over the centuries, however, this spread to other parts of society. In certain groups it had unfortunate consequences. Women in towns and cities were often confined to small houses with limited social contacts and therefore barred from community life.

Professor Nur Veergin, Professor of Sociology in Istanbul, although intensely supportive of Islam, is

scathing about the long black *chador* or veil, even blaming it on Christianity. She explained her argument to me:

"I must say that these categories have been influenced by Christianity. For instance the veil. It's claimed that horrible black *chador* that one sees now more and more in Istanbul streets is something to do with Islam, that has nothing to do with Turkish Islam anyway. It comes from Byzant [Christianity], it comes from Iran, but it certainly doesn't derive, doesn't stem from the Turkish national culture or the Islamic culture of Turkey."

The *hijab* in the 1980s and 1990s has become a fashionable and recognizable symbol of Muslim identity among young girls. It must be emphasized that it is not worn out of fear or pressure from the home. Many girls wear this in spite of opposition at home. It is a neat way of saying: 'this is where I stand and I am proud of it.'

Let us end this chapter by emphasizing a crucial point that must be borne in mind when considering Muslim responses to modernity. Western commentators commonly make the assumption that once Muslims are set on the path to democracy (and modernity) they will become more like 'us' and, as in most of the West, eventually separate the religious from the secular in their lives. Yet Muslims are either Muslims or they are not; there is no halfway house. They cannot just take bits and pieces of Islam and still remain Muslims. If they do, they become something completely different. Evidence of this is most explicit where Muslims live as a minority in non-Muslim states, and we shall discuss this in the next chapter.

Polygamy in Islam

There is another idea about family life that is difficult to lay to rest in the West. It is of Islam as a man's paradise with every man possessing at least four wives. This is, of course, a stereotype and not a real image. In my anthropological fieldwork in Pakistan which cast a wide net over an entire section of a major tribal group (the Frontier Pukhtuns) I discovered that only 0.02 per cent of men were polygamous (Ahmed 1980). Personally, too, apart from one or two people in the older generation, I know of no friend or acquaintance who has more than one wife. The vast majority of men are monogamous.

In Islam it is always important to look for the spirit behind the word or law - whether it is in

criminal punishment or polygamy. The fact that a man is allowed in extraordinary circumstances to marry up to four wives must be seen in this context. It is quite clear that the ideal is one wife, and the Qur'an emphasizes and indeed advocates it. However, there are situations in times of war or famine or social upheaval when it is better that a woman is safely and honourably married than has to fend for herself as a destitute or even prostitute her body. It is therefore the spirit that must be understood, not the letter of the law.

The Qur'an has clearly given permission for men to marry more than once, and in certain circumstances this is a social necessity: *"If you are afraid that you will not treat orphans justly, then marry such women that may seem good to you, two, three or four"* (Surah 4: verse 3). But in the next line the Qur'an lays down a clause: *"If you think you will not act justly, then one."* This is a stringent condition making it difficult for a person to marry more than once. Indeed the Qur'an itself says that polygamy is not possible: *"You will never manage to deal equitably with women no matter how hard you try"* (Surah 4: verse 129). The true spirit of the Qur'an thus appears to be of monogamy, because marriage to more than one wife is contingent on absolute equality and impartiality between wives.

Nonetheless, Muslims are not apologetic or defensive about polygamy. A liberated, female Indian Muslim writer makes the following point while supporting polygamy in Islam:

Islam accommodates human weaknesses and needs. It aims to create a society based on natural instincts. It sanctions re-marriage and divorce but discourages flagrant immorality and sex outside marriage. Polygamy is a provision and not a compulsion. The Western pattern and definition of women's liberation is not the only one. If a woman is content with being a second wife why should anyone tell her she should feel otherwise? Polygamy provides a hedge for increased female population due to disasters like wars. The clause legitimizing multiple wives is in the interest of 'the other woman' as it gives her moral, social and legal rights. One man one woman relationship is merely an Anglo-Saxon concept of purity.

The oppression of Muslim women in the sub-continent is a result of feudal-social attitudes and has nothing to do with Islam. Some of the laws in these countries are detrimental to women and need to be reviewed in the Muslim framework. Islamic

jurisprudence provides the liberal and progressive basis for a moral and just society in recorded history. (Dehivi 1992)

Marriage in Islam is not a temporary union and is meant to last for life. Dissolution of marriage is, however, permitted if it has irretrievably broken down. However, before actual divorce, Muslim law demands an attempt at reconciliation. The natural prevalence of monogamy as normal is more and more the practice in Muslim countries. Nevertheless, a limited polygamy is seen as a realistic need in certain circumstances, and indeed as preferable to the concealed polygamy without responsibility, in some ways tolerated in Western society. Islam is a practical religion and is meant for the guidance of human beings made of flesh and bones' (Ahmad 1974: 21-2).

Islam in the Age of the Western Media

Islam in The Age of The Western Media

By the end of the 1980s the world had changed dramatically. And the causes of change crept up on us quietly, almost without our noticing. The main developments concern widespread use of the audio-visual media. These include video, fax and satellite communications technology. In the context of the global political situation, in which the USA has emerged as the master of the age, these developments assume a special cultural significance.

Islam And The West: Confrontation or Consensus?

In the 1990s America and its cultural allies (like the countries of Europe) appear to dominate the world. They do so through the media. That is why the media is seen as hostile by the Muslim world. Anything from the West is regarded as potentially threatening; this creates neurosis and suspicion. Anyone associating with the West is seen as an agent, a representative of the CIA. It is the gut reaction and bizarre response of a people repeatedly humiliated and let down by the West. It is not the response of Islamic civilization which has survived over a millennium and produced some of the most enduring cultural systems ever seen.

The West, dominated by North America and Western Europe but also including countries such as Japan, is the driving force in the new global culture. The standards of living of many of their citizens have

never been so high in history. But they have little to offer those outside their borders. Indeed, they would close their borders to outsiders. The notions of 'fortress USA' and 'fortress Europe' are just beginning to develop and will certainly grow in the coming time. Strong notions of race and social superiority are embedded in these countries and can very easily translate into dangerous political philosophies. We see the Nazi salute and ideology openly displayed in Germany once again. This was unthinkable even a few years ago. Once again the cries against Jews and foreigners are thick in the air, as crude racism re-emerges in Europe, including France and Britain. Once again immigration laws are debated and are being made stricter. So into the next millennium the dominant Western nations will wish to maintain a tightly run island of prosperity to be protected from the hordes of the hungry and restless wishing to join them.

Then there is the Islamic world. In its population and its resources it is potentially capable of forming a major world presence. Its politics, however, remain volatile. Its leadership still requires vision and stability. Its own thinkers still require clarity. It is for this reason that Western journalists find it easy to label groups of Muslim countries as an arc of crisis, or an Islamic crescent of crisis, and dismiss them. They take some Muslim countries and connect them across Asia or Africa; so Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey form a crescent. This is a journalistic cliché.

Correctly or not, Muslims perceive the Western media as hostile. Many factors explain this sense of discomfort. The general attitude of hostility is largely true. Western programmes about Muslims are often slanted to suggest negative images of Muslims. Many carry messages of political instability and the poor treatment of women - the two notorious Orientalist prejudices against Islam.

The restless generation coming of age in Muslim societies is another factor. It has grown up with the media and feels familiar with American culture. It is ambiguous about what it sees: it cannot live by the American standards it observes, yet paradoxically it wants them. It also feels contempt for much of what it sees on television (particularly sex and violence) and believes it to be representative of American society. Frustrated, it finds its only legitimate sense of identity in its own traditional civilization, which is Islam. This generation therefore emphasizes its Islamic identity by rejecting the West.

As we know, Islam is not the only religion experiencing a resurgence. There has been a rise of religious revivalism throughout the world. This has often taken new expressions, sometimes aggressive ones. Whether evangelical Christianity in the USA or Hinduism in India, this phenomenon of revivalism is peculiar to our age. Notions of the secular, of progress and of science which many took for granted a generation ago are being challenged.

Another factor is that Muslim societies appear to be experiencing problems with the contemporary world and its ethos based on speed, cynicism and disbelief. Islam recommends balance and a steady pace. There is also the noise and dazzle of the media. Again, Islam emphasizes quiet, meditation and simplicity. The family itself is under attack in today's world. Islam emphasizes the family as the key unit of society and would safeguard it at all costs. Most important, Muslims believe in God in an age dominated by materialism and agnosticism or atheism.

Further, people have already been predicting that after the collapse of communism the West's next enemy would be Islam. Now that there are no more powerful enemies for the West to conquer since the break-up of its main adversary, the USSR, Islam alone remains in its path, preventing final world supremacy. There is a growing feeling among writers and commentators that the world is heading for a final show-down, a final crusade, between Islam and the West.

Because there is so much anger and frustration, there is little analytic or objective thought around Islam; there is little sense of working out solutions, of pondering on problems, in a global context. There is sometimes despair and at other times a wild attempt at striking at the enemy. Not unnaturally, this prevents understanding, analysis or communication.

The Muslim failure with the media

Anyone today with access to a television, radio or newspaper will have been recently inundated with negative images of Muslims. The controversy regarding The Satanic Verses, the Gulf War and the collapse of the BCCI are three examples of the media focusing attention on Muslims and causing heated argument. Through the drama that surrounded the author and the novel, the way the Gulf War developed and was fought, and the story of the bank, Muslims all over the world were forced to engage in a debate with non-Muslims and indeed

with other Muslims. With media descriptions of a 'criminal culture,' to many in the West Islam appeared to be a force for anarchy and disorder.

Some of the main questions in the media about Muslims that related to the above examples were: Is the burning of books a standard Muslim response to literature they don't approve of? Does this mean Muslims do not prize knowledge and learning? Are Muslim leaders merely dictators who invade and occupy smaller neighbours forcibly? Are Muslim businessmen only capable of fraud? What are Muslims really like? Muslims themselves were angry and bewildered by the extent and intensity of the criticism. While they did not approve of The Satanic Verses, most did not wish to kill the author; while many did not support the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, they felt it was high time someone challenged the bullying attitude of the West; and while they were shocked at the extent of corruption in the BCCI, and many lost their deposits, they nevertheless felt that the manner of its public exposure was partly motivated by a deliberate attempt to humiliate Islam. In the age of the media, of the sound bite, of television images, Muslims have not yet found a way of expressing themselves adequately. Their leaders - whether Gaddafi or Saddam - rely too much on mob oratory and controlled television appearances which appear artificial and ineffective in the West. Besides, the vernacular translates poorly. Hyperbole may be thought appropriate for the mob gathered in the Muslim city - wiping the enemy from the face of the earth, the mother of battles which would claim thousands of lives, and so on - but it translates badly in the international press. Muslim leaders either appear as military dictators ordering the chopping of hands and the whipping of the poor (Zia in Pakistan and Nimeiri in Sudan) or as tribal tyrants (Arab rulers) or as socialist dictators (Saddam in Iraq and Assad in Syria).

There seem to be two distinct Muslim responses to the Western media in the 1990s. I will give two examples from Pakistan. One response is mimicry, to accept Western culture, indeed to reflect and further it, often unthinkingly. The weekly paper, Friday Times (Lahore), and the monthly magazine, Herald (Karachi), both in English, are edited by Oxbridge/London University journalists who provide useful and often penetrating political commentary. But they also faithfully echo Western jargon and ideas. Even the word 'fundamentalist' is used, without a trace of self-consciousness, to describe fellow

Pakistanis; indeed it is often abbreviated to 'fundo'. Both carry detailed and regular commentary on the latest videos and pop songs coming from America. Pop stars like Madonna are frequently featured. The other response, also from Pakistan, is that of the *Jamaat-i-Islami* political party. A member announced in public that if Madonna or Michael Jackson were to be invited to Pakistan the party would not only agitate against the government for allowing the invitations but ensure that the functions were disrupted. More zealous members promised to break the legs of those who participated.

While one reaction was to absorb without thought what was coming from the West, the other was total rejection. (They were echoing the two separate streams of education I pointed out in chapter 4.) But are these really well-thought out, balanced and serious responses? Will they be long-term? Do they solve anything? Do they help us to understand better the relationship between Islam and the West?

Muslims have yet to discover how to use the media to project ideas and images of their own culture and civilization. A perfect example comes from Muslim Spain. Although the King of Spain has dutifully apologized to Jews for what his ancestors did to them in the fifteenth century with the fall of Granada, he has not apologized to Muslims. It is known that he is keen to build bridges but still awaits a Muslim initiative on the matter. From this it appears that Muslims who are so acutely aware of the loss of Andalusia in their popular literary culture find it difficult to translate this into realpolitik and international diplomacy. The failure to do so has cost them heavy. They are always lagging behind in the world, and the injustices inflicted on them are barely mentioned.

Another example comes from Afghanistan. We have discussed the *mujahid* as the equivalent of a Muslim Zorro figure. But in the Western media the word means different things in different times and places. *Mujahid* in the Middle Eastern context is a young man with a Kalashnikov wearing battle fatigues, his face covered by a Palestinian scarf, taking a Western hostage. A *mujahid* in Afghanistan was a heroic tribesman fighting the Soviets. There were thus different interpretations, different responses to the same person fighting for the same cause: the right to self-determination and dignity. But the media is fickle. Once hailed as the giant-killers, those that successfully fought a

superpower, the Afghan *mujahidin* in the wake of the new world order find themselves discarded. The Americans now see little need for them. Afghanistan is still in a state of turmoil, one-third of the population wiped out and the remaining scarred physically and mentally by one of the most savage confrontations in modern times. The Afghans find themselves at a loss.

The Gulf War and the media

When they came out of the Arabian desert in the seventh century, Muslims had little besides horses and faith. It was this faith that scattered the more established and powerful armies before them. It was a time when faith could sweep all before it, and that lesson was never forgotten. In 1991 in the Gulf War we saw how things had changed. The Iraqis could not even come near the enemy as death rained down from the skies thousands of feet above. It was impossible even to hold one's own against a superior technological force. It was a pitiful spectacle, a massacre.

It is a truism that the media are used as a weapon in today's world. I was in Britain during the war and I watched television and read the newspapers closely. In the first few days there was a complete blackout of news reported from the Arab side. Television channels broadcast a number of discussion programmes with some very distinguished participants. Because the Western media had built up the war as a major conflict between two largely balanced forces it was difficult to separate reality from illusion. Saddam's army (the fourth largest in the world), Saddam's nuclear potential, Saddam's Scud missiles and Saddam's super-gun were constantly paraded before us. It was going to be a bloody and prolonged fight.

The reality was totally different. Some of the most powerful nations in the world had combined their forces to lure, fight and destroy a Third World power. And at best Iraq was nothing more than a Third World power. Its armies had not even succeeded in penetrating beyond the borders into Iran in the long war in the 1980s. This was in spite of the full backing of the West and indeed the Arabs who wished to prevent the Iranian revolution from spilling into their areas.

However, watching the war on television one had the impression that this was going to be a repeat of the Second World War. Saddam had been elevated to the rank of a Hitler - indeed the word was commonly bandied around. Then there was the

completely one sided nature of the commentary and analysis. No brown or black faces were to be seen on the discussion - panels in the early days. Furthermore, not only Iraqis but Arabs by extension became the enemy. It became the war of the white man against the brown one, the European and American against the Arab. By further extension it soon became the war of the West against Muslims.

This equation, looking back coldly now, appears astonishing. And yet it happened and is true. Because of this identification of Muslims as the enemy, numerous incidents were reported of Muslims being taunted, beaten and abused in the UK. The irony of picking on a Bangladeshi in the London Underground, a man who had nothing to do with Saddam and his politics or indeed the Middle East, did not strike those who vented their anger against Muslims. Even Indians were not spared. The further irony of an Indian - perhaps a Hindu - being taunted as a Saddam supporter strikes us as ludicrous now but created an uncomfortable atmosphere during the war. I was aware of the seriousness of the situation because I was one of a group of Muslims invited to call on the junior Foreign Minister, Douglas Hogg, at the Foreign Office. The delegation conveyed some of the apprehensions of the beleaguered Muslim community in the UK at the height of the war. A long list of incidents that had taken place over the last few days was presented to the minister. This included women being spat at, pushed and abused because they were easily identified as Muslim (wearing a *hijab* or *shalwar-kameez*). In the public mind anyone who even looked remotely Muslim was supposed to be a supporter of Saddam.

This atmosphere created a siege mentality within the Muslim community. Muslims began to feel their loyalty was on test. Many opposed Saddam and his policies, but there were many others who did not necessarily approve of him yet saw in him a man who had the courage to stand up to the West. The television discussion programmes in the West at first did not allow the opposite point of view. Not only were there very few speakers who could represent the Muslim point of view but they were rarely given a chance. Those that did appear sympathetic to Muslims were dismissed as the loony left or romantics who knew nothing of political reality. In one such British television programme in which I appeared the distinguished panellists virtually dismissed Victoria Brittain simply because she

expressed pro-Arab sentiments and wrote for the Guardian newspaper (although the latter probably created greater animosity than her support for the Arabs in some of the conservative panellists - particularly since the Guardian consistently opposed the Gulf War). There was no doubt that the Muslim point of view was not only marginalised but was not allowed to be represented. On Channel 4's Midnight Special programme, I found that positions were often firmly taken before discussions and then firmly held. There was little attempt at exchange of ideas or even dialogue; and these were extremely distinguished people: MPs, air marshals and experts. However, I also found that some of the famous names showed unexpected sympathy for the suffering of the Iraqi people. Harold Pinter, for example, spoke strongly in support of the underdog. He was, of course, roundly attacked by most members of the panel.

It was quite clear that whoever controlled the media could project how the war was being fought. More important, they could project why the war was being fought. The other side was simply not given a chance. Even untrue stories could be cooked up or true stories be presented in a manner that blurred reality. We were shown the savage bombing of a building in Baghdad that killed hundreds of civilians in the basement. We were not sure what happened. We were told that this was a military target. It was only through the emotional voice and the disturbed eyes of the British television reporter who went in and saw the carnage that we were aware that something terrible had happened. Hospitals, bridges, homes - the very fabric of society was being demolished. For each news item we had to use a method of calculation, to make adjustments, to arrive at the truth.

But there were other extraordinary developments in the Muslim world itself that needed to be explained. Although many Muslim governments supported the West against Saddam, the people were with him. It was a strange phenomenon, this support for Saddam. Muslims were aware that he was far from the ideal Muslim ruler - that, in fact, he was a tyrant created by the West and supported in the 1980s to stem Iran's Islamic revolution. Yet in Pakistan and Egypt, although the governments sided with the Western allies, the people took to the streets in support of Saddam. The Supreme Council of British Muslims met in Bradford and unanimously supported Saddam. His posters became the most popular item throughout the Muslim world. Suddenly Saddam was

being seen as another Nasser, even another Saladin, who stood up to the West. Although Saddam was neither of these, he had assumed an almost mythical status. So intense was the sense of humiliation and anger among Muslims that they would even rally behind the devil himself if he stood up to the West. This is not only a disturbing explanation but an uncomfortable reality.

Media encouragement of Muslim orthodoxy

There is a causal relationship between the Western media and the orthodox position in Islam. Ironically, the media encourage what they set out to deflate. Let me explain. Until the availability of modern technology which would link distant parts of the world, Muslim societies were culturally diverse. The Qur'an and the *Shar'iah* provided guidelines but local practice often varied. So the most colourful syntheses of cultures are recorded from one end of the Muslim world to the other. In due course these became part of Islamic observance. Unchallenged, they were accepted as custom.

Today, however, nothing can go unchallenged because everything is public. Within minutes, accounts of the behaviour of a Muslim group in one part of the world can be flashed to another. This has given the main centres of orthodoxy unimaginable power and has allowed them to act and behave as the guardians of orthodoxy in a manner unthinkable and practically impossible only a few years ago.

Looking at South Asian Muslim customs, we observe that many of them are derived from Islam's close contact with Hinduism. Over the centuries these have become part of Muslim custom. But their absorption into Islam alarmed Muslim scholars. In the eighteenth century the Muslim scholar and reformer. Shah Waliullah, emphasized the need for Muslims to reject these customs. But his voice, although powerful and respected, was nonetheless a single voice. His following and his writing had an impact, but it was limited to the literate. Today the power of the media is such that any custom which is deemed to be abhorrent or unorthodox can be exposed to literally millions of people through the media. It is therefore much more difficult to practise something that is not officially sanctioned or accepted by the orthodox. Sufism provides an interesting example. It is increasingly under attack by the orthodox. The media images of Sufism as a corrupt, decadent cult attracting hippy figures do not help. Sufism has already been under attack over the last century by

modernizing Muslims who absorbed Western scientific and enlightenment concepts. Arab leaders with socialist ideas, like Nasser, have also attempted to suppress it.

Although Sufism in its purest forms is traced directly to the Prophet himself, and some of the greatest Muslim figures have been inclined towards Sufism, the more distorted forms attracted much contemporary criticism. Tomb worship, saint worship and stories of miraculous powers have contributed to the disrepute that Sufism now seems to have fallen into. However, this does not mean that Sufism is to be rejected in its entirety. It is one of the most endearing faces of Islam. Its philosophy of universal love, of universal peace, *sulh-i-kul*, is one of the most powerful and attractive messages it has for our age. Besides, its orthodoxy cannot be challenged. The Sufi's first task is to master the *Shar'iah*, a Sufi must first be orthodox before he can go on to the stage of mystical achievement.

Yet Sufism stands as a discredited force particularly among the younger generation. This is for several reasons. The strictly orthodox Wahabis of Saudi Arabia believe that much of Sufism is little more than mumbo-jumbo, a deviance from the straight path. They are especially critical of the notion of intermediaries between man and God. They believe that power attaches to God alone and not to human beings. Not even the holy Prophet has any special status apart from the fact that he is the last messenger of God. Some extreme sections of the Wahabis would even go as far as discouraging visitors to the tomb of the Prophet because it attracts worshippers who in turn begin to worship the tomb rather than God.

This is logical and correct. But, like all philosophies carried to an extreme, it can create problems on the ground. It produces a rigidity which does not allow for alternative explanations. Backed by the power of scholarship, funding and propaganda, it can easily convince the younger generation that anyone accused of being a Sufi is little short of indulging in shirk, attributing a partner to God, one of the most serious crimes in Islam. I have heard accusations against some of the most respected and saintly figures in contemporary Islam who were suspected of having Sufistic leanings. These people would in turn chuckle and say, 'May God give Muslims better understanding.'

The media play their part in discouraging Sufism. It is not easy to convey the Sufistic message

in the media. The hidden meanings of the saints, mystical powers and esoteric images do not translate easily. The image is far more powerful than the message. A Sufi is easily reduced to a Hollywood caricature.

The other Muslim position, the more formal and orthodox, is paradoxically enough boosted by the Western media. Images of crowds yelling anti-Western slogans and pictures of militant young men capturing embassies or blowing up planes do not discourage other young Muslims. On the contrary they attract them. It gives them a sense of identity, a pride in their cause. They are striking a blow for Islam, for the glory of their religion. They are prepared to make any kind of sacrifice and indeed it is on the news all over the world. This is acknowledgement. So the media play a role in assisting one form of Islam as against another, however unwittingly.

The Western bogeyman: Islamic fundamentalism

What is this so-called Islamic fundamentalism? Why is it becoming such a force in world politics today? Islamic fundamentalism is an imprecise and elusive term which attempts to convey contemporary Islamic revivalism and resurgence. Certain features of this phenomenon can be identified. There is a belief that Islam is a comprehensive way of life, that it includes society, politics and economics. There is also a belief that the failure of Muslims is due to their departure from the straight path of Islam and their infatuation with Western secularism and its materialist ideology. Then it is felt that the renewal of society necessitates a return to Islam, which draws its inspiration directly from the Qur'an and the Prophet. Many Muslims also believe that, in order to create a truly Islamic order, the present Western-inspired civil and criminal codes must be replaced by more Islamic ones. Westernization is condemned but modernization is not; science and technology are therefore accepted, but they need to be subordinated to Islamic belief. The process of Islamization itself requires organization and association of dedicated and trained Muslims who will struggle in *jihad* against corruption and social injustice. However, some go beyond this set of beliefs. They see the West as continuing the Crusades against Muslims with the Crusader mentality. They reject even their own Muslim governments because they are not inspired by the *Shar'iah*. While accepting that the Christians and

Jews are people of the Book, their links with Western colonialism and Zionism make them unbelievers.

Many factors feed into this Islamic revivalism. Most significant are the rapid developments in communications which link up Bradford with Islamabad, Washington with Cairo, connecting Muslims living in the West to their own societies. There are also visiting scholars, diplomats and travellers. This is why when the explosion took place around The Satanic Verses in Bradford a movement developed rapidly among Muslims all over the world. In Bombay and in Islamabad Muslims were killed protesting against the book. Benazir Bhutto, who had just assumed the office of Prime Minister, said, 'Salman Rushdie almost sank me.' Never before in history could the problems of an author living across the world have had such an effect on the politics of a country like Pakistan.

There is also a sociological factor. We note a polarization in Muslim society which often leads to conflict. Neither extreme is desirable: neither integration, for it implies the blurring of borders which would in the end deny a separate Muslim identity; nor isolation, for Islam is not and cannot be isolationist with its emphasis on the universal and the global. But the tensions of the times have created the crisis of polarization, and the lack of leadership among Muslims has allowed it to grow to the point of mutual incomprehension.

World politics have also contributed to the growth of the phenomenon. From the Muslim perspective it is important to understand that during the Cold War both the USA and the USSR were equally suspect in their dealings with the Muslim world. The Muslim perspective was best summed up by Khomeini's dictum *na sharq na gharb*, neither East nor West. During the 1950s and 1960s the USSR threatened Muslims. One of my memories as a young undergraduate in Pakistan is Khrushchev's drawing a circle around Peshawar in Pakistan threatening to wipe it out with a nuclear attack. Syria and Iraq fell to a local variant of communism and the results were disastrous. It was feared that if the USA removed its protection many other Muslim countries would fall to the Soviet Union. Then, in the 1970s, things began to change.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, it was expected that like so many dominoes the surrounding states of Iran and Pakistan would be the next to fall. But the Afghans stood their ground, and eventually the USSR packed up and went home. This

was followed by the complete break-up of the USSR, which in turn led to the emergence of six new Muslim states. Not unnaturally, this sequence of events was linked by Muslims to their own vision of Islamic destiny. For Muslims it was the triumph of their faith against Godless Russia; the inevitable victory of good over evil. - With the collapse of the USSR, Muslims believed that the USA alone remained as the major force hostile to Muslims. However, we must emphasize that not all Muslims accept conflict with the USA as inevitable. Many nations have close ties with the USA, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

In considering why Islam is becoming more of a world force today, we need to explain what is happening to make countries like Algeria - once firmly secular - turn to Islam. Algeria itself is an interesting example because it was one of the first Muslim countries to achieve independence from a European colonial power. After a heroic struggle which cost millions of lives, it then set itself on the path to secular democracy. Having rid itself of the French it would try to become as far as possible French. The paradox was not resolved. It was simply frozen.

All this, however, did not meet the economic and political aspirations of the ordinary Algerian. A generation later Algeria seemed to have got nowhere. Worse: in the process it began to lose its own sense of identity. Horror stories of the treatment of Arabs in France further alienated Algerians from the French model. Questions were raised: if we are to be totally French and yet the French despise us there must be something wrong? Where do we look for another identity? Is the answer in our own culture and religion? The alternative source of identity was, of course, Islam. It was always there. Earlier it had simply been assumed. Now the present generation of Algerian leaders began to examine it seriously and discovered in the process that there were many Algerians thinking along these lines.

'Islamic revivalism,' 'Islamic resurgence,' 'Islamic movement' - we imagine these are new and peculiar to our age. We think we are understanding something happening in the world by labelling Muslim expressions thus. In fact these very terms are as old as Islam itself. Islam is nothing short of an endless revolution, the eternal quest to reach out to God. It is the universal desire of human beings to pose the eternal questions and attempt their answers in our brief span here on earth.

Concluding Thoughts

A hundred years ago Muslim lands were under the European colonial powers. Muslim capitals such as Algiers and Cairo were occupied. Those that were not, like Kabul and Tehran, were under the influence of one or other power. It was the nadir of Muslim political fortunes. Today, a hundred years later, there are about fifty Muslim states, almost a billion Muslims in the world (with, significantly, about ten million Muslims in the West).

Islamic symbolism remains high among Muslims. Constitutions are declared Islamic and flags bear an Islamic star or crescent. Airlines like Pakistan International and Gulf Air say a prayer before the flight when announcing take-off. Major hotels indicate the direction of Mecca for those of the faithful who wish to pray in their rooms.

Perhaps because of the global Islamic position that is forming, there is also a feeling among non-Muslims that Islam is a threat. Throughout the world there is confrontation between Muslims and people of other religions: in South Asia between Hindus and Muslims (India and Pakistan), in the Middle East between Jews and Muslims (Israel and the Arabs), in Africa between Christians and Muslims (Nigeria and Sudan). Even the disintegration of the communist states shows how deep-rooted these divisions are in history. In Bosnia Muslims once again confront Christians, and in Azerbaijan Azeri Muslims fight it out with Christian Armenians.

The Andalus syndrome is never far from the Muslim mind. The sense of injustice, of loss, of the cruelty of the world is sharp. It is captured by a South Asian Muslim character in an Urdu novel commenting on Muslim losses which fuse in his mind and cause confusion:

The bearded man tried hard to recollect: after a while, he said, 'all I can remember is that as I was leaving Granada ...'

Granada! the rest looked up at the bearded man with a start . . . And the poor old bearded man, already shocked at their mocking disbelief, felt utterly distraught at the laughter . . . 'I've been uprooted,' he remarked dolefully, 'and that's what matters. What difference does it make now for me to remember whether it's Granada that I've been thrown out of, or Bait-al-Muqaddis [Jerusalem], or Jahanabad, or Kashmir . . .?'

The depth of sadness in his voice had an intensely melancholy impact on all the men. They drifted into

silence. After a while the bearded man said tearfully, 'Friends, we left behind all that was once ours, and now it seems we've even left behind our memories.' (Husain 1973:93)

Andalusia, Kashmir, Jerusalem and now Bosnia - the list of Muslim losses is long. It brings together the past and the present. It acts as an open wound. Political injustices, deep-rooted hatreds, disintegrating empires and overzealous reformers explain some of the confrontation between Muslims and non-Muslims today. But it is also to be explained by the ethnic and religious revivalism all over the world. It is a revivalism that is still to be understood in its present global context. We must therefore attempt to explain the differences that exist between Muslims and non-Muslims. By doing so we will make some sense of our different positions. By avoiding it we will perpetuate the stereotypes and misunderstandings. There is no reason to assume that differences in themselves set different civilizations on a collision course. Indeed, in the plural world that we live in the differences must be not only tolerated but also understood.

Muslims in the West

For the last thousand years the West treated Islam as the 'other,' as 'over there.' In the main this is still true: the bulk of the Muslim population lives in Africa and Asia. But today this simple world-view has been complicated by the presence in the West of over ten million Muslims. About five or six million Muslims live in Europe and about four or five million in America; the exact numbers tend to be somewhat unreliable, since immigrants and converts sometimes do not wish to declare their identity or register and are therefore difficult to enumerate. Muslims living in the West are theologically in harmony with the Quranic position. Again and again the Qur'an has emphasized that God's domain is not restricted by East or West: it is everywhere. "*To Allah belongeth the East and the West. Whithersoever ye turn there is Allah's countenance*" (Surah 2: verse 115). So Muslims can practise their religion whether in Cairo or California, in London or Lahore.

We need therefore a new frame of reference. It can no longer be seen as Islam versus the West; it is Islam and the West or Islam in the West. The growth of this Muslim community has been impressive to judge by the mosques: both Germany

and France have about a thousand, Britain about 500 (although many may only be a room or two). The central mosques in London and in Washington symbolize this growth: the mosques are full of worshippers, they are beautifully constructed and are the hub of Muslim social and religious activity.

But if there are no theological obstacles for Muslims in the West there are certainly sociological and political ones. The Muslim presence in the West has added fuel to anti-Islamic sentiments. Young girls wearing the *hijab* in France have become the subject of hostile national news; Muslims wanting separate schools in England are at the centre of a heated national debate; the Salman Rushdie controversy continues to involve Muslims and the majority in a virulent confrontation.

This charged atmosphere encouraged the growth of European racism dramatically in the 1980s. It was symbolized by Le Pen in France. So rapidly did his popularity escalate that few politicians could ignore his message. Soon, even the distinguished offices of the French Prime Minister were talking of 'smelly and dirty immigrants.' It had become fashionable to speak of immigrants with open contempt. Politicians called for rigid immigration controls, even for deportation. This kind of public position was quite unthinkable only a generation ago when the figleaf of European humanism would have covered such racist expressions.

Apart from an increasingly hostile environment in some Western countries, several other factors have sharpened the Muslim sense of identity. It is for this reason that so much alarm is being caused. It explains the platform for politicians like Le Pen. The international political climate which changed dramatically in the 1970s struck a chord among Muslims in the West. This was the period when King Faisal of Saudi Arabia used oil as an Islamic weapon and Imam Khomeini in Iran and General Zia in Pakistan talked of Islamic revolution and Islamization. This kind of political leadership triggered Islamic revivalism throughout the Muslim community, wherever they lived in the world.

The younger generation

A younger generation of Muslim immigrants has come of age in the West; about half are now born in the West as distinct from their parents, who migrated here in the 1950s and 1960s. The young people rejected the integration and assimilation that their parents often desired. They were no longer the

meeek, invisible immigrants grateful to be allowed in at all; they wished to assert themselves. In this situation issues of race and religion often fused, as growing racism forced them into a greater sense of religious identity.

In the mid-1960s, when I was in Cambridge, there was no place for Friday prayers. Now, in the 1990s, there are three and they are invariably overflowing with worshippers on Friday. At various sessions of *Seerat-un-Nabi* conferences (in honour of the Prophet) organized by the Pakistan Cambridgeshire Association, which I chaired, around 200-250 Muslims, entire families, turned up. This type of phenomenon appeared to be happening all over the world. In 1989 on my way to Hawaii for a conference, I was invited to speak at the recently constructed mosque in Seattle after the evening prayer. There were about 200 Muslims present; many were women - again a sign of our times. The questions were sharply focused on the role of Muslims living as a minority.

There is also an economic factor. The younger generation are better educated than their parents, who in the UK, for example, had arrived largely to take up menial jobs as bus conductors or factory workers. Young Muslims now compete for places at university with ambitions of becoming doctors and engineers. They wish to share the good life of the West, to own smart homes and cars.

Not all analysts are convinced that the signs of Muslim activity are evidence of Islamic health. Some of the trends among the younger generation of Muslims cause pessimism in certain Muslim quarters. Older Muslims living in the West are worried that their culture will be weakened over time. For example, Dr Muzammil H. Siddiqi refers to a recent study of immigrant Muslim communities in the West which showed that with each succeeding generation there was a decline in strict adherence to specific Islamic values:

Thus it is observed that few Muslims care for five daily prayers. Some do not feel bad about drinking, dating and dancing. Some Muslim girls feel there is nothing wrong in marrying non-Muslims as long as they love and care for each other. Seventy to eighty percent of all Muslims do not belong to any Islamic centre or mosque, and do not care about them. Many think that Muslim countries (especially the oil-rich countries) should build mosques for them, and they do not even contribute one percent of their income to the Islamic centres and organisations.

(Siddiqi 1991:12-13)

The American versus the European experience

There are some interesting differences between the USA and Europe which help us to understand better the phenomenon of Muslims living in the West, and which also highlight the broader historical differences between the USA and Europe. The main difference is the social and economic composition of the Muslim community. In the USA it is largely middle class doctors, engineers, academics. This gives the community a greater social confidence and a positive sense of belonging. In Europe, by and large, the community remains stuck in the working class or even the underclass. Its failure on the political scene is spectacular: although Britain has almost two million Muslims they have not been able to win a single seat in Parliament. Worse, their leaders tend to be divided, particularly over where to draw the line between integration and traditional Muslim identity; they seem more interested in attacking each other than representing the community. Another difference is that in the USA there is a greater geographical spread; Muslims are not concentrated in one state or city. In Europe there is a tendency to concentrate; Bradford in England is an example. The concentration allows the leaders of that particular city to emerge as spokesmen. During the Rushdie crisis the leaders of Bradford were constantly consulted by the media and, it was assumed, spoke for the entire community. It allowed the media to simplify questions of leadership, values, strategy and organization among Muslims. Only subsequently did people realize that although the Bradford spokesmen broadly reflected the general opinion of Muslims they were by no means elected or unanimously accepted leaders of the entire Muslim community of the UK.

The concentration of Muslims in specific communities has another consequence. The community can import and perpetuate its sectarian and ethnic characteristics from home. The traditional sectarian tensions in Pakistan between the Barelvis and Deobandis were lifted en bloc to the UK. For the outsider the differences between these sects are confusing and difficult to understand. Let me explain by an example. For the Barelvis, (who are mostly from the Pakistan province of Punjab) the holy Prophet is a superhuman figure whose presence is all around us at all times; he is *hazir*, present; he is not *bashar*, material or flesh, but *nur*, light. The Deobandis, who also revere the Prophet, argue he

was the *insan-i-kamil*, the perfect person, but still only a man, a mortal. This explains why Kalim Siddiqui in the UK, demanding the implementation of the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie for insulting the Prophet, found his most sympathetic audience among the Barelvis, especially in the network of mosques that they have organized.

Europe itself has changed dramatically in relation to its immigrants and their culture. For example, from the early 1950s to the early 1990s a number of developments took place in Britain on all levels of society: from seven curry restaurants to seven thousand, from a few mosques to 500, from no African or Asian television presenters and journalists to dozens, from only a few African or Asian authors writing in English to a number of Booker Prize winners. All this was to the good; British culture was that much richer. But it is easy to understand the British fear that perhaps too much may have been happening too fast. After all, Britain is a deeply conservative and insular society, and no such foreign influences - and from such far lands - had made themselves felt before. The fear fed easily into feelings of racial animosity. Muslims in the USA are conscious that they are there by choice. They have opted to be American. America is, after all, the land of the melting pot, where everyone is ideally equal. This contrasts with Muslims in Europe. Many feel that they are in Europe simply because their parents migrated or were forced to migrate for economic reasons. This makes for disenfranchised and alienated citizens.

Muslims in Europe have a direct relationship to the colonial period. The UK ruled South Asia (British India), and therefore most of its Muslim immigrants tend to be from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (of about two million the biggest single national group is Pakistani). Moroccans and Algerians drifted to France (about half a million of the former and one million of the latter of France's three million Muslims). Because Germany and Turkey had a relationship going back to the First World War, Turks went to Germany (most of Germany's one and a half million Muslims are Turks). The Netherlands has about half a million Muslims who are mostly from Surinam. In Portugal most Muslims are from the former colonies in India or southern France; in Spain they are from Morocco or Algeria. In Italy, where there are estimated to be about 200,000 Muslims, they are mostly from Libya.

In both the USA and Europe, ideas of local

ethnicity also affect Muslim self-awareness. The rise of black power in the USA helped to create a mood of assertiveness, of identity, of exaggerated self-importance in the Muslim community. Black Muslims like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali in the 1960s became symbols of Muslim pride. This did not happen in Europe. There were no superstars to rally behind. The vast majority of the Muslims were marginalised in low-paid jobs and there were few intellectual or media figures speaking on their behalf.

There is also the geo-political factor. The USA is, by and large, neutral in its dealings with Muslims. So, while it is seen as anti-Libya, anti-Iran or, more recently and more famously, anti-Iraq, it is also seen as an ally of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Its relationships, therefore, depend on its geo-political strategy. Racial or imperial prejudices which often colour the view of the European powers are less visible.

Muslim integration in Western nations

It is a common assumption that the Muslim presence in Europe began after the Second World War; it is fed by media stereotypes and racist polemics of Muslims invading and flooding Europe. But the roots of Muslim immigration go back much further (Nielsen 1992). The origins of the Muslim community in Germany lie in the close relationship between Germany and the Ottoman empire through periods of war and peace. Even earlier, Muslims had settled in the southern German states after the second siege of Vienna in 1683. After that period Prussian kings often employed Muslim soldiers. It is the same link that allowed the Ottoman sultan to patronize the mosque built in a Muslim cemetery in Berlin in 1866. The economic and diplomatic relationship between Turkey and Germany thus has deep roots. The picture is the same for France and Britain, where many immigrants arrived during the last century. Seamen from Africa and Asia settled in London and other ports. We know of the early Yemeni settlements (Halliday 1992). The first mosques were opened for these seamen, and mosques were then opened in Woking in 1889 and Liverpool in 1891. The Liverpool mosque did not survive the outbreak of the First World War. In 1935 the mosque in Woking declared its adherence to SunniIslam (earlier it had been associated with the Ahmedis). Marmaduke Pickthall and Abdullah Yusuf Ali, whose translations of the Qur'an into English continue to be read all over the world, were both associated with this mosque. In

1944 King George VI inaugurated the Islamic Cultural Centre on a site near Regent's Park in London, in exchange for a site in Cairo for a new Anglican cathedral. In due course Britain's main mosque would be built there.

France shows an even more pronounced pattern of immigration than Britain before 1945. Mohammad Ali of Egypt in the last century had encouraged Egyptian students, scholars and business people to go to France. Before the First World War immigrants from Algeria, mostly from the Kabyle tribes, were drifting to the Marseille region for jobs in the olive oil refining and related industries. During the First World War Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians joined the civil and defence industries. It was in recognition of this that the French allowed the opening of a mosque in Paris in 1926. During the Second World War the Vichy government in 1942 imported North African labour to help Germans in their war effort. By the time of the 1954 census there were 200,000 Algerians in France. Immigration was caused largely by the European governments themselves, who actively encouraged people from their former colonies to emigrate to the 'mother country' because of the need for labour in the post-war reconstruction. For example, in Britain, at a time of full employment in the 1950s it was difficult to recruit people to work in the most menial and arduous jobs; the governments therefore sought to attract Asians and West Indians to Britain and offered them the worst jobs, those that they could not fill with native British. This occurred throughout Europe. It is often forgotten by native inhabitants that Muslims were actually invited by the governments.

Most of these immigrants had no intention of staying permanently in Europe. But most did. At first their problems were not so severe. However, changes were taking place in Europe. The colonies had disappeared. The economy was stagnant and the oil prices began to rise sharply. The question of race was now in the air. European countries reacted by stricter immigration laws, Britain being the first with its Commonwealth Immigration Act in 1962. This did not prevent immigration from continuing and indeed increasing. But there was a difference: wives and children were now arriving.

As the governments had only wanted immigrants for their labour, they tried to restrict immigration when Muslim men started to bring their families over. By this time the governments had achieved their objectives and did not assume responsibility for the

break-up of Muslim families as a result of migration. When discussing Muslims in the West we often overlook the 'local' convert. Many Europeans and Americans are attracted to Islam, especially its Sufic strand. Small communities, such as that at Norwich in the UK, became famous for attracting British middle-class converts. In the 1970s they drew attention because many of their members were academics and intellectuals and some from influential families. Interestingly, these groups have now been marginalised by the more noisy, aggressive, turbulent and ethnic Muslim politics of the 1980s and 1990s.

What can Muslims do to improve their chances in the West? Some answers are provided by a sympathetic Christian scholar in the USA (Poston 1991). He believes that five main actions are crucial for the future well-being and expansion of Islam in America: (1) The need to develop an indigenous American leadership: American converts should be trained quickly and thoroughly for positions of leadership in order to avoid the categorization of Islam as a foreign 'cult'. (2) The stereotypical negative image of Islam must be transformed through proper use of the media. (3) Provocative anti-Christian polemics should be avoided lest they provoke a strong reaction among Christians (whether practising or non-practising). (4) Muslims should attempt to reach more achievable goals by promoting co-operation among themselves instead of focusing their concern on homogenizing diverse Muslim ethnic groups. (5) Muslim individuals should become involved in dawah (social welfare and missionary) activities in order to overcome the powerful assimilative influence of the American mainstream. These are practical and sensible suggestions, and most Muslims will find little to argue in them. Many Muslims may have reached these conclusions themselves but as communities they are still some way from implementing them. Unless they do so, strife will result from their minority position. Muslim leaders and writers need to do more serious thinking.

Muslims as Minorities

In the last chapter we focussed on countries where Islam is the dominant religion. In Turkey, Iran and Pakistan - and in the Arab countries - about 90 to 95 per cent of the people claim to be Muslims. Many of these countries use the word 'Islamic' in their self-description; thus the

Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where the *Shari'ah* is the law of the land. We will now look at Muslims in countries where the majority population is not Muslim. The important point to keep before us is the wide range of the Muslim experience as minorities. In one place they are comfortable and adjusted, in another resentful and deprived; Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides is an example of the former, Samarkand, under the Soviets, of the latter. We shall look at both in this chapter. In discussing the problem of Muslim minorities in my book, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (1992), I mentioned Kashmir, Palestine and the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union. But events now make the third example redundant. Over the last few years we have seen the Soviet Union disintegrate and the former Soviet republics in Central Asia emerge as independent states. We can no longer talk of the Muslim republics as a minority within a non-Muslim majority. But because their problems derive from their former situations as a minority we shall discuss them below.

The 'Problem' of Muslim Minorities

It is not difficult to see why Muslims who live as a minority in non-Muslim countries like India or Israel are seen by them as a problem. The reasons are relatively simple. Wherever Muslims live as minorities they increasingly face problems of discrimination. These are partly due to historical and political factors, partly due to the media, which have confirmed for many that Muslims are violent, unreliable and prone to anarchy. There is another reason. Most non-Muslim countries in which Muslims live have an image of themselves as plural, tolerant, secular and modern societies. Muslims somehow challenge this image. They provoke the worst aspects of the state. In the main, instead of solving the problems of the Muslims in a manner that would be mutually beneficial, the state tends to ignore or minimize them. In the former state of Yugoslavia the Serbs went one step further with their Muslim minority. They systematically killed them and drove them from their homes in Bosnia. The world called it '*ethnic cleansing*' and did nothing. Bosnia was added to the list of recent Muslim losses. What offends Muslims living in a country as the minority community? What is the Muslim 'problem'? There are two or three things that Muslims are most sensitive about. The most important is religion. Muslims would like to be able to visit their mosques and say their prayers peacefully without interruption, without being

beaten up, without being picked up for interrogation. They would also like privacy in their homes where they can lead their lives as Muslims. They would like dignity and honour for their families - in particular, for the elderly, the women and the children. They don't like police or paramilitary forces to burst into their homes and humiliate their families. They would like some control over their lives, some perpetuation of their own customs and values, the construction and maintenance of mosques which are the focus of social and cultural life, the capacity to read the Qur'an and the chance to live as Muslims and by Muslim traditions. These include family laws, inheritance, religious holidays and religious festivals. When these are threatened, Muslims are threatened; confusion and anger ensue.

It is not difficult for non-Muslim rulers to concede these facilities to Muslims; when they have been conceded, Muslims have lived harmoniously. History confirms this. It is the modern state that creates the problem. Because the modern state is so centralized and because it often lacks imagination in dealing with its minorities, Muslims are constantly under pressure. Merely wishing for the minimum, Muslims are seen as people who demand separation and indeed secession.

There is a cultural problem also for Muslims living as a minority. Non-Muslim tourists visiting Muslim holy places cause offence by eating there and loitering, playing loud music on their radios. Islamic culture, *adab*, is directly challenged. In some cases there is a direct physical threat to these holy places, such as the demolition of Babar's mosque in Ayodhya, India. The inevitable religious clashes cost lives. There is also the more sinister danger of actual history being changed and Muslim culture being depicted in official textbooks as barbaric and worthless (as has happened in Spain). A discussion of Muslims as a minority is important for several reasons. First, the populations we are discussing are large. Indeed, Muslims who live as a minority constitute about a quarter of the total number of Muslims. The problem is serious because it is ongoing and does not involve only one or two countries - it is global. A list of countries in which Muslims live as a minority includes the USA, India, Russia, the UK, France, Germany, Israel and Singapore. In India alone there are said to be anywhere around 110 million Muslims. No religion in the world has so many people trapped in an alien environment as the Muslims. Neither Christians nor

Jews, nor Hindus, none of the major world religions have such large numbers in so many countries dominated by people of other religions.

The second reason is that the sharpest and most brutal political confrontation is taking place in these societies. We learn of the most compelling stories of injustice and brutality as Muslims struggle for self-dignity and identity. The images that are shown on television and the reports in the press confirm for us the plight of the Muslims.

Thirdly, because of the notion of the *ummah*, because of the manner of the suppression of these groups, Muslims in neighbouring countries are deeply concerned. The struggle of the Kashmiris in South Asia and the Palestinians in the Middle East draws in large Muslim populations outside the national borders. The geo-political situation remains tense; indeed it can escalate to war at any time. It is well to recall that the major powers in both areas have gone to war three or four times because of these Muslim minorities. Finally, some Islamic ideas place Muslims and the non-Muslim majority on a confrontation course. The Islamic ideas are notions of the *ummah*, which transcends national borders, and the idea of *jihad*, struggle, the need to fight for a just and correct order. On the other hand, these non-Muslim nations need to respond to security requirements and geopolitical strategy. The Muslim minority is often caught in the crossfire.

There are agonizing dilemmas facing Muslims living as a minority in certain areas. In a different time, in a previous age, Muslims persecuted by the majority could do one of two things: they could pack up and leave, that is, exercise the right to adopt *hijra*, or they could fight for their rights, that is *jihad*. Today, because of the power, the highly centralized security and administrative structures and the strongly manned borders of state, neither option is really feasible. Besides, it would be difficult to exercise the option of *hijra*. As recent history shows us, migrant communities do not settle down easily and merge; they take a long time to do so. Any influx of large numbers of refugees causes all kinds of social and political problems to the host community, however welcoming they may have been at first.

This leaves the option of *jihad*. That too is difficult in our age. A small deprived minority cannot easily take on the power of the state, but it can try. The attempt to assert independence, to fight for one's dignity and culture, explains what is going on in Kashmir and Palestine. Communication between the

government and these groups appears to have broken down. For Muslims the state is represented by the brute force of soldier and policeman. The women in the area live in dread of their honour and dignity being violated; young males are in the constant fear of being picked up for interrogation and torture at any time on any flimsy pretext. For the elders there appears to be no real alternative but to give free rein to the youth in their attempt to break loose and create their own response to the world, whatever the costs. It is a dreadful choice, full of pain and disruption. But when dialogue breaks down it appears to be the only one open for the time being. An important aspect of these movements is their direct involvement with the geo-politics of the region. The Kashmir movement is seen in India as entirely a creation of Pakistan. This perception is simplistic and disregards numerous factors: the notion of the *ummah* which generates sympathy for Muslims wherever they are in trouble (although the Kashmiri cause has great sympathy in Pakistan, so does the Palestinian one); the strong feelings of injustice in Pakistan regarding the legality of the state of Kashmir and the manner it was incorporated into India; the many Kashmiris who have settled in Pakistan; the failure of the central government over the last decades to integrate these areas into the larger body of the nation. All these factors militate against integration. There are also certain Muslims who out of enthusiasm or ignorance or even mischief would make demands which not only clash with the state but suggest its disintegration. These create problems for everyone concerned. For instance Dr Kalim Siddiqui's call for a Muslim parliament created all kinds of doubts in Britain in the early 1990s. Did Muslims want to create their own country in Britain? Did they want independence? Were their threats of forcing an Islamic order on to Britain to be taken seriously? Such questions obviously cause resentment and anger in the majority. This reaction, when fed into the existing stereotypes about the minority, creates a sense of contempt and revulsion against it. Muslims appear to be largely unaware of this aspect of their relationship with the majority.

The inexplicable fear of Muslim minorities

I find it surprising, even intriguing, that there is such a pronounced fear of Muslim minorities, whether in India or in Israel. In India it is even reflected in its attitude towards Pakistan. India, a country far larger in size, its armies and air force always maintaining

a ratio of four or five to one, and now with a sophisticated nuclear programme, lives in strange psychological fear of Pakistan, the smaller, poorer, lesser-armed country.

Similarly, the Israeli notion of the Arab threat is exaggerated. Here is a modernized nation possessing one of the most sophisticated defence services of the world, including a wide range of nuclear weapons. It is supported by the USA, which, when there is war against the Arabs, enters the fray with an almost unlimited supply of the most up-to-date weapons. Israel faces poorly equipped armies often manned by demoralized soldiers. Arab leaders are usually politically divided whatever their rhetoric of wiping Israel off the face of the earth. Yet Israeli leaders sound like David facing Goliath. It must be, I imagine, the atavistic fear of Muslim warriors in the past. Nothing else could explain the neurosis of such powerful countries contemplating their weaker Muslim neighbours. These are deep and complex psychological fears, but they need to be confronted if they are to be laid to rest.

Muslim governments have rarely exhibited this tension with regard to minorities. Minorities have always been part of many Muslim countries and on the whole they have been left alone, indeed often participating in the state by holding the highest positions. The problem is therefore not only of the minority but of the majority. If the majority is a little bit more tolerant and imaginative it will be able to deal with the minorities more fairly and more kindly, and Muslims in return would respond more positively. Power is both corrupting and dangerous when it is unchallenged and concentrated in the hands of the majority as it is in Israel and India. The non-Muslim voices of tolerance and compassion are easily drowned.

In the selection of officers for defence and the civil services and in the distribution of economic permits and sanctions, the state tends to encourage the oppression of the minorities. It also does so by suggesting a certain kind of Muslim as a 'good' Muslim in the media. The definition is centred on someone who is prepared to abandon Muslim customs and indeed faith. He or she thus becomes a good or moderate Muslim. In contrast anyone wishing to assert their culture and identity is seen as a fanatic or a fundamentalist - in the terms of the state, a troublemaker, a separatist, a communal creature.

The resources of the state are infinite, the

energy of the security forces and their strength is inexhaustible. In comparison the protesting individual has limited resources and lives at the centre of a web spun by the state. The fact that Muslim groups have fought so long for their rights simply underlines the desperation of their position. Imagination and wisdom demand that the state responds to them with understanding and tolerance. Using more force, more torture and more suppression implies not only the failure of the state but a serious misreading of the situation.

The burden of the immigrant

But the position is more complex than a straightforward clash between majority and minority. What is not so well known in this context is that Muslim groups fleeing to neighbouring Muslim countries have also had a difficult time. The Muslims of India who migrated to Pakistan found a great deal of succour and support in the early days. In recent years, however, a confrontation has developed between them and the local majority based on ethnic and economic factors. Refugees from India were seen as monopolizing better jobs. Notions of cultural superiority, language differences and ideological arguments about identity all widened the gap between the minority and the majority. The result was that in the last decades we have seen these very minorities in direct conflict with the majority population - although both are Muslim. So while Sindhis battled it out with refugees from India in the Sind province - of Pakistan the Jordanian government fought it out with the Palestinians using tanks and heavy weapons to dislodge them. It was a cruel, paradoxical and even unexpected development. But it showed how deeply interconnected countries and problems were, how impossible it was to view the problem of the minorities in isolation.

By the time of the Gulf War in 1991 we saw how the role of the Palestinians affected and divided Arab opinion. Because of their support for Saddam Hussain - which seemed to have developed only because of his vocal support for them - they were victimized and bounded out of countries that had once allowed them employment. The ideological and emotional support for their cause was clearly subordinated to the antipathy they were arousing by their political position.

The Afghan refugees arriving in Pakistan provide another example. Although they were welcomed

when they arrived in the late 1970s, most Pakistanis soon began to view them with unease and then open resentment. Stories of kidnapping, drug-smuggling and robbery were publicly linked to them, and Pakistanis began asking their guests when they would return. Similarly, the Muslim minorities appeared to be out of step with the majority in Britain. During the Gulf War the Muslim conference in Bradford which claimed to speak for all Muslims in the country unanimously supported Saddam against Britain. British Muslims were concerned about the bloodshed and damage that would be inflicted on the Iraqi people. They were right to be concerned. But it also convinced many in Britain that here was a potential fifth column, a minority which in the middle of a war situation was prepared to side with the enemy. The leaders of the Muslim minority were out of tune with the times. The racial harassment that followed was only to be expected. It would have been far worse if the war had continued and large numbers of British soldiers had died. Coffins coming home would have triggered racial violence on an unprecedented level. Fortunately for the British Muslims, the war ended quickly. As there was no hand-to-hand fighting or set-piece military engagements, British casualties were at a minimum. But the British majority had been made aware that the Muslim community had voted against them. Henceforth a question mark would hang over the loyalty of the British Muslims.

Sufism the Universal Way

In the midst of accounts of prejudice, alienation and anguish there is a success story of integration and harmony. It is located in the unlikely setting of the Outer Hebrides, off the Scottish coast.

Sufism is Islam's tolerant, mystical and universal philosophy. Its message of *sulh-i-kul*, peace with all, has endeared it to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It appeals to all Muslim sects and social classes. One has only to visit shrines such as that of the Sufi saint at Ajmer in India and observe the stream of Muslim and non-Muslim visitors for confirmation of this (see chapter 3). Sufis see the unity of God, *tawhid*, in everything and everyone. Although in its vulgar or more populist forms Sufism has acquired distinctly un-Islamic practices, but nevertheless its origin is unimpeachable, tracing back to the Prophet himself. The Sufi must first

master the *Shar'iah*, the true path of Islam, before venturing onto the *tariqah*, the Sufi way.

Sufi masters are central figures for their disciples in helping to unravel the mysteries and ideas of Sufism. The first and primary function of the Sufi master is what may be called ego-busting and that is to diminish the individual ego in order to establish the supremacy of God. To aid this, numerous exercises are devised, most of them baffling to the layman. Many stories are told of how Sufi masters instruct their disciples. There are tales of princes who, on entering the Sufi circle, are ordered to clean latrines. As with all things Sufic, many layers of meaning lie beneath the surface. The idea is first to deconstruct and then to reconstruct the seeker of truth before the *tariqah* can be understood. These esoteric practices allow Sufis to endure hard times, even times of persecution. One such practice is the ritual of *dhikr*, mention of the name of Allah. Each of the ninety-nine names is known to contain a special quality. Pronouncing and repeating the name in a special manner produces a spiritual state in the believer. *Dhikr* kept Islam alive in Central Asia during the harsh days of Soviet rule (see chapter 5). The following prayer sums up the spirit of Sufism. It is from the Naqshbandi order associated with Bahauddin Naqshband, the saint of Bukhara, who lived in the fourteenth century (and whom we shall meet again in chapter 5). The universal strands of Islam are clearly visible; it could be the prayer of any religion, anywhere in the world:

Oh my God, how gentle art thou with him who has transgressed against thee: how near art thou to him who seeks thee, how tender to him who petitions thee, how kindly to him who hopes in thee. Who is he who asks of thee and thou dost deny him or who sought refuge in thee and thou dost betray him and drew near to thee and thou dost hold him aloof? And fled unto thee and thou dost repulse him?

The all-pervading and tolerant spirit of the Sufis is not surprising when we consider their sources of inspiration. Although the Prophet is their ultimate model, other spiritual figures - which include Abraham, Moses and Jesus - also mould them. This is enunciated in '*The Eight Qualities of the Sufi*' by a well-known Sufi master, Junaid of Baghdad:

*In Sufism, eight qualities must be exercised.
The Sufi has:*

*Liberality such as that of Abraham;
Acceptance of his lot, as Ismail accepted;
Patience, as possessed by Job;
Capacity to communicate by symbolism, as in the case of Zachariah;
Estrangement from his own people, which was the case with John;
Woollen garb like the shepherd's mantle of Moses;
Journeying, like the travelling of Jesus;
Humility, as Muhammad had humility of spirit. (Shah 1990:246)*

For me personally, Sufism's message of compassion, humility and universal love is attractive and inspiring. But what is a youngster, soaked in the materialist urban milieu in which television provides the greatest input, to make of Sufism? How would he or she understand Sufi stories? The following tale from the celebrated *Mathnawi* of the greatest of Sufi masters, Rumi, illustrates the point. A disciple seeking the Sufi path finally feels he has mastered it and arrives to announce this to his master. He knocks on the door and when asked 'Who is there?' answers, 'It is I.' The master says, 'Go away, you have not yet acquired knowledge. ' He leaves to return after he has performed more spiritual exercises, and this time when asked who is knocking says 'It is Thou'. 'Come in,' says the master. 'There is no room for two in this house.'

This Sufi story illustrates the layers of understanding that lie in Sufism: the obliteration of the ego, the need for the master who will help the quest for knowledge along the divine path, and the search for the true way, the way of God, however difficult and esoteric. These stories are allegories, metaphors, stories within stories, and like the layers of an onion they require patience to peel and they sometimes end in tears.

Sufism is not calculated to be popular or understood in an age that is dominated by the media, by the sound bite, by simplistic analysis, by the noise and thunder of the sound-track and by a cynical irreverence (see chapter 6). Our age demands simple heroes - Superman, James Bond, Indiana Jones. Themes that remind us of the transience of our life on earth, that point to the I mysteries of existence, the complexity of being, are not readily accepted.