

INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES, NEW DELHI

30th Anniversary Celebrations Programme

Two-day National Seminar on

Towards Equality, Justice and Fraternity in Contemporary India - Creating a Better Tomorrow through Islamic Studies

In collaboration with

Maulana Azad University, Jodhpur (Rajasthan)

On October 20-21, 2017 at Jodhpur, Rajasthan

CONCEPT NOTE

Islam entered India from two sides; first it reached the shores of Malabar, Kerala through the Arabs who were involved in peaceful maritime trade since pre-Islamic period. Second, it came to Sind in the wake of Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sind. Interestingly it was the looting and plunder of a maritime trade ship that prompted the Umayyads to conquer Sind. Sind had ports where commercial ships used to call on and station for services and probable small scale trade. The fact that the commercial ship waylaid and looted by King Dahir was carrying the widows of Muslim merchants brings home the point that probably Islam had reached the shore of Sind much before the conquest of the land.

The Arab merchants were welcome in Kerala because the later found the commercial activities of the former as beneficial to itself. The local rulers not only received the Arabs with open arms, but also encouraged a section of their subjects to cooperate with them, even embrace Islam. The Arabs appreciated and complemented the local hospitality with honest business partnership and by being a true guest avoiding any kind of interference in local politico-military matters. At a later stage, when in the late 16th century, the Portuguese sought to forcibly dominate and take over the Arab-dominated maritime trade, the Arab traders in collaboration with the local rulers fought against them. The Arabs' relationship with the local rulers was so strong that it lasted for centuries even in the wake of foreign invasion and other such difficulties. Because of the peaceful Indo-Arab relationship in Kerala, Islam spread among the local population on a large scale. The Islamic principles and practice of equality and human brotherhood specially impressed the local population.

On the contrary Islam entered Sind politically and militarily. Naturally there arose political, economic even religious issues which young Muhammad bin Qasim handled and solved dexterously. The Umayyad Empire was, then, spread over a very vast territory from Sind to Spain. The Muslims were the ruling class and the majority of the empire's subjects were non-Muslims including the Jews, Christians and the fire-worshippers of Iran. The Jews and Christians, being the People of the Book, were given a good deal of rights and privileges which later on were extended to the conquered people of Iran as well. Muhammad bin Qasim, on advice from

the Ulema, extended the benefits of the People of the Book and Ahl al-Zimmah to the Hindus and the Buddhists living in Sind. He also provided full religious freedom and included them in his administration.

Muhammad bin Qasim's rule was very short but it opened the gate of India for Islam. However, the Arab power and influence in Sind declined quite fast after Muhammad bin Qasim, though pockets of Arab presence and influence in Sind and Punjab existed for quite a long time.

By the time Muhammad bin Qasim conquered India, Islamic Studies or scholarship was in its infancy. Motivated and encouraged by the Quran and the Prophet, the Muslims started an intellectual/ knowledge movement whose parallel is difficult to find in human history. Naturally their first job was to protect the Quran and collect and preserve the authentic sayings of the Prophet (PBUH). They also started developing Fiqh in view of the fast changing world in which they were operating. Ilm al- Quran, Ilm al-Hadith and Fiqh are thus sciences or the oldest branches of Islamic Studies and in many respects they are unique. Ilm al-Hadith particularly is a discipline the parallel of which cannot be found in any other civilization.

There was no duality in knowledge in the early period of Islam. Al-ilm meant all disciplines dealing with any aspect of human existence and the nature. After having developed what is popularly known as Islamic Sciences, the early Muslims, following the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah, started to master the social and natural sciences of their time. Their first step was to acquire the existing knowledge of mankind which they considered as their own lost treasure. Thus started a great translation movement; the Muslims joined hands with scholars of other faiths and languages and translated books of several languages into Arabic. These books were about social, human and natural sciences and thus in early Islamic period disciplines like history, (including elements of economics, political science, sociology etc.) geography, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, chemistry, physics etc. began to develop. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, and particularly to respond to some metaphysical problems created by the speculative philosophy and logic, Ilm al-Kalam was developed. Broadly the above-named sciences continued up to the modern age that came to the Muslim world along with European colonialism.

It has been noted above that at the time of Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest, the foundation of the great Islamic civilization that developed and flourished during the Abbasid period, was being laid down. However, when three centuries later Mahmud Ghaznavi attacked India, the Islamic civilization and sciences were on their peak. In the long period between Muhammad bin Qasim and Mahmud Ghaznavi some scholars emerged and authored significant works including Chach Nama. However, the small principalities that succeeded Muhammad bin Qasim and survived were either unable or did not take keen interest in promoting knowledge and Islamic sciences which were flourishing in neighboring Iran and Iraq.

But Mahmud Ghaznavi himself was highly educated and proved a great patron of knowledge. He is known, even maligned, for his numerous attacks on what is northern India including Gujrat and present day Pakistan. What is generally not known that he patronized knowledge and scholars including the celebrated al-Beruni. He used the booty of wars to develop Ghazna into a big city and patronized knowledge and men of letter. He not only built gardens, mosques and

palaces in Ghazna but also established and patronized universities, libraries and centres of learning. The syllabi taught at universities included Islamic sciences, humanities and social and natural sciences including mathematics, medicine and other sciences. This very syllabus, more or less, was taught in universities located in Baghdad, Bulkh, Bukhara, Samarqand etc. Later on, the same syllabus, more or less, was taught at universities set up in Delhi and other cities of India. And this syllabus was a mix of what is known in Islamic tradition as Manqoolat (reported/revealed knowledge or sciences like Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh etc) and Maaqoolat (rational sciences including natural sciences, humanities and social sciences). Understandably the syllabi were different, and the difference was mainly visible in selecting books for particular subjects. The method of teaching was book-based; that one or more books dealing with a particular subject were taught to students. The concept of lectures that we normally follow today had not developed then.

As a discipline Islamic Studies is not only about teaching Islamic faith and civilization in Madaris/colleges and universities (Jamiaat) but it also includes what may be described as Islamic scholarship. It is satisfying to note that by and large the Islamic scholarship has been alive to the realities of the time it operated in. Since the time of Mahmood Ghaznavi we find towering personalities and scholars who made great contribution to one or more branches of Islamic knowledge, faith and civilization. Notable scholarly contributions were especially made in the field of Ilm al-Quran, Ilm al-Hadith, Fiqh, Tasawwuf, Tib, historiography, philosophy and geography etc.

The Islamic Studies or scholarship had to grapple with new challenges when the British occupied India and introduced their own system of education, syllabi and medium of instruction. There arose a need to thoroughly investigate the Muslim/Islamic response to European colonialism from Shah Waliullah's time to the modern age.

After the death of Aurangzeb, the Muslim power in India declined quite fast. Attempts were made to militarily arrest the Mughal decline but to no avail. The decline that had been set into motion in the beginning of 18th century was completed towards its end. The British had tightened their stranglehold on Mughal India by the end of 18th century.

Shah Waliullah was born a few years before Aurangzeb's death in 1707. He not only saw the pitiable condition of fast declining Mughal Empire but also observed the pathetic state of common Muslims who were prisoners of customs than being followers of Islam. Being a true scholar of Islam, he gave a call to return to the original, pristine Islam.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was born at a time when the great Mughal Empire was reduced to what is the State of Delhi today. He lived long enough to see the demise of Muslim rule and complete occupation of the country by the British. His response to the demands of his time was both Islamic and practical. Sir Syed's contribution to Islamic Studies merits to be studied objectively. Allama Shibli, Sir Syed's junior companion, made outstanding contribution to Islamic studies and the two stalwarts, along with their predecessor Shah Waliullah, have influenced many generation of scholars in India.

Many more great scholars and visionaries emerged in colonial India such as Iqbal, Maududi and Ali Mian; the last two scholars even lived and wrote in post-colonial India also.

Islamic Studies has been alive to the demands of the time in every phase of the Muslim presence and rule in India. There are four broad areas in which the early Muslim scholars made their contribution: Quran and Hadith Studies, Fiqh, Tasawwuf and social sciences, particularly historiography. We are not concerned here with the Muslim contribution to arts - music, poetry and architecture etc.

The end of colonial rule in 1947 was an epoch-making event, though independence dawned on us in a blood-soaked atmosphere. The post - colonial India is a secular, socialist republic which is being governed by a constitution. Muslims, a significant or major minority, are equal citizens of the country, though practically they face discrimination on a wide scale. This new India has thrown up many challenges like multiculturalism, globalization and above all materialism to which the Islamic Studies has yet to respond in an authentic and authoritative manner. It is the duty of the scholars living today to respond to the challenges of the time.

The two – day national seminar should expectedly focus on the following broad themes: Status of Hindus during the Muslim Rule (Ahl al- Zimmah, Jizya and Hindu Participation in Muslim Administration etc.), Contribution to Quranic – Hadith Studies, Fiqh, Tasawwuf and Dawah, Historiography, Philosophy, Inter-faith Studies, Muslims in Post-Independence India: Citizenship and Rights, Constitutionally Guaranteed Minority Rights, The Muslim Realities: Educational, Political and Economic Marginalization, Islam and Multiculturalism in Indian Context, Challenges Opportunities of Globalization or Market Economy, Misperceptions about Islam and Muslims like the concept of violence or Jihad in Islam, conversion in Islam, women in Islam, growth of Muslim population, all round Muslim decline etc. and The Way Ahead: Future Planning and Strategy.

There is another important aspect that the seminar will especially focus on. In fact Islam and Islamic Studies have a lot to contribute in shaping the future of India according to the high ideals enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Perhaps in view of what happened during the Partition, the Constitution was a great gift by post- independence India to the Indian Muslims. Many of the ideals enshrined in the Constitution, especially the fundamental rights like equality, justice and fraternity etc. are equally important in Islam. The Muslims are required by their faith to implement these ideals in their lives as well as in societies they are living in. It is expected that the seminar will highlight the great Islamic teachings on equality, justice and fraternity and suggest ways as to how they can help in implementing the lofty constitutional ideals in the caste-ridden Indian society.

It is expected that the seminar will thoroughly discuss the past, present and future of Islamic Studies and Muslims in India. Prospective contributors, we hope, would understand that some of the above- listed broad themes –from Status of Hindus during the Muslim Rule to Inter-faith Studies—are history- oriented and, therefore, focus has to be on what Muslim, even Non-Muslim, scholars contributed in the past or during the Muslim Rule. The remaining themes/ topics come under the category of contemporary and future studies and, therefore, we expect the prospective contributors to study them with contemporary approaches and methodologies.

The Institute of Islamic Studies and Maulana Azad University, Jodhpur are going to jointly organize a two- day seminar on 21-22 October, 2017 and invite contributions/ papers on the following broad themes:

- 1- Islamic Studies during the Muslim Rule: Contributions to Quranic-Hadith Studies, Fiqh, Tasawwuf, Interfaith Dialogue, Historiography and Natural Sciences etc.
- 2- Misperceptions about Islam and Muslims: Misconceptions or misunderstanding of Islamic concepts or nomenclatures like Ahl al- Kitab, Ahl-al Zimmah, Jizya, Forcible Conversion of Hindus to Islam, High Birth Rate among Muslims, Violence or Jihad in Islam, Islam and Terrorism, Women in Islam, Islam and Multiculturalism etc.
- 3- Muslims in Post- Independence India: Impact or Baggage of Partition, Economic and Political Marginalization of Muslims, Educational Status of Muslims, Hot and Soft Hindutva, and Media and the Muslims etc.
- 4- Indian Constitution and the Islamic Ideals of Equality, Fraternity and Justice: Position of Muslims in Indian Constitution, Islamic Concepts of Equality, Fraternity and Justice, Islam/ Muslims and Democracy in Indian Context, Globalization and Market Economy in India: Challenges and Opportunities for Muslims etc.
- 5- The Way Ahead or Future Strategy: Dawah and Interfaith Dialogue, Islam and the Marginalized in India, Islam and Human Rights, Towards Educational Renaissance, Composite Culture and Promoting the Constitutional Ideals etc.