

V I E W P O I N T

WHAT THE WEST THINKS OF ISLAM

By Samina Ahmed

After having spent all my life in England I thought it a good idea to write an article on, as the title suggests, what Westerners believe Islam to be. This article does not refer to the enlightened few who are well aware of Islam as a way of life, but to the less informed class of people who happen to be in the majority. The latter includes not only persons who are less educated but also people who are classed as the very learned - people who are believed to be the cream of society, and those who are themselves involved in the various aspects of religion.

"Muhammedanism" is the name that Westerners give to Islam. This is mainly due to the fact that they have no idea what the word Islam really means, and because of their lack of knowledge they tend to assume that, like themselves, Muslims worship the man who brought down the religion. This, however, is totally incorrect as Muslims worship none other than the Almighty God or Allah. At the time of the Holy Prophet's death, his companion Abu Bakr came out and said, "Listen ye all! Whoever worshipped Muhammad, the certainly Muhammad has passed away, and whoever worshipped God, let him know that God is Ever-living, and He never dieth." The word Islam means submission to God, and no-one else, whether dead or alive.

Errors in Western books

Western writers, either critics of Islam or people merely lacking in knowledge, have certain incorrect ideas on the history of Islam. The book *The World's Religions* (a Lion Handbook) suggests that raiding expeditions were organized by the Holy Prophet and the first Caliphs in order to obtain booty. In other words, the Holy Prophet and the first Caliphs were concerned with acquiring property at other people's expense. However, according to Hadith (Bukhari 56:15), war was not to be fought for the sake of material gain. The Holy Qur'an states, "Let those fight in the way of Allah who sell this world's life for the Hereafter". This means that people who want to fight for the defence of Islam in the face of aggression should not want anything out of it other than to do their duty. Another point is that, so far from encouraging them to go on plundering expeditions in order to win their support and employ them for worldly gain, Abu Bakr prevented tribes who had previously been in rebellion from undertaking military service until it became necessary, in order to cope with attacks from the Persian frontier.

It is also claimed that Islam spread to other countries not because of the attraction of the religion itself, but because non-Muslims were thought of as second-class citizens. Yet the Holy Qur'an says, "All men are a single nation" (2:213). As for the claim that Islam spread by the sword, it states, "*And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, and do not exceed the limits, for Allah loves not those who exceed the limits*" (2:190), and again, "*There is no compulsion in religion*" (2:256).

All this previous information shows that Western knowledge of Islamic history is not wholly correct. It has been misunderstood or misinterpreted to suit Western eyes, as have other aspects of Islam.

Women in Islam

In recent times, here in Britain, much emphasis has been laid upon freedom and equality for women in Islam. People have formed the opinion that Muslim women are the slaves of men in every respect, and yet Islam was the first religion to banish any such slavery. Westerners believe Muslim women to be housebound and kept prisoners. The first point to be made here is that one only preserves that which is valuable to one's heart, and so Muslim women are provided security and protection by the male members of society. Secondly, it will be seen that millions of Muslim women have active social and professional lives, with no barrier between them and the outside world. Muslim countries provide equality to their women financially and otherwise, although even some Muslim governments fail to grant women all that is theirs by right. The Holy Qur'an says, "For men is the benefit of what they earn, and for women is the benefit of what they earn" (4:32). Islamic marriages are abhorred in the West as the people believe that both bride and groom are forced into it. However, according to Islam, no marriage can take place without the consent of both parties.

Nature of charity

In the recent book *Islam*, by D. S. Roberts, it is

stated that "there are certain prescribed duties towards the disadvantaged, the poor, widows, orphans, slaves and the vanquished, but these are of a practical nature and no emotional commitment is required or expected". It says this, and yet the Holy Prophet Muhammad himself went so far as to *marry* a widow, and often spoke fondly of her after her death. Moreover, the love of God should be the basic motive in all charitable deeds. The Qur'an says, "And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive" (76:8). Again, there are such Hadith as the following:

"You will recognize the faithful by their compassion for one another, and by their love for one another, and in their kindness towards one another; as with the human body, when one member of it ails, the entire body ails" (Bukhari, 46:3);

"He is not of us who does not show kindness towards those lesser amongst us and respect towards those greater amongst us" (*Mishkat*, 24:15).

Conclusion

From everything that has been mentioned hitherto, it becomes obvious that the majority of Westerners have preconceived ideas about the religion of Islam. It remains, of course, to be pointed out that many Muslims today themselves have incorrect ideas about Islam, and hence mislead the Westerners. For example, many people confuse customs with religion, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. Nevertheless, the people of countries such as Britain

need to know more about Islam, not only its principles, but the fact that it is indeed a universal religion.



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**POSITION OF THE MUJADDID
IN SHARI'AH**

By Hafiz Maulana Sher Muhammad

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Question: What is the position, in Islamic theology, of the terms *mujaddid* (reformer or reviver) and *muhaddath* (a person spoken to by God, though not a prophet)?

Answer: These terms are taken from *hadith* (sayings