

Tolerance And Islam

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INTRODUCTION:

Analyzing the concept of tolerance is the job of the philosopher, while describing the rule of tolerance in the history of Islam is the task of the historian. The historical question itself comprises two distinct issues, (a) what are the ideals or teachings concerning tolerance in the scriptures and the writings of theologians, jurists and saints, and (b) how far have these ideals and teachings been practiced at different points of time? To confuse the above two issues, (as is not uncommon even in highly educated quarters), leads to futile controversy.

In the following pages I wish to (a) give a philosophical analysis of the concept of tolerance, as understood in the modern sense of the term, (b) give a historical review of the idea and practice of tolerance in history, (c) give a critical analysis of tolerance, as understood in classical Islamic thought derived from the Quran, and finally (d) describe how tolerance was actually practiced by Muslims in the Islamic world with special reference to medieval India.

THE CONCEPT OF TOLERANCE:

The original use of the word 'tolerance' referred to tolerance of metals, of gold and silver coins, of bridges to bear stress, and of the capacity of a person to bear pain or suffering, physical and mental, i.e., the capacity for endurance. These uses of the word were gradually extended, perhaps, in the 17th and 18th centuries, to the use, which concerns us here. A standard English dictionary defines tolerance as 'the disposition to tolerate or allow the existence of beliefs, practices or habits differing from one's own, now often freedom from bigotry, sympathetic understanding of others' beliefs etc., without acceptance of them...'

The diverse uses or meanings of any word shows the futility of picking upon 'the' meaning or essence of a concept. Instead, we must make a contextual analysis of the different uses of a word or expression. This analysis may well be supplemented by a conceptual analysis of the core use of the word in a particular context. This core use should then be distinguished from cognate or related concepts to avoid confusion.

Contextual analysis means translating the analysandum into expressions, which are simpler, clearer and conform to natural or ordinary usage rather than to the specialized usage or language of philosophers or scientists.

Let us now attempt a contextual analysis of the statement, 'Ahmad is a tolerant person'. Most of us would agree on the following contextual analyses, which are illustrative rather than exhaustive:

- (a) Ahmad tries to understand the other's point of view with sympathy.
- (b) Ahmad does not believe that those who differ from him are dishonest, ill motivated or perverse, unless there be clear evidence for this.
- (c) Ahmad realizes that beliefs, attitudes or approaches other than his own could possibly be right or justifiable.
- (d) Ahmad realizes that value judgments can never be proved conclusively, so that disagreement among different persons is unavoidable.
- (e) Ahmad does not allow his differences with others to cloud his judgment concerning their good points, or to make him hostile to them.
- (f) Ahmad factually befriends or is ever willing to befriend those who honestly differ from him but are decent persons.
- (g) Ahmad believes that the inherent dignity of a human being should be respected irrespective of race, religion, politics or gender.

It may be added that tolerance has several dimensions and degrees. Thus a person may be tolerant in one sense, or with regard to a particular dimension, but not with regard to others. Again, he may be tolerant up to a particular degree but not beyond that. To give two striking examples, the British philosopher, John Locke, who was the father of the movement of religious tolerance in 17th century England, was not prepared to tolerate atheists. Madan Mohan Malaviya, a great Indian nationalist, freedom fighter, and colleague of Gandhiji, could not tolerate non-Brahmans at his dining table.

In view of the above fact that tolerance has different dimensions and degrees, no individual or society should be judged to be tolerant or intolerant on an either-or basis. The application of a simple two-dimensional either-or logic would mislead us and would fail to capture the complexity of different situations. The proper course, therefore, is to identify the different elements and degrees of tolerance or intolerance and to grade individuals or societies accordingly.

Let us now distinguish the concept of tolerance from some related or cognate concepts with which it is liable to be confused. A person who is tolerant in religious matters may have profound religious faith and be strongly committed to moral values. Or a tolerant person could be indifferent to religion, or be a septic, Yet very respectful of those who are genuinely religious. If a person be both tolerant and courageous, he would say after Voltaire and Mill— 'I do not agree with a word of what you say, but I shall give my life to defend your right to say so'. A tolerant person need not accept a secular approach to politics, even though a secular approach to politics helps promote religious tolerance. Tolerance may co-exist with religious fundamentalism, provided the latter is of a form which does not involve any discrimination against others on grounds of faith.¹ Since, however, the fundamentalist versions of all religions have some in-built elements of discrimination (in some form or other) the practice of complete tolerance does require a secular approach to politics. However, secularism, as such, is neutral with regard to theism or atheism. Commitment to secularism does not imply any corollary of theism, agnosticism or atheism, but merely the principled separation of religion and politics. This must, however, not be misconstrued as the separation of morality from politics.²

A tolerant person need not be apathetic to persuading others to accept his own views or values, since tolerance is not the same as apathy. However, the concern of a tolerant person for the welfare of others is tempered by humility instead of a hidden desire to dominate others and impose one's own ideas or values, as the absolute truth. Tolerance is not the fear of giving offence, just as it is not the fear of commitment to a particular viewpoint. Tolerance does not conflict at all with spontaneous self-expression and active communication or dialogue, provided mutual goodwill and respect be present. Dialogue helps to promote greater harmony even though it may also bring existing differences into sharper focus. A tolerant person, therefore, need not remain a silent spectator in the face of conflicting truth-claims.

A tolerant person need not appease those who disagree with him. Tolerance is an intrinsic value like love of truth or devotion to duty, while appeasement is a strategy for buying agreement or peace on an ad hoc basis. A tolerant person may be extremely firm and unbending in doing one's duty or in resisting evil. Tolerance may result in self-sacrifice of a martyr, while appeasement seeks the easy way out. The birth of tolerance, however, does not signify the death of genuine faith in one's own cherished tradition. Tolerance merely signifies the willing acceptance of the view that beliefs or convictions, other than one's own, may also inspire goodness and beauty in the depths of the human soul. This approach is quite different from merely tolerating dissenting views which are deemed to be essentially evil or, at least, devoid of any real value. In other words, tolerance, at its best, is not passivity at the follies of others, beyond our power of correction, but rather profound humility in the face of the inscrutable mystery of reality, and of genuine respect for different perspectives and views.

SOCIAL ROOTS OF TOLERANCE:

The individual, as a child, is obviously, culturally conditioned in respect of language, morals, religious convictions, artistic as well as sensory taste, body language and so on. Thus, he speaks not language, in general, but a particular language; he follows not religion and morality, in general, but a particular religion and moral code. Now the crucial feature of the conditioning process is that the individual is, on principle, screened from exposure to other languages, morals, religious convictions and art forms, as if, they were aberrations to be concealed from the tender and innocent mind of the child. In other words, the inbuilt cultural plurality of the human situation has no impact upon the individual. To a considerable extent this is a pedagogic necessity since too many cultural stimuli would, obviously, confuse the child. But the way in which the child is more or less indoctrinated by his parents and teachers almost inevitably leads to the fallacy of cultural 'reification'-- the identification of symbols with what is symbolized. This, in effect, means equating particular language forms with the structure of the world itself, particular moral codes with absolute morality itself, particular perspectives of reality with reality itself. In other words, the individual is made to feel, as if, his cultural world alone accurately mirrors or reflects reality, while all other cultural worlds are, more or less, miserable caricatures. Thus what is, really, a model of reality is reified as the reality as such.

The simple truth (which is difficult to learn because of our cultural conditioning) is that while, reality is one, its symbols are many; that the same experience or response can be expressed in a variety of forms or ways. The crucial reason why a particular conceptual model or form appeals to me has much to do with my own cultural conditioning, even if this may not be the only factor. The realization that one's beliefs and convictions would have been very different had one been born in a family professing a different faith shows the essentially contingent character or complexion of one's beliefs system. This realization ought to fill one with humility as well as empathy for other traditions.³

What social factors promote or retard the prospects of tolerance? It seems mixed racial, ethnic, language and culture sub-groups within a larger territorial unit play the dual role of generating tension and conflict within the group, yet facilitate the eventual growth of tolerance. The greater the area of inner differentiation within a large and complex society, the greater the chance of conflict as also the greater the need of mutual understanding and accommodation to prevent the disintegration of the society into smaller warring sub-groups. If the internal unity of the society, as a whole, be a crucial survival value for most members composing the large group, the will to preserve its unity will generate tolerance and mutual accommodation of diverse points of view. Since, however, the needs and interests of individuals and of sub-groups often clash with each other, and also with the society, as a whole, they may adopt strategies calculated to promote their own limited interests at the cost of the long-term interest of the society as a whole.

The appeal of tolerance is relatively greater for those individuals and sections, which enjoy high status or power and possess material means enough for sustaining their dominance. A few highly evolved and sensitive souls may, however, reach the level of pure morality transcending individual or group-interests.

INTELLECTUAL ROOTS OF TOLERANCE:

Awareness of plural truth-claims and a measure of existential perplexity are the essential conditions of tolerance. Empathy and respect for the individual who may hold different views from one's own intensify one's existential perplexity and also of genuine humility, specially, when a person who is held in high esteem (due to his or her moral integrity and status) hold views contrary to one's own convictions. Though differences in sensory taste are well tolerated irresolvable differences over moral or religious issues do lead to inner perplexity and anxiety.

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The simple knowledge that the 'milieu' plays a tremendous role in shaping one's ideas, values and convictions, and the further knowledge that these ideas or values are not logically or scientifically demonstrable give a

further boost to tolerance. In short, tolerance of diverse views is the only proper response to the cultural plurality.

THE IDEA AND PRACTICE OF TOLERANCE IN ANCIENT & MEDIEVAL PERIODS:

The idea of religious tolerance was understood and practiced in China, India, Greece and Rome in the ancient period. The religious and philosophical approach of the ancients was that there were many roads to salvation and the individual should be free to take any road one liked.⁵ The Emperor Asoka (d. app. B, C 235) stood for tolerance, not merely in the sense of tolerating religious dissent, but in the higher sense of respecting plural convictions or faiths other than his own. The classical Hindu concept of '*Isht Devata*' (choice of deity) also reflected the same basic approach. Unfortunately, the *Sanatana Dharma* of India was vitiated by intolerance in the shape of the most heinous forms of caste taboos and prohibitions on social intercourse. There was no concept of the dignity and equality of the individual, irrespective of caste.⁶

The freedom of thought and tolerance prevailing in ancient Greece and Rome was free from caste discrimination, though there were rigid class distinctions and a strongly entrenched system of slavery. The populace were ever attracted to myth and ritual, connected with religious beliefs, while philosophers loved abstract reasoning. Neither the conflict between myth and reason nor the wide variety of myths and philosophical theories led to any rancor or intolerance of dissent in the pre-Christian era. It appears that the rise of Semitic Monotheism and the denunciation of idol worship in Palestine then under Roman occupation created a new psychology or attitude, both among the monotheists themselves and the pagans or the worshippers of tribal deities. The Jewish prophets proclaimed the destruction of Roman glory and political supremacy because the people did not worship the one true Lord of the whole universe. The Jewish prophets held that all those who did not worship the one Lord of the world were wicked people and deserved dire punishment. However, the Jews, and later the Christians were treated as too insignificant a minority to be taken seriously by the mighty Romans.⁷ The emperor Domitian (d. 96), however, thought that the other-worldly concern and the repudiation of Roman gods was a potential danger to Roman solidarity; but he was not intolerant to the Christians. Emperor Trajan (d. 117) was the first to ban the propagation of the new religion, as it was totally opposed to the Roman creed. The Christians were subjected to mild suppression, which however, became intensified under the reigns of Decius (d.251) and Valerian (d.260). Numerous Christians became martyrs, though, according to modern historical research, the tales of their savage persecution are myths or exaggerated. At last, better sense came to prevail, and Emperor Constantine (d. 337) inaugurated the era of religious toleration, vide the Edicts of Milan of 311 and 313. Around 321 Constantine himself embraced Christianity and made it the state religion of the now 'Holy Roman Empire'. This was indeed a turning point in world history.

The Christian subjects of the Roman Empire had been eulogizing the virtues of tolerance for the past 200 years. But no sooner did Christianity become the official religion of the empire; the Christians started to eulogize the necessity of saving the souls of non-Christians, even by force, if necessary. They came to believe that if people refused to convert to the one true faith and died without being baptized they would suffer everlasting damnation in hell. Therefore their death at the point of the sword was a lesser evil for them. It is said that St. Augustine (d.430) interpreted the words of the gospel, 'Compel them to come in' in this sense.

The emperor Julian the Apostate (d.363) stopped the persecution of heretics and pagans at the hands of the Christians who now ran the Roman Empire. But it was a stillborn move. Emperor Theodosius I (d.395) resumed the policy of persecuting pagans and heretics. This state of affairs continued until the end of the 6th century.⁸

A new era dawned in world history with the advent of Prophet Muhammad's mission in the early 7th century. Islam, though a continuation of the Semitic tradition of Monotheism, rejected the dogma of exclusive salvation and welcomed Jews, Christians and all others into its rapidly expanding territories.

The political expansion of the Arab-Islamic state in the regions adjoining Arabia proper took place at the point of the sword (as all political expansions have done in history). but not Islam, as a religious faith. The truth is that the political hegemony of Islam, on the basis of an almost unceasing chain of military victories against the then super powers, created the social psychological space for the eventual peaceful conversion of the non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic commonwealth due to a combination of social, psychological, cultural, and political factors. Islam ushered in a plural society based upon tolerance, though the tolerance was not perfect and fell short of the modern concept of tolerance. Inter-religious co-existence and tolerance prevailed for four centuries in the territories of Islam until they were attacked by the Christian crusaders at the fag end of the 11th century. These crusades continued, with interruptions, for almost the next three centuries. Impartial western scholars of repute have pointed out that the defenders of the Cross unleashed a reign of terror, not only against the Muslims and Jews, but also the local Christians of the areas 'liberated' by the crusaders and ruled by them for approx. 80 years. Eventually the crusaders were thrown back by the legendary heroism and inspiring leadership of Sultan Salahuddin (Saladin the Great) in the early 13th century.⁹ Immediately afterwards, or almost at the same time, the Islamic world had to face the terrible fury of the Mongol hordes leading to the almost total destruction of Baghdad in 1258. Though Iran recovered after approx, 200 years, under the great Safavids, who ushered in the golden age of Persian culture and Islamic humanism, the Arabs could not recover. In fact, they regressed into a state of utter political, economic and cultural decline, lasting until the beginning of the present century.

Turning to the story of Christian militancy in the struggle-for political power, Pope Innocent III, at the end of the 12th century, embarked upon the policy of penalizing Christian kings who the Pope adjudged as heterodox. The most tragic victims of this policy were the Count of Toulouse and the Albigeios community in France. Pope Innocent III set the precedent that the Pope had the right to coerce a Christian ruler in matters, both temporal and religious, on the principle of the supremacy of the spiritual over temporal power. Shortly afterwards Pope Gregory IX initiated the idea of the Inquisition, which idea was put into practice by Pope Innocent IV in 1252. Going far beyond the punishment of heretics, the objective of the Inquisition was to pry into the inmost depths of the human soul to punish the minutest doubt or deviation from the dogmas of the Church.¹⁰ The work of the Inquisition was supervised directly by the Pope over the head of the Bishops who had no say in the secret workings of a super investigative net-work throughout the Christian lands. The most ruthless agency of this Papal tyranny was the Spanish Inquisition which concerned itself not merely with Christian heretics but also with the persecution of Spanish Muslims.

In 1556 Philip II decreed that Muslims should abandon 'at once their language, worship, institutions and manner of life'. The final order of expulsion was given by Philip III in 1609, and more than three million Muslims were executed or banished from Spain. Not less tragic than the persecution of heretics was the persecution of women dubbed as witches in medieval Europe. As late as 1484 Pope Innocent VIII said in a Bull that plague and storms were the work of witches.¹¹

THE IDEA AND PRACTICE OF TOLERANCE IN THE MODERN AGE:

The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in the mid 15th century and the final collapse of the Eastern wing of the Roman Empire (Byzantium) is another turning point in world history. Christian scholars, who were exclusive custodians of the Greek classics in the original, migrated to the Italian mainland, which was the seat of the Pope and an integral part of Western Europe. Till that time Western Church fathers, scholastic thinkers and writers were not acquainted with the full range of Greek thought and culture, their attention being focused on translated versions of some selected writings of Aristotle and others derived from Arabic sources. The western mind now, for the first time, came in contact with-the Greek classics in the original. This triggered the great cultural revolution known as the Renaissance.

The independent states of southern Italy became the-cradle of the new movement, which, in the course of time, radiated to the whole of Europe and transformed the intellectual, cultural, religious, political and economic

climate of the entire western world. The Renaissance was soon followed by movements of religious reform in several Christian communities by Wycliffe (d.1384), Hus (d.1415) and Martin Luther (d.1546). Luther's Reformation proved to be the most effective and durable, but Luther was far from being a consistent champion of freedom of conscience. Having succeeded in repudiating papal authority, in the name of liberty of conscience, Luther tried to impose his own conscience on others with the help of force. He declared Anabaptist Christians as heretics who should be put to the sword. Likewise, Calvin (d. 1564) of Switzerland, the other outstanding Protestant reformer of the age, substituted his own brand of religious and political authoritarianism in place of the Pope. Calvin stood for the organic unity of the church and the state, that is, the complete fusion of spiritual and worldly power in the manner of Islamic fundamentalism today. He is generally accused of the execution of the great Spanish religious liberal, Servetus, in 1553.

The real protagonists of Christian liberalism and religious tolerance were the Italian pioneers of the Unitarian version of Christianity—Sozzini (known as Socinus in English speaking countries), Castellio and others in the second half of the 16th century. These honest and brave souls were hunted out of Rome and fled to Switzerland, Transylvania and Poland to escape the wrath of Calvin. Eventually, they took refuge in Germany, Holland, England, and finally, in the New England state of the America. The Unitarians rejected the dogma of Trinity, but held Jesus to be the perfect man and the exemplar for all times. Though Sozzini did not affirm the separation of church and state, he stood for complete tolerance of all views within and without the Church.

It was natural for the Catholic Church to fight back the different reform and liberal Christian movements from Luther to Sozzini. Pope Paul III severely punished free enquiry in religion and science. The most tragic episode was the burning of the great scientist and thinker, Bruno of Italy, in 1600. The massacre of French Protestants had earlier taken place on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572. At least 7000 innocents lost their lives in cold blood. The conscience of France was shocked, and, to make amends, the Edict of Nantes, 1598, ensured bare tolerance to the Protestant minority of France for almost the next hundred years. However, in 1676 persecution of Protestant recommenced and this continued until the French Revolution of 1789.¹²

Voltaire's contribution to freedom of conscience and tolerance is well known. Though far from demanding the separation of the church and the state, he championed free enquiry and complete tolerance. His great contemporary, Rousseau (d.1778) did the same, though he had no place for atheists in public office. The brigade of the French Revolution, retained Catholic Christianity as the 'dominant religion' of the Republic, but gave the right of public office to all French citizens with the exception of Jews. Absolute or unqualified equality of status of all French citizens was established, in theory and practice, only in 1795 when the modern 'principle of separation' between the church and the state was substituted in the French Constitution in place of the earlier 'principle of jurisdiction'. According to the constitution of 1795 'Theophilanthropy' (Divine Love of Humankind) was the new official philosophy or secular religion of the state. This 'Love of Humankind' was claimed to be 'the religion of Socrates, Marcus Aurelius and Cicero', a religion which cut across all religions in the conventional sense. Ironically, Napoleon who claimed to be an atheist and humanist entered into a pact with the Pope in 1801 (the Concordat) and re-established the 'principle of jurisdiction', thereby restoring the authority of the Pope over the French constitution. Napoleon thought that 'using the Pope as an instrument' he could control the consciences of men and more easily carry out his plans of empire. The Concordat lasted till 1905 when the principle of 'separation' (first applied in 1795) was restored in France.¹³

The story of the birth of religious tolerance in Germany is far more consistent than the French experience, until the advent of Hitler's ideology implying racial as well as religious intolerance of the worst kind in human history. Germany, however, had to go into an incredibly prolonged and tragic baptism of fire and blood in the form of the Thirty Year's war which was occasioned and fed by religious intolerance.¹⁴ The famous Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the infamous war, stipulated religious tolerance and equality of status to Catholics and Lutherans though not to the Jews and others. Frederick, the Great, after his accession in

1740, extended full tolerance to all, including the Jews, though the principle of 'jurisdiction' was retained and Lutheran Christianity remained the religion of the State. The great emperor, who befriended Voltaire and who had a cosmopolitan outlook, even toyed with the idea of inviting Muslim settlers in his dominion and giving them equal rights. Frederick held that 'every one should be allowed to get to heaven in his own way.' The outstanding German thinkers, poets and scholars who ushered in the German Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries—Kant, Schiller, Goethe, Hegel, Dilthey -et al were all great champions of religious tolerance.

Coming to England, the turning point in the history of religious tolerance in the country dates to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when Queen Anne and Prince Williams were raised to the English throne after the long period of instability, strife and uncertainty which followed the beheading of King Charles I in 1649. The horrors of the Thirty Year's war brought home to Englishmen, no less than to Germans and others, the utter futility of intolerance, thereby generating a sort of moral revulsion against bigotry. It is significant that the Treaty of Westphalia was signed in 1648, and exactly forty years afterwards, the new English sovereign proclaimed the principle of tolerance in his realm. The British Parliament passed the Act of Toleration in 1689. The philosopher, John Locke of Oxford, published in the same year his first Letter Concerning Toleration. Locke had great influence over the thinking of the period. The great philosopher was in favor of the 'principle of separation' between church and state, but this separation, in the strict formal sense, never came about in his own country, even though it eventually came to be implemented in the New World, as we shall shortly see. Interestingly, rather paradoxically, Locke did not extend the principle of tolerance to atheists. Earlier the great English poet, Milton, had strongly championed the liberty of conscience. Milton declared in 1644, 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all other liberties'.

The Act of Toleration of 1689, however, did not bring about complete tolerance in the modern sense of the term. It was only the first beginning of a long process of social and legal changes that eventually culminated in the establishment of full and unqualified tolerance and equality of status in the modern sense. Legal discrimination against the Jews and the Unitarian Christians continued. It is significant that the great physicist and philosopher of Cambridge, Newton (d.1727) who was strongly drawn to Unitarianism conducted his scholarly research into Christian dogmas in complete secrecy and dared not air his views in the open. These disabilities were not removed until mid-19th century. Disraeli could not have become Prime Minister of England, had he been born a quarter of a century earlier.¹⁵

I now turn to America, which has given the greatest importance to complete religious tolerance and where the principle of separation between church and state was first applied in the history of mankind. This was done in the city-state of Providence on the eastern cost of the USA. The city was founded by Roger Williams in the 17th century with a view to securing complete equality and dignity to all its citizens, irrespective of their religion. The Roman Catholic colon/ of Maryland, established in 1649, also ensured complete toleration, though the state had retained the traditional principle of 'jurisdiction', that is the jurisdiction of Christianity over the state.¹⁶

The first large modern state, founded on the principle of separation of church and state, is the United States of America. The principle of separation was applied here even earlier than in the case of the French Republic. The secular constitution of the USA was, however, not the work of atheists, agnostics or materialists, but of committed Christians who sincerely and passionately had veered round to the belief that religion was, essentially, a personal matter which should be kept separate from the affairs of state and public issues, and the state, as a public corporation, should have no official religion. This philosophy of the nascent American Republic was the fruit of the sad and the bitter experience of the fanaticism and intolerance prevailing in the countries of the old world. The founding fathers of the American constitution held that the principle of jurisdiction enabled and encouraged one particular religion or sect to use the power and machinery of the state for promoting its own cause at the expense of the non-official sects or denominations. The constitution, therefore, declared the state to be neutral and equi-distant from all religions, and every citizen, irrespective of his religion or lack of religion, was guaranteed equal status, as an American citizen. The constituent states of

the Federal Union were, however, granted the right to follow the principle of separation or of jurisdiction with respect to their internal matters. The principled separation of the state and the church by the founding fathers of the American constitution reflected the religious maturity of enlightened and sincere Christians who had certainly not repudiated spiritual or moral values, or even institutional religion, provided it did not over-step its proper sphere.¹⁷

Humankind, however, is still far from the practice of tolerance, at its best, whether it be USA, Europe or other countries of the world. Tolerance, in the sphere of marriage between Catholics and Protestants, still does not come naturally or readily in the western world, and many sincere Christians are compelled to resort to a civil marriage. The Jews still have their problems of emotional distance or prejudice. In America the Catholics would not readily give full marks to the overwhelming Protestant majority when deciding who should occupy the White House and other such issues. However, the movements of Unification theology, inter-religious dialogue, Human Rights and so on are all contributing to the desired goals. The recent 'communications revolution' bears the promise of ushering in a multi-cultural global society. Almost every nation or linguistic and religious group, hitherto steeped into an ethnocentric outlook, has been exposed to multi-cultural stimuli and to the knowledge explosion. The tribals of a remote village in India mingle with the folk dancers from USSR, or listen to the music at St. Peter's; a puritanical mullah of a mosque in the interior of Pakistan or Afghanistan watches the temple-dancers of India or Indonesia, and so on. The sheer force of technology has shattered the cultural insularity of the past. Great diversity and disparity certainly characterize the human situation, and there is, as yet, no common language, no common religion, political authority or economic system. Yet, the awareness of cultural plurality is steadily steering the human family in the direction of permissiveness and tolerance in all cultural matters including religious belief or faith. The phenomena of religious fundamentalism, violence-and terrorism does raise fears of an impending catastrophe round the corner. However, in my thinking, though the fundamentalists or terrorists may win the battles, here and there, the humanists are going to win the war.

Secular Humanism, when not equated with atheism, does not destroy genuine religious feeling and spirituality, it merely rejects that form of religion which seeks to regulate the total behavior of the believer and which, furthermore, divides humanity into 'we-they camps' with respect to every sphere of human activity. Religious tolerance, when not equated with indifference, is not the axe, which destroys the tree of faith, but rather the fruit, which grows upon it.

THE ISLAMIC DOCTRINE OF TOLERANCE:

The concept of tolerance in Islam is derived from the Quran and the practice of the Prophet. The reported sayings and doings of the Prophet were put into writing, sorted out and classified a little less than 200 years after his passing away. Meanwhile the different schools of law founded by Abu Hanifa (d. 767), Malik (d. 795), Shafai (d.820), Hambal (d.855) and Ja'far Sadiq(d.765) crystallized after the Umayyad Caliphate had been displaced by the Abbasid wing of the Prophet's family. The Umayyad Caliphs who were more self-reliant or independent in their judgment on public matters had adopted a more or less eclectic and pragmatic approach to Islamic polity under the influence of Iranian and Roman ideas, which were adopted to promote the social dominance and economic interests of the Arab ruling class. During this period Islamic piety was focused, more on the five pillars of the religion, rather than on the social aspect of the *shariah*.

The subsequent literary, intellectual and cultural efflorescence in the middle Abbasid period was based on the earlier spadework under the Umayyad Caliphate. This gradually led to the full growth of the *shariah* whose authority became almost indistinguishable from the 'Book' as such. The interpretations of the major jurists, scholars and theologians were made in such a subtle manner that the distinction between the Quranic texts and their interpretation virtually disappeared. This led, in the course of time, to a situation where the inevitable imperfections of fallible individuals and the limitations of the spirit of the age in which they lived came to be projected on the 'Word of God' or the 'Book' as such. The fall of the titular Abbasid Caliphate (1258) at the hands

of the Mongol hordes put the last nail in the coffin of the Islamic creativity of the earlier days. The tradition lost, for centuries to come, its inner dynamism and creativity in an ever-changing human situation.

It is, therefore, imperative to make a clear distinction between the Quranic texts, as such, dealing with tolerance (or any other concept or belief for that matter) and its traditional understanding or interpretation. According to the orthodox view, the traditional understanding is based upon the precepts and practice of the Prophet, the pious Caliphs and authoritative jurists. We must, however, realize that, firstly, all natural languages (including Quranic Arabic) are, inevitably, open to diverse interpretations, specially in the case of metaphysical, metaphorical, evaluative and directive uses of language. Secondly, whenever we act on the basis of a general statement or command, diverse interpretations of the 'real' meaning become unavoidable. In other words, the principle of plural interpretations is an in-built feature of the Quran no less than of other scriptures or of language in general. Therefore, while Muslim believers must much respect the traditional interpretation of the Quranic texts no individual, school or system can rightly claim absoluteness or finality in an ever-changing human situation. The inevitable growth or movement of thought will inevitably and rightly suggest fresh interpretations of the scripture of Islam as of other religions.

Coming to the subject of tolerance, the Quran abounds in verses that prescribe tolerance of a high order, though the texts also contain some injunctions, which, prima-facie, negate the spirit of humanistic love and tolerance. However, contextual enquiry and careful textual scrutiny of the relevant verses, scattered in different parts of the Quran, show, beyond any doubt, that these injunctions were temporary regulations during the state of war or belligerency rather than basic maxims of conduct.

I shall now first cite some Quranic texts, which prescribe tolerance, inter-religious harmony, and the essential oneness of all religions.

There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. (Al-Baqarah, 2:256)

Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.
(al-Kafirun, 109:6)

Say (O Muhammad): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered, (al-i-'Imran, 3:84)

Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. (al-Baqarah, 2:136)

Lo: those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers, and seek to make distinction between Allah and his messengers, and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others, and seek to choose a way in between ; Such are disbelievers in truth; and for disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom.

But those who believe in Allah and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them, unto them, Allah will give their wages; and Allah was ever Forgiving, Merciful (an-Nisa,4:150-152)

The Messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto Him from his Lord and (so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers—we make no distinction

between any of His messengers—and they say; we hear, and we obey. (Grant us) Thy forgiveness, our Lord! Unto Thee is the Journeying. (al-Baqarah,2 : 285)

Verily We sent messengers before thee, among them those of whom we have told thee, and some of whom We have not told thee; and it was not given to any messenger that he should bring a portent save by Allah's leave, but when Allah's commandment cometh, (the cause) is judged aright, and the followers of vanity will then be lost. (al-Mumin,40:78)

Lo: those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad) and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans —whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doth right —surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve. (al-Baqarah, 2:62)

Lo : those who believe and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans, and Christians — whosoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right — there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve. (al-Ma'ida,5:69)

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which Allah hath revealed and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ, (al-Ma'idah, 5:48)

Had Allah willed, they had not been idolatrous. We have not sent thee as a keeper over them, nor art thou responsible for them.

Revile not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance. Thus unto every nation have We made their deed seem fair. Then unto their Lord is their return, and He will tell them what they used to do. (al-An'am,6:107,108)

And if thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers?

It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of Allah. He hath set uncleanness upon those who have no sense. (Jonah, 10: 99,100)

Say: O mankind: Now hath the Truth from your Lord come unto you. So whosoever is guided, is guided only for (the good of) his soul, and whosoever erreth erreth only against it. And I am not a warder over you. (Jonah, 10:103)

Lo: this your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship me.

And they have broken their religion (into fragments) among them, (yet) all are returning unto Us.

Then whoso doth good works and is a believer, there will be no rejection of his effort. Lo! We record (it) for him. (al-Anbiya,21: 94)

Say: Obey Allah and obey the messenger. But if ye turn away, then (it is) for him (to do) only that wherewith he hath been charged, and for you (to do) only that wherewith ye have been charged. If ye obey him, ye will go aright. But the messenger hath no other charge than to convey (the message) plainly. (an-Nur,24:54)

Remind them, for thou art but a remembrancer, Thou art not at all a warder over them. (al-Ghashiyah,88:21,22)

And they say: None entereth Paradise unless he be a Jew or Christian. These are their own desires. Say: Bring your proof (of what ye state) if ye are truthful. Nay, but whosoever surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good, his reward is with his Lord; and there shall no fear come upon them nor shall they grieve. (al-Baqarah, 2 : 111. 112)

And the Jews say the Christians follow nothing (true), and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true); yet both are readers of the Scripture. Even thus speak those who know not. Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differ. (al-Baqarah,2:113)

The Jews and Christians say: We are sons of Allah and loved ones. Say: why then doth He chastise you for your sins? Nay, ye are but mortals of his creating. He forgiveth whom He will, and chastiseth whom He will. Allah's is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and unto Him is the journeying. (al-Maidah 5:18)

And for every nation have We appointed a ritual, that they may mention the name of Allah over the beast or cattle that He hath given them for food; and your God is one God, therefore surrender unto Him. And give good tidings (O Muhammad) to the humble. (al-Hajj 22 : 34)

Unto each nation have we given sacred rites which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with thee of the matter, but summon thou unto thy Lord. Lo! thou indeed followest right guidance. (al-Hajj 22 : 67)

Say: O people of the Scripture! Ye have naught (of guidance) till ye observe the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed unto you from your Lord. That which is revealed unto thee (Muhammad) from thy Lord is certain to increase the contumacy and disbelief of many of them. But grieve not for the disbelieving folk. (al-Maidah,5:68)

Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed, such are evil-livers. (al-Ma'idah, 5:47)

*Naught is said unto thee (Muhammad) save what was said unto the messengers before thee. Lo: thy Lord is owner of forgiveness, and owner (also) of dire punishment. (Ha-Mm, 41:43)
Whoso bringeth a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof, while whose bringeth an ill deed will be awarded but the like thereof, and they will not be wronged. (al-An'am, 6:161)*

And Lo! of the People of the Scripture there are some who believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto you and that which was revealed unto them, humbling themselves before Allah. They purchase not a trifling gain at the price of the revelations of Allah. Verily their reward is with their Lord, and lo! Allah is swift to take account. (al-i-Imran, 3:199)

When they listen to that which hath been revealed unto the messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears, because of their recognition of the Truth. They say Our Lord, we believe. Inscribe us as among the witnesses. (al-Mai'da, 5:83)

*Those unto whom we gave the Scripture before it, they believe in it.
And when it is recited unto them, they say: we believe it. Lo! It is the Truth from our Lord. Lo! even before it we were of those who surrender (unto Him). (al-Qasas, 28:52-53)*

Here are those Quranic verses which, prima facie, contradict the spirit of Humanism but which are not contrary to the spirit of tolerance when their historical context is understood:

Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Who so doeth that hath no connection with Allah, unless (it be) that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking (as it were) security. Allah biddeth you beware (only) of Himself. Unto Allah is the journeying. (al-i-Imran, 3:28)

O ye who believe! Take not for intimates others than your own folk, who would spare no pains to ruin you; they love to hamper you. Hatred is revealed by (the utterance of) their mouths, but that which their breasts hide is greater. We have made plain for you the revelations if ye will understand. (al-i-Imran, 3:118)

Those who choose disbelievers for their friends instead of believers, do they look for power at their hands? Lo! all power appertaineth to Allah. (an-Nisa, 4:139)

They long that ye should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, that ye may be upon a level (with them). So choose not friends from them till they forsake their homes in the way of Allah; if they turn back (to enmity) then take them and kill them wherever ye find them, and choose no friend nor helper among them.(an-Nisa,4:89)

O ye who believe! Choose not disbelievers for (your) friends in place of believers. Would ye give Allah a clear warrant against you? (an-Nisa,4:144)

O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrong-doing folk. (al-Maidah, 5:51)

O ye who believe! Choose not for friends such of those who received the Scripture before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your religion. But keep your duty to Allah if ye are true believers. (al-Maidah, 5:57)

O ye who believe! Choose not your fathers nor your brethren for friends if they take pleasure in disbelief rather than faith. Whoso of you taketh them for friends, such are wrongdoers. (af-Bara'at, 9:23)
Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (al-Bara'at, 9:5)

It may be that Allah will ordain love between you and those of them with whom ye are at enmity. Allah is Mighty, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

Allah forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers.
Allah forbiddeth you only those who warred against you on account of religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive you out, that ye make friends of them-- (All) such are wrong-doers. (al-Mumtahanah, 60:7-9)

O ye who believe! The idolaters only are unclean. So let them not come near the Inviolable Place of Worship after this their year. If ye fear poverty (from the loss of their merchandise) Allah shall preserve you of His bounty if He will. Lo! Allah is knower, Wise.(al- Bara'at, 9:28)

He it is who hath sent His messenger with the guidance, and the Religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion, however much the idolaters may be averse. (al-Taubah, 9:33)

And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah), it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter. (Ale- Imran,3:85)

The above set of Quranic texts have a different thrust from the previous set that stressed the values of tolerance, peace and universal harmony. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the grim sternness and severity of the injunctions concerned reflect the extreme danger and risk faced by the nascent Islamic movement at the time the verses were revealed. As said earlier, these verses are, essentially, war time safety precautions and regulations for Muslims, not the basic values and virtues of normal human social intercourse and relationships.

A comparative study of the Quranic texts, in the light of the situational context of the revelation, confirms the view that humanistic love and tolerance are the fundamental directive principles of the Quran, while mistrust of non-Muslims, social exclusiveness and harshness towards non-believers were merely temporary rules or security measures during the state of belligerency.

Tolerance and Apostasy in the Quran:

Apostasy or religious defection from one faith to another or to total disbelief was a great sin in pre-Islamic times, and was punishable by death both in Judaism and Christianity. Islamic canon law (*shariah*) did the same, even though the Quranic texts, as such, relating to apostasy did not prescribe this extreme penalty. The relevant Quranic texts are as follows:

Lo! those who believe, then disbelieve and then (again) believe, then disbelieve, and then increase in disbelief, Allah will never pardon them, nor will He guide them unto a way. (an-Nisa, 4:137)

O ye who believe! whoso of you becometh a renegade from his religion, (know that in his stead) Allah will bring a people whom He loveth and who love Him, humble toward believers, stern toward disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah, and fearing not the blame of any blamer. Such is the grace of Allah which He giveth unto whom He will. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing. (al-Maidah, 5:54)

The above verses, read in conjunction with the clear and categorical Quranic text, (2:256) by no means validate the pre-Islamic penalty for apostasy. Yet the classical Islamic jurists did so. Perhaps, they reasoned that the Quranic text (2;256) 'there is no compulsion in religion' prohibits Muslims to convert others to Islam by force, but does not permit a Muslim to renounce Islam. Should a Muslim do so he becomes guilty of apostasy that is a heinous sin that God never pardons. The apostate should, therefore, be executed. In other words, while use of force for conversion to Islam is prohibited, use of force is lawful for preventing a Muslim believer from defecting to some other faith or sheer paganism. Thus, Islamic jurists of all schools declare that once a person accepts Islam, he forfeits the freedom to repudiate his allegiance to Islam. Should he do so, he attracts the death penalty. But there appears to be absolutely no warrant for this extreme view in the relevant verses of the Quran.

Apostasy became a major issue after the death of the Prophet when some Arab chieftains who had earlier accepted the Prophet's call to Islam decided to repudiate Islam or the authority of the successor to the Prophet. It seems that two logically distinct issues, namely, repudiation of the Islamic creed proclaimed by the Prophet, and repudiation of the political authority or supremacy of the successor to the Prophet got intertwined in the historical developments after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the ideas of 'religious defection' and of rebellion got mixed in the Islamic response to behavior of the 'false prophets' after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad. As we all know, all societies or states mete out the death penalty to anybody who challenges the power of the supreme authority at any point of time. The earliest Islamic establishment did the same without making any distinction (valid and essential for the modern mind) between political loyalty and religious faith, or between the matters of inner autonomous faith and the matter of loyalty to the sovereign.

Perhaps, at that critical juncture the successors to the Prophet had no time and patience to go into the distinction between the freedom of conscience and loyalty or obedience to the ruler.¹⁸

The Status of Non-Muslims in the Islamic State:

According to the Islamic doctrine of religious tolerance conquered territories ipso facto become parts of 'the land of Islam' (*darul Islam*). Those inhabitants who lay down arms, but are not willing to embrace Islam were entitled to full protection of life, property, honor and freedom of belief in and practice of their religion, and the carrying on of their normal means of livelihood, provided they paid '*jizya*', a special discriminatory tax on an annual per capita basis. Women, children, the aged and the infirm were exempted.

The concept of the '*jizya*' was taken from the ancient practice in Iran and fully harmonized with the spirit of the times. The Islamic rationale for adopting this practice was that it was a substitute tax for '*zakat*', which was a Quranic obligation upon Muslims alone. The defense of the Islamic state against external attack was also obligatory upon the Muslims but optional for the '*dhimmis*'. The protected non-Muslims (*Dhimmis*) had the option to seek exemption from '*jizya*' by simply offering to participate in the joint defense of the Islamic state against external attack. It is significant that without the '*jizya*' the economic liability of the Muslims actually exceeded that of the '*dhimmis*'. In fact the '*jizya*' was a device to keep both Muslim believers and the rest of the peaceful citizens on par in purely economic terms. Moreover, the Islamic establishment actually protected the '*dhimmis*' against the land hunger of the Muslims themselves. In short, in actual practice, the '*jizya*' was not a penal tax but merely a more or less functional substitute tax for non-Muslim citizens, who, by definition, could not attract all the rights and obligations associated with Islam, but wished to continue living in lands that had become a part of 'the land of Islam'.¹⁹

Unfortunately, some prejudiced historical writings have created a false impression that the '*dhimmis*' were subjected to several humiliating disabilities, as mentioned in the so called 'Compact of Omar, the second pious Caliph. Modern research (thanks to the labors of reputed Western scholars, no less than Muslims themselves) has exploded the myth. What happened was that Omar II (d.702), the Umayyad Caliph, who came on the scene more than half a century after the pious Caliph Omar did put some restrictions upon the '*dhimmis*', and, subsequently, some jurists also adopted a discriminatory approach against non-Muslims. But even Omar II did not issue any Compact at all, and he should not be held responsible for some really objectionable views and practices of much later jurists in medieval times in India and elsewhere. These doctrines are much later developments and have no place in the Quran, and the practice of the Prophet and the pious Caliphs.²⁰

RESPECT FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP:

The Islamic doctrine of tolerance categorically prohibits desecrating any place of worship, or forcibly using it for Islamic worship. However, the Prophet did remove the idols from the Ka'ba at Mecca on the ground that the Ka'ba was, originally, a mosque built by Abraham. The Prophet viewed the 'cleansing' of the Ka'ba from idols as the restoration of a monotheistic place of worship to its original status. This is a solitary instance of the Prophet having removed or destroyed idols from a place of worship under the control of non-Muslims for several centuries. Syria was conquered during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, Iraq, Iran and Egypt during the caliphate of Omar, and Khurasan during that of 'Usman'. No expansion took place during the caliphate of Ali. During this entire period of about thirty years no place of worship belonging to non-Muslims was desecrated, nor any icon destroyed or any encouragement given to iconoclasm.

PERMISSIBILITY OF INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE:

A unique feature of the Islamic doctrine of tolerance is that Islam permits inter-religious marriage, when no other religion does so. The Islamic tradition permits marriage between Muslim men and non-Muslim women belonging to the 'people of the Book' (*ahl-e kitab*). Muslim women are, however, not permitted to marry non-Muslim men. The 'people of the book' meant, in practice, only the Jews and the Christians, to begin with. Later on the Zoroastrians of Iran, and the Hindus of Sind were also included for a brief period.²¹

DARUL ISLAM & DARUL HARB (LANDS OF ISLAM & LANDS OF WAR):

The Islamic doctrine of tolerance presupposes the division of the world into the land of Islam and of non-Islam, and the duty of Muslim believers to transform the entire world into the land of Islam. The traditional Islamic doctrine affirms a state of continuing conflict between Islam and non-Islam. However, there is room, on a temporary basis, for a transitory truce, no-war pacts, or treaties of mutual aid. Islamic jurists were the first to frame a code of conduct for Muslim participants in war and also for Muslims living in the land of non-Islam.²²

ISLAMIC TOLERANCE IN PRACTICE:

The Prophet had brought about the political unification of the Arab tribes shortly before his death. This great achievement represented the combined victory of Arab nationalism over centrifugal tribalism, as also of Islam as the revised version of ancient Judaism and Christianity. The, hitherto, camel-drivers, petty traders and desert freebooters emerged from the backwaters of history, onto the world-stage. The almost unbroken chain of military victories against the then super-powers, inevitably, fostered a new self-image of the emerging Arab elite. In this self-image were inextricably mixed Arab nationalism and faith in Islam, as the final world religion—the completion of God's favors and blessings on mankind. Gushing, springs of self-assertion and valor, born from the fusion of Arab pride and Islamic commitment burst forth from the arid sands of Arabia, taking the world by storm, as it were. The incredible momentum of the Arab-Islamic revolution of the 7th. Century, historically speaking, has not yet been surpassed for rapidity of success, in the annals of world history. To my mind, Arab expansion was the result of neither pure racial imperialism, nor of pure Islamic missionary zeal, but rather an inextricable combination of both. To look upon the Arab expansion as nothing but territorial aggrandizement, or as nothing but a spiritual mission, would be to over-simplify a complex historical phenomenon. Arab political expansionism, to begin with, was a violation of the spirit of tolerance. But once the Islamic state was established the Arab Muslims immediately put the Islamic doctrine of tolerance into practice. The people in the conquered territory were invited to accept Islam and become equal partners. Failing this, they could live and carry on their normal activities as protected non-Muslims (*dhimmis*) living in an Islamic state (*darul Islam*). Though the '*dhimmis*' had a slightly lower status, it was, certainly, not a lowly status or a mere euphemism for slavery. There was no recourse to forced conversion of the conquered people. However, there can be no doubt that Islamic tolerance falls short of the modern idea of tolerance implying complete equality of status, irrespective of religion. Nevertheless, the Arab Muslims were ahead of the times in regard to observing humane rules of war, fair treatment of prisoners and of doing justice to people who had been subjugated but were unwilling to embrace Islam. Historians of repute, including eminent non-Muslim scholars, testify to the above. Short of becoming the head of state, '*dhimmis*' rose to positions of eminence in the service of the state, business, industry, commerce, banking, medicine and the pursuit of learning. In the course of time, the majority of '*dhimmis*' got converted to Islam. But this was certainly not the result of force but of social psychological, political and ideological factors. The great achievement of the early Muslims and Islamic creativity in almost every field of human endeavor genuinely moved millions of Christians, Jews and others to embrace the new faith, as had happened earlier in the case of Christianity and Buddhism.

The process of formal conversion to Islam was a long drawn out affair extending to almost two centuries in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt and other places. Some among the vast Zoroastrian population of Iran migrated to India (where they came to be known as 'Parsis') on the ground of persecution, but the majority stayed behind, gradually taking to Islam. In a slow and prolonged process of cultural inter-action between the ancient and rich culture of the Iranians, and the Quranic and Semitic concepts of Islam several Iranian thought forms and cultural patterns became an integral part of the growing Islamic tradition. The same process was repeated later on in India, and subsequently, in Malaysia and Indonesia, with respect to their respective pre-Islamic Sanskrit cultures.

The Prophet himself had set the tradition of tolerance and of inter-religious dialogue from the very beginning. The Prophet's agreement with the local residents of Medina stipulated mutual friendship and aid for all citizens, irrespective of their religion. Political expediency and breach of solemn promises by the Jews impaired the inter-religious solidarity and harmony the Prophet had clearly visualized. Indeed, the burden of the Prophet's Islamic message lay in continuity of the great Semitic tradition of the Jews as well as the Christians. The friendly relations between the Prophet and the Emperor of Ethiopia are well known. A group of early Muslim converts had found friendly asylum at the court of the Emperor much before the migration to Medina.²³

Caliph Umar refused to pray inside the Christian Church at Jerusalem (despite requests by the Christians) lest this provide an excuse, later on, for its conversion into a mosque. Umar also had the sagacity and the moral courage to prohibit the Arab invaders of Egypt from displacing the local farmers from their fertile lands in the Nile valley.

Coming to the Umayyad period we come across numerous instances of harmonious relations and friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims. The wife of Caliph Muawiyah (d.680) was a Christian, as also his secretary of finance. Al-Oasri, governor of Iraq under Caliph Hisham (d. 743) built a church at Kufa to please his mother who was a Christian. Hisham also appointed Zoroastrians to public office. The Abbasid Caliphs appointed Christians as Viziers (Prime Ministers), Ibn Sa'id Yaqut being the most famous. The Caliph Muttaqi (d.944) had a Christian Vizier. Caliph Mutazid (d.902) appointed a Christian as the head of the war office, and a Jew, Muhammad bin Ubaidullah, as the Vizier. The Fatmide Caliph, Aziz (d.996) appointed a Jew, Yaqub bin Killis, as the Vizier. Eventually, Yaqub became a Muslim. Aziz later appointed Isa bin Nestorius, a Christian, as a Vizier. The head of the Babylonian Jews in Baghdad was greatly venerated by the Muslims who viewed him as the direct descendant of David.

Abdur Rahman I (d. 788) of Muslim Spain continued the liberal tradition of the Damascus Caliphate. Hakam I (d.822), was opposed to the mixing of religion with politics, and stood for restricting the *shariah* to purely religious matters, Abdur Rahman II (d.852) showed the utmost tolerance to Christians who wielded great power in society. Abdur Rahman III (d.961) the greatest of all the Caliphs of Muslim Spain and one of the greatest rulers of the world, continued the liberal tradition at Cordova. Spain produced a galaxy of poets, thinkers, scientists, historians, artists, architects, manufacturers who came from among the Jews and the Christians, no less than Muslims, and made a permanent contribution to the sum total of human civilization and culture. The Ottoman Caliphs of Turkey also practiced the same liberal tradition, throughout their very extensive multi-racial and multi-religious empire. The Jews and Christians (both Catholics and Protestants) were given the highest posts in the realm and even dominated the industrial and commercial life of the state. Even the personal bodyguard of the Caliphs included Christians.²⁴

Coming to the dark side of the picture, several Caliphs (no matter what their other qualities and good points) deviated, in varying degrees, from the Islamic doctrine of tolerance, and discriminated against both Muslims and non-Muslims. Some even persecuted doctrinal dissent within the fold of Islam itself. The most striking case of persecution of doctrinal dissent within Islam is Mamun's prolonged persecution of the great jurist, Imam Hambal, for not accepting the Mutazalite view that the Quran was not eternal but was created in time. Mamun, reputed for his great contribution to culture and learning, sought to impose his own Mutazaiite view on the jurist who held the theological view that the Quran was eternal. Ironically, Muqtadir reversed the position and persecuted the Mutazalites, expelling them from public office.²⁵ Self-appointed censors invaded homes and burnt objectionable literature. Under Mustanjid, the writings of Ibn Sina were burnt in 1150. In 1192 Abdus Salam, the noted scholar of Baghdad, was accused of atheism and his library was burnt. The persecution of the great mystic, Mansur Hallaj (d. 922) is well known. Notwithstanding the above, the Muslims in history have shown far greater tolerance than the Christians or Jews in the same period. All impartial historians (including reputed non-Muslim scholars) concede the atrocious behavior of the Christian crusaders towards the Muslims

and Jews in the territories the crusaders had temporarily conquered from the Arabs and which remained under Christian rule for an interregnum of approx. 80 years. The defenders of the Cross unleashed a reign of terror and incredible brutality, not only against the non-Christians of Palestine, but against the local fellow Christians themselves who were far happier under Islamic rule than under the Cross.

THE PRACTICE OF TOLERANCE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

Let us now review the practice of tolerance in medieval India. We should avoid drawing hasty and sweeping conclusions from selective views and attitudes and take the totality of facts into account. We would be guilty of '*simplism*' if we were to give undue significance to the views of a section of the *ulema* who bemoaned the friendly relations between Muslims and non-Muslims and the power and position of Hindu nobles and top administrators, on the ground that the *shariah* (as interpreted by them) prohibited friendly intercourse between Muslims and the polytheists. Some theologians were not even averse to the permissibility of coercion for saving the souls of heathens, even as a doctor may forcibly administer a bitter medicine for the patient's own good. The expression of such ideas in the writings of some Muslim divines has led some historians and scholars to wrong conclusions regarding the actual state of affairs in medieval India. These scholars tend to ignore the fact that the Sufi, approach to the problem of tolerance was radically otherwise. In fact, a sizeable section of the ultra-orthodox *Ulema* held the view that the sufis were pseudo-Muslims. In actual practice, however, the Indian classes no less than masses flocked to the sufi saints while giving only formal respect to the *Ulema*.

Sufis, in general, are known for their ethics of tolerance and universal love and the doctrine of the essential unity of all religions and the oneness of the human family, notwithstanding diversity of symbols and forms. Some of the Sufi utterances, really, cut so deeply into the traditional fabric of religious belief as to invite the charge of misunderstanding or blasphemy. Though the great Sufis did attract people to Islam through their elevated moral and spiritual status, their emphasis was upon inner purification of the soul rather than upon conversion to Islam. It is highly significant that Muslim sovereigns were attracted more to the Sufis than to the theologians.

The point at issue has a great relevance to our own times. It is well known that several Hindu quarters are openly hostile to the non-Hindu segment of the Indian people. Now the spoken and written words emanating from such quarters should not make the impartial observer of the Indian scene today infer that the government of the day actually practice what the Hindu communalists desire or recommend. The declared wishes or inner attitudes of a particular section of the people should not be equated with the actual policy and practice of the government of the day. Unfortunately, this is, precisely, what some scholars, politicians and religious leaders do when they bemoan the plight of Hindu society under Muslim rule in the medieval period. No matter what some custodians of the *shariah* may have thought, the Muslim rulers of medieval India refused to mix religion and politics and followed a policy, which may aptly be called 'functional secularism'. Like rulers, in general, Muslim rulers were more interested in saving their own thrones rather than in saving the souls of others. When things did not go their way, rulers did turn to spiritual help or support from religious sources and symbols. But this was a recipe merely in times of adversity, not the staple food of rulers. As prudent statesmen, the sultans and emperors adopted a policy of non-discrimination against their Hindu subjects who constituted the overwhelming majority. This fact rather than sheer force or the supposed degradation of the Hindus helped sustain Muslim rule in medieval India for successive centuries.

The overwhelming majority of the Hindus did not look upon Muslim sovereigns as foreign tyrants, or the Muslim nobility and the military as agents of exploitation of the tyrant concerned. The king or the ruler, no matter what his race or religion, was given all love and loyalty, so long as he was victorious in the battlefield. The Hindu populace, no matter what it might have thought at the time of the very first confrontation with the Turk or the Pathan invaders, soon came to look upon the Muslims as a warrior caste, one among the several castes forming the rich mosaic of Indian society. There is no doubt that when the Muslims settled down in the land of their conquest, they became in their own eyes no less than in that of the Hindus, an integral part of the

already much mixed population. True, intermarriage between the Muslims and the Hindus was an unthinkable proposition. But so was inter-caste marriage within the Hindu fold as such. The significant point is that the vast majority of the Indian Muslims were ethnically of Hindu stock.

The weaker and socially handicapped segments of an extremely hierarchical Hindu society, bedeviled by caste taboos, had found new hopes of vertical mobility under the umbrella of Islamic social egalitarianism. In addition, Islam being the creed of the ruling class, it offered extra avenues of political power. The sovereigns (with just one or two exceptions) treated Hindus and Muslims with paternalistic impartiality. The Hindu populace enjoyed full freedom of belief and of conscience, and were free to carry on their individual and social life just as they chose. There was absolutely no state interference in matters religious, cultural, and social. Agriculture, industry, the bulk of the trade and administration (at the lower and intermediate levels) remained in the hands of the Hindus. They also had access to assignments at the highest level, but here their proportion was considerably lower because of intense competition from the Muslim side. The upper class families of Turkish, Pathan, Turanian and Iranian descent looked upon themselves and were also looked upon by the rulers as the natural claimants or incumbents at the top levels of power, and even the Muslims of pure Indian origin had to face stiff competition.

The Hindu princes and chieftains who accepted the suzerainty of the central power were accorded high honor, retained their thrones and exercised vast powers, military and civil, in their own extensive territories under the feudal system. There was a common civil levy on the land, apart from personal, laws, which were not interfered with. The law of the land was heavily influenced by the *shariah*, but the sovereigns claimed and exercised discretionary powers in all worldly matters. The sovereigns, firmly and consistently repudiated the claim of the Islamic jurists that the jurisdiction of the *shariah* was all embracing.

The sultans and emperors, with the sole exception of Akbar, did not presume to reinterpret Islam, but merely followed the policy of 'functional secularism'. This, in effect, amounted to a pragmatic separation between the jurisdiction of the state and of religion without formally raising technical religious or doctrinal issues, such as the status of India as '*Darul Islam*', or the de jure authority of the *khalifa* over India, and so on. ^{25(a)}

Many theologians and jurists disapproved of the above-mentioned pragmatic approach of the sultans who, however, persisted in their de facto functional secular approach. The rulers got moral support from sufi saints who were, in general, inclined to religious liberalism and humanism and were also more in touch with the populace, Muslim as well as Hindu. Indeed, there was a measure of tension (which persists till today) between the humanism of the sufi and the legalism of the jurist or the theologian. The best Urdu and Persian poets in India and elsewhere express this tension and exalt the spiritual ecstasy of the sufi while decrying the empty legalism of the mullah. ²⁶

The policy of 'functional secularism' reached its fruition and was sought to be transformed into a basic political principle, as it were, in the time of Akbar. Going beyond mere practical prudence, Akbar sought to bring about complete equality of status and of opportunity between his subjects, and also emotionally integrate Hindus, Muslims and others into one larger Indian family. Akbar's abolition of the '*jizya*' in 1564 (eight years after his accession to the throne) was the most significant reform or innovation, both psychologically and doctrinally, to bring about the desired emotional integration. However, from the purely fiscal or economic angle, the abolition of this discriminatory tax on non-Muslims did not amount to much. '*jizya*' was in lieu of the obligatory wealth-tax (*zakat*) which was a religious duty imposed on all Muslims having surplus wealth at the end of the year. Now whatever the theory of '*jizya*' may have been, in practice, it was an exclusive tax on the non-Muslims, just as '*zakat*' was an exclusive tax on the Muslims, and the latter tax could far exceed the quantum of '*Jizya*' paid by non-Muslims. Moreover, several categories of non-Muslims were exempt from the said tax. The discrimination involved was thus more formal rather than economic. Nevertheless,

the discriminative nomenclature must have bred psychological distance between the two categories of tax assesses. And Akbar's administrative intuition and political insight led him to bring all his subjects on par, legally, administratively and fiscally. Unfortunately, Akbar's well-intentioned and far-reaching vision was misinterpreted by many of his Muslim contemporaries as a repudiation of Islamic *shariah*, or as a sinister move to impose a new religion in place of Islam. The coining of the term, '*Din-e-Ilahi*' and the over-enthusiasm of some of the Emperor's courtiers (for reasons, selfish rather than spiritual) conspired to give a semblance of truth to the misinterpretation of Akbar's religious views as the downright repudiation of Islam or as sheer political opportunism. This misinterpretation still persists, especially among those who glorify the achievements of Aurangzeb, and hold that he saved Islam from being totally destroyed by the follies of Akbar and Dara Shukoh. Numerous non-Muslims, on the other hand, condemn Aurangzeb for his religious fanaticism and persecution of Hindus and Sikhs. Incontrovertible historical evidence is increasingly piling up with the passage of years, thanks to rigorous methods of research by Indian and western scholars, to expose the fallacy of the above extreme views.

It is clear that Akbar regarded himself as a Muslim, and so did the overwhelming majority of his subjects (both Muslim and non-Muslim). It is also clear that Aurangzeb continued to enjoy the unquestioned loyalty and active support of a sizeable section of the Rajputs till the very end of his long reign. Aurangzeb's declared policy and practice were to employ efficient and honest persons, irrespective of religion or caste. The percentage of non-Muslims among high-ranking *mansabdars*, no less than among lower or middle rank revenue officers, was higher in the time of Aurangzeb as compared to Akbar. Aurangzeb's Deccan and Marhatta policy was not dictated by religious, but rather by economic and political considerations, even as his fight against his father and brothers was a vigorous search for power. His brothers also sought power, but they lost, while Aurangzeb won. Differences in religious outlook did exist, but the crucial factor in their motivation was the search for power, rather than search for piety. If Dara was poetic and speculative, Aurangzeb was puritanical and legalistic; if Dara came under the spell of the *Upanisads*, Aurangzeb remained in the grip of the *shariah*; if Dara stood for the essential unity of all religions, Aurangzeb stood for the exclusive salvation of Muslims. But the point is that religious bigotry was not the crucial factor in the motivation of Aurangzeb who was far from being an evil tyrant and temple-destroyer. He was rather lacking in political and economic insight and had a static religious vision failure was due to a relative lack of political insight and a static religious vision, but he was not inimical to others. The reimposition of the '*jizya*', the excessive territorial expansion of the empire, the concessions to Muslim traders in customs and excise duty, the discouragement of music and other art forms, the long absence from the capital due to his taking over the command of the insurgency operations in the Pune region—all were misconceived and harmful policies, not acts of hostility against non-Muslims. While Aurangzeb did demolish a few temples, he endowed many more in different parts of the country. It is significant that he also demolished a mosque at Golkunda that was being used by Muslim insurgents.²⁷

The history of the several independent regional Muslim kingdoms in the medieval period, prior to their incorporation into the Mughal empire, also points to the tolerant character of the Sultans and of the functionally secular motivation of their policies and conduct of public affairs. Zaynui Abidin (d.1470) of Kashmir, the most illustrious ruler of the region, was admired and loved by all Kashmiris, irrespective of their religion. He was the patron of Sanskrit no less than of Persian, of the '*sant*' no less than of the Sufi. Husayn Shah (d.1519) of Bengal played a similar role in the eastern region. His example was later on followed by the great Sher Shah Suri (d. 1545) whose enlightened religious liberalism and administrative reforms are still remembered by all Indians, Hindus and Muslims alike.

In the southern region, the Bahmani Sultan, Tajuddin Feroze (d. 1472) gave preference to Dakhnis in state employment, irrespective of religion. His conflict with the neighboring Hindu Raja of Vijaynagar was purely political. Mahmud Gawan (d. 1481), the illustrious Prime Minister of the Bahmani Kingdom followed the same policy. The Sultans of Golkunda and Bijapur and the Rajas of Vijaynagar entered into pacts or fought among

themselves in their own respective political interests, as they saw them, quite irrespective of their religious affiliations. Ibrahim Qutb Shah (d. 1580) of Golkunda greatly patronized Telegu culture, endowed Hindu temples and even discontinued the *jizya*. Vijaynagar thought it fit, in its own political interests, to play one Muslim kingdom against the other. This game went on until Vijaynagar's eventual defeat in 1565. During this protracted period of shifting alliances, the Muslim ruler of Bijapur sought the help of the Raja of Vijaynagar against the Muslim kingdom of Ahmadnagar. In short, political, rather than religious considerations were the leitmotif of the actor's concerned.²⁸

Coming to later times, exactly the same remarks apply to the shifting alliances and endemic warfare between the decadent Mughals, rising Marhattas, Rajputs, Pathans, Jats, Sikhs, Rohillas and others, all of whom got sucked into the vortex of the power struggle following the sudden collapse of the great Mughal empire soon after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707.

In the southern region, Tipu Sultan (d. 1799) emerged as the hero, alike of Muslims and Hindus, of Mysore (present Karnataka). The Nizam of Hyderabad emerged as the ruler over a mixed population whose loyalty never wavered till the very end of the British period. However, the Muslim rulers of Mysore and Hyderabad ever remained on opposite sides in the drama of the Indian struggle against British supremacy.

Coming to our own times, the semi-independent princely states, Gwalior, Indore, Baroda, Jaipur, Patiala, Kapurthala, (all ruled by Hindu or Sikh rulers) gave liberal patronage to Muslims of ability and integrity, and they often rose to highest positions of power and trust in the state.²⁹

In conclusion, a few comments on the proper interpretation of medieval Indian history would be in order. As is well known, Sultan Mahmud Ghazna (d.1030) attacked India several times in the 10th century, Muhammad Ghori invaded and conquered North India in the 12th century, Babar in the 16th century, and Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali again invaded the country in the 18th century, and all these attackers were Muslim. But it would be a totally perverse view to hold that the above historical processes were instances of Islamic aggression against Hinduism. All the above events flowed, essentially, from the struggle for ascendancy by rising and expanding groups at the expense of older and defensive groups, more or less on the decline, in terms of general human creativity and vigor. This has been the perennial rhythm of world history. In the ancient period, the creative and expanding groups were the Aryans, the Iranians, Greeks, Romans and Chinese, while in the medieval period the Arabs, Turks, and Mongols played the role of the creative expanding group. In the modern era the role was taken over by the Europeans.³⁰

It is also worth mentioning that the social paradigm of 'Muslim aggressor' and 'Hindu victim' (even if it were to be accepted, to begin with) breaks down after the first few episodes, since the aggressors and their victims soon became mixed. Here are just a few examples of how the struggle for power and wealth cut across religious or racial distinctions. Babar fought against the combined forces of Ibrahim Lodi and Rana Sanga, Humayun struggled against Sher Shah, and both these contenders for supremacy had allies or supporters from both Hindus and Muslims. The power of the great Mughals flowed from a firm alliance between them and the Rajputs. The victims of Mughal imperialism or expansion were Muslim kingdoms no less than Hindu. The Hindu rulers of south India continually fought against each other even as the Rajas in the northern region before the advent of the Muslims. The entire artillery of Sivaji was manned by Muslims. The victims of Sivaji's lootings of the prosperous port of Surat were Hindus no less than Muslims, even as the victims of the invasions by Nadir Shah and Abdali were Muslims and Hindus alike.³¹

According to the Hindu '*dharmashastras*', every king or ruler was duty-bound to enlarge his dominions and fighting the highest duty of the warrior caste. Territorial expansion was not evil so long as the ruler could win in battle and rule justly over his subjects in accordance with the *shastras*. The Rajas fought, won or lost, but the

'*praja*', unmindful of the race or religion of the contenders for power, pursued their own peaceful vocations of life, the '*purusharthas*'. This social ethic was also applied to the Muslim rulers when they came on the scene. The Hindu populace, in general, did not grudge Muslim rule, provided the ruler did not interfere in their '*dharma*'. The legitimacy of the ruler was not determined by or dependent upon his religion or race, but flowed from his victory in battle or the struggle for power. Such has been the basic social and political ethic of *Bharat* from times immemorial. Communalism, in the modern Indian sense of the term, was unknown earlier and emerged during British rule.

During the entire medieval period, social gradation cut across the distinction between Hindu and Muslim. Poor Muslims were in the employment of rich or affluent Hindus, and vice versa. Muslim rulers and feudal lords ruled over and commanded the genuine loyalty and admiration of their subjects, Muslim and Hindu alike, and vice versa. Muslim rulers had enemies or rivals among the Hindus, and vice versa. Friends and foes did not belong to any religion or caste, nor did creditors and debtors. There were business and industrial partnerships between Hindus and Muslims who took the same risks and shared the same gains or losses. The common man (Hindu or Muslim) had the same grievances against the '*patwari*', the '*kotwal*', the '*sahukar*', the '*qazi*', the aristocrat, the burglar, the artisan, and the prostitute, who could be either Hindu or Muslim. And so on. The best commentary on the tolerance and functional secularism of medieval India is provided by the growth of a common or composite culture reflected in the regional languages, architecture, painting, music, dress, entertainments, amusements, proverbs, folklore and folk-religions of India.³²

Notes and References:

1 The word, 'fundamentalism' is a misnomer since its literal sense suggests something totally different from the sense 'fundamentalism' is being used in these days. Understood literally 'fundamentalism' should mean emphasizing the fundamentals of a religion to the exclusion of all secondary or tertiary details. But in actual usage 'fundamentalism' means that the writ of religion runs in each and every sphere of life, every detail of which falls under the discipline of an organized religion. I have termed this basic approach to religion as 'religious totalism', and the opposite of this approach as 'religious liberalism'. The liberal approach to religion demarcates the proper function of religion and lays emphasis upon the fundamental concepts and values of a religion rather than upon cultural, social, economic, political matters which are best left to man's collective wisdom expressed through the democratic process.

2. This is precisely what Mawdudi and other critics of secularism do. They first distort the real operative meaning of separating religion from politics and then disapprove of 'politics sans religion' as the naked pursuit of power.

3. This simple truth is missed by numerous persons of different religious faiths. In his autobiographical novel, *Of Human Bondage*, Somerset Maugham refers to how the first realization of this truth freed him from spiritual conceit and contempt for creeds other than his own.

4. Existential perplexity is the condition of inner doubt concerning spiritual or moral issues which cannot be settled objectively by observation, experiment or reasoning. In other words, the individual is constrained either to remain in perpetual doubt or to believe on the basis of faith. Existential certainty flows from authentic faith, while objective certainty is the product of systematic perception and inquiry. Not only religious or metaphysical but even ethical and aesthetic truth-claims cannot be established by objective methods of knowing. Empathy is the ability to place oneself in the life- situation of others and to see things from their perspective and in a different light, as it were. Empathy implies the ability to suspend one's own beliefs or views, to become provisionally, as it were, a participant in a different spiritual or ideational world for the purpose of understanding it as an insider rather than as an observer from outside.

5. The principle of tolerance is well exemplified in the maxim of the Roman Emperor Tiberius: 'If the gods are insulted, let them see to it themselves. See, J B Bury's classic, *A History of Freedom of Thought*, London, 1957

6. The following extract from the famous Rock Edicts of Ashoka is truly remarkable: 'Whoever honors his own sect and disparages another man's, does his own sect the greatest possible harm...' See, de Bury, WT, (Ed.) *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Oxford University/ Press, 1956.

7. The early followers of Jesus were humble folk belonging to the weaker sections of the Jewish population of the region.

8. The first reported case of death penalty for heresy is that of Priscillian in 4th Century Spain, in the reign of Emperor Valens. See Bury, op.cit.

9. In the popular perception the crusades were a bloody confrontation between Christianity and Islam. From a mature sociological and historical approach, however, political and economic factors were silently operative in producing this confrontation, which was far from being a pure and simple religious issue. Indeed, religion provided only a romantic or sentimental coloring to issues, essentially, concerned with the struggle for wealth and power.

10. See, Bury, op.cit

11. The tragic story of the Spanish Muslims has been told by reliable historians, Muslim as well as others. See the well known works by Amir Ali, *A short History of the Saracens*, London, 1955; Hitti, PK, *History of the Arabs*, London, 1957.

12. The French liberal thinker, Bayle (d.1706) questioned the validity of St. Augustine's interpretation of the remark 'Compel them to come in'. There is a strong similarity between the liberal approaches of Bayle and John Locke of Oxford. Rousseau, Voltaire et al, carried the work of Bayle forward to its consummation.

13. The principle of 'Jurisdiction' meant that the jurisdiction of the established religion applies to secular matters no less than to purely spiritual. The principle of 'separation' meant that the affairs of state be kept separate from religion as such, and that the state should function as an autonomous corporation rather than as an agency subordinate to any particular religion. Separation, however, does not mean the absolute or total rejection of religion or of morality.

14. This totally absurd war crippled the economy of entire western Europe. One of the most devastating wars in the annals of human history; it even led to cases of cannibalism for sheer survival.

15. Legal disabilities against Unitarians were completely removed in the forties, and against the Jews in the fifties of the 19th century. Signing of the 39 Articles of the official Anglican Church ceased to be a pre-condition of a fellowship at the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge as late as 1871.

16. It is both ironic and amusing that Protestants settled in large numbers in Maryland and, on becoming the majority, discontinued the tolerance established by the Catholics, The policy of tolerance was, however, re-established after 1660. See Bury, op. cit.

17. It is worth pointing out that the founders of the first secular state in the world were not atheists or materialists, but deeply committed Christians who, however, from the long experience of European religious

intolerance and fanaticism had learnt the wisdom of separating religion from politics. The Muslim mind is still struggling with this issue. This principle was incorporated into the letter and spirit of the Indian constitution, thanks to the vision of the leaders of the Indian Renaissance starting in the late 18th century Bengal, and coming to full maturity in the life and work of Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru et al. It is true tolerance may also flourish in a state where the principle of jurisdiction holds, for instance, Britain whose monarch continues to be the head of the established Anglican Church. Yet, the American model remains supreme for the rest of the world.

18. The Prophet and his companions had to abandon their hearths and homes in Mecca to escape humiliation, ostracism and torture at the hands of their opponents bent upon exterminating the new religion. Even at Medina the refugees were not allowed to live in peace. The over-all situation did call for harsh defensive even pre-emptive action by the Muslims. They, however gradually become the dominant political power in the region. See the scholarly and objective exposition (based on original Arabic sources) of this theme in Majid Khadduri's excellent study, 'War and Peace in the Law of Islam', Oxford, 1955.

19. *Jizya* was a graduated tax in three slabs of 12, 24 and 48 *dinars* per annum. The establishment did not, in general, severely penalize the failure to pay the tax because of financial stringency. See Majid Khadduri, op. cit.

20. According to the (spurious) covenant of 'Omar', the '*dhimmi*' had to wear a distinctive dress, cut their forelocks, were debarred from using a saddle when riding horses, living in houses taller than those of Muslims, wearing of silken clothes, praying or ringing church bells loudly, and testifying against Muslims. Moreover, they had no legal share in war spoils though they could get an allowance as participants fighting on the side of the Muslims, if a Muslim killed a non-Muslim, the penalty was restricted to fine only. These and similar restrictions or disabilities of the *dhimmi* were unknown in the earliest normative period of the Islamic commonwealth. Even when they came to be espoused in some Muslim juristic quarters they were not acted upon due to various reasons. However, it is true that evidence of non-Muslims was not admissible against Muslims; non-Muslims could not build places of worship without prior sanction of the state. See, Majid Khadduri, op. cit. Also see Tritton, A.S., *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*, London, 1930, and Fischei, WJ, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam*, London, 1937.

21. The Zoroastrians were added in the category 'people of the Book' soon after the Arab conquest of Iran during the time of Omar in 642. The Hindus of Sind in India were also included in this category at the instance of Mohammad bin Qasim who conquered the region at the behest of the Umayyad *Khalifa*, at Damascus in 712. This liberal approach was, however, reversed after Qasim's recall from Sind and his disgrace at the *Khalifa's* court.

22. Muslims are pre-disposed to see the aspect of missionary zeal alone, while non-Muslim observers that of mere territorial expansionism. Balanced observers and historians such as Gibb, Hitti, Watt et al. do strike the correct note.

23. The compact of Medina entered into by the Prophet with the residents of the host city is a document of great significance. (It is worth recalling that an outstanding Indian scholar and public figure, Husain Ahmad Madani (d.1957) viewed the compact as a sound justification for Muslims and Hindus living together in a united India without any need for creating Pakistan in 1947 as a separate state for Muslims.

Many Arabs wanted to settle down in the fertile lands belonging to the defeated Egyptians. Omar did not permit this, even though Ali reasoned that there should be no objection in view of the fact that the Muslims had earlier displaced the Jewish owners of the fertile farms and lands at Khyber in Arabia. See Shibli's monumental *Life of Omar, the Great*, Lahore, 1962.

24. The instances of tolerance cited have been taken from standard historical works by reliable historians, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, who have laboured hard to go to the original Arabic sources closest to the periods concerned. Amir Ali, op. cit. p. 112-115; 321-322. Hitti, P.K., *History of the Arabs*, pp.234, 355. The dark side of the picture will be found in the same works: Amir Ali, pp.288-89:301,412. Hitti, pp.353, 359, 360.

25. The debate whether the Quran, as the Word of God, is eternal or created in time (just like the rest of God's creation) is one of the most crucial issues in the history of Islamic thought. Under the influence of Greek thought the *Mutazilite* theologians held that the 'Word' came later in time, since holding otherwise would compromise the essential unity of God's Being. The *Ash'arite* theologians held that the *Mutazilite* view compromised the status and supreme worth of the 'Word of God'. The *Asharite* held that their view was quite compatible with the unity of Divine Being, while the *Mutazalite* critics thought otherwise.

25(a) It had become a tradition that Muslim sovereigns in different parts of the Islamic world sought legitimacy for their rule by proclaiming, suo-moto, their formal allegiance to the *Khalifa*, though this was a mere fiction. Indeed, the unity of the Islamic commonwealth had been lost as far back as 750 when the Abbasids displaced the Umayyad dynasty, and the Umayyad prince; Abdur Rahman founded a rival seat of power in Spain. The declaration of allegiance was purely ceremonial. Akbar discontinued this formality. 'Functional secularism' means that secularism in practice went hand in hand with theoretical Islamic rule, even as the secular government in Britain has gone hand in hand with an established Church of England. See, Rizvi, S.A.A. op.cit

26. In general, Muslim theologians held that the *shariah* stipulated the right and obligation of the *ulema* to overview and regulate the affairs of state and the acts of the Sovereign. The Sufis, on the other hand, were content with pure spirituality and a rather low profile in the affairs of the state. The Sufis were absorbed in devotional music and meditation and the task of giving solace and comfort to the weaker sections of society instead of asserting their authority in the corridors of power. There were, however, several exceptions to this general rule. Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi (d.1624) and Shah Waliullah (d.1763) are notable instances. Beautiful examples of Sufi poetry abound in the poetry of Attar (d.1229), Rumi(d.1273), Sadi(d.1291), Hafiz(d.1389), Jami (d.1492), Urfi(d.1591), Kabir (d.1518), Mir (d.1810), Ghalib (d.1869) among others.

27. Valuable results have come from the practice of impartial historians to consult deeds of charitable grants by Aurangzeb to several Hindu temples, official lists of Governors, top military commanders, feudal lords, writers etc. and last, but not least, authentic letters or memoranda. See the pioneering study by Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, Bombay. 1966.

28. The details concerning the regional Muslim kingdoms have been taken from Rizvi, op. cit.

29. This is not a simplistic indictment of British imperial policy in India. Communalism was also a natural concomitant of the social, economic and political consequences of the process of industrialization and modernization of a given society. The largest single factor which precipitated communalism (in the modern Indian sense) was the introduction by the British of representative secular democracy. This meant that every man was a potential wielder of power no matter what his caste or religion. This inevitably created an almost irresistible temptation to appeal to members of one's own religion, caste, region, or language for winning the battle of the ballot-- the passport for political power and wealth.

30. In the early medieval period Muslims did destroy some temples and also used their debris for constructing mosques. These actions represented medieval modes of asserting the military might of the victor, though such practices had no Islamic sanction. These acts were, however, not cases of persecution or of forced conversion. While we rightly disapprove of these acts on the basis of our contemporary norms and ideals, this should not

make us condemn the medieval period as one of darkness, decay and wholesale tyranny. See Pande, B.N., *Islam and Indian Culture*, Patna, 1987.

31. Shivaji attacked and looted the prosperous port city of Surat first, in 1664, and again in 1670. Nadir Shah attacked and looted north India in 1739, and Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1756. Mahmud's fighting force comprised Hindu mercenaries also. Moreover, Mahmud had Hindu chiefs as allies in the perennial wars for territorial expansion-- the declared aim and duty (dharma) of the schattriya caste, according to the *dharmashastras*. It is significant that when the triumphant Mahmud sent rich presents to a noted scholar-jurist of Ghazna, Qazi Abul Hasan Baulami, the learned divine returned the presents on the ground that Mahmud had not behaved in conformity with Islamic tenets. See, K. A. Nizami's *Religious Leanings of the Sultans of Delhi*, 1958. See also, K.S. Murty, *The Indian Spirit*, 1965.

32. Cross-cultural fusion is a universal social phenomenon. The culture or general way of life of the Prophet's time was Arab. The Islamic ethos, as it emerged in the early normative period of the pious *Khalifas* and even later, retained much of the pre-Islamic Arab mores. Sociology reveals that the original culture of a society which converts to an other religion can not but sub-consciously carry over (to some extent or other) their pre-conversion attitudes and modes of thinking. Thus, while Islam, as an abstract creed, (enshrined in the *kalimah*) is common to all believers, Muslims of Arabia, Iran, Africa, India, Indonesia etc. greatly differ from each other socially and culturally. See Tarachand's classic, *The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad, 1963.