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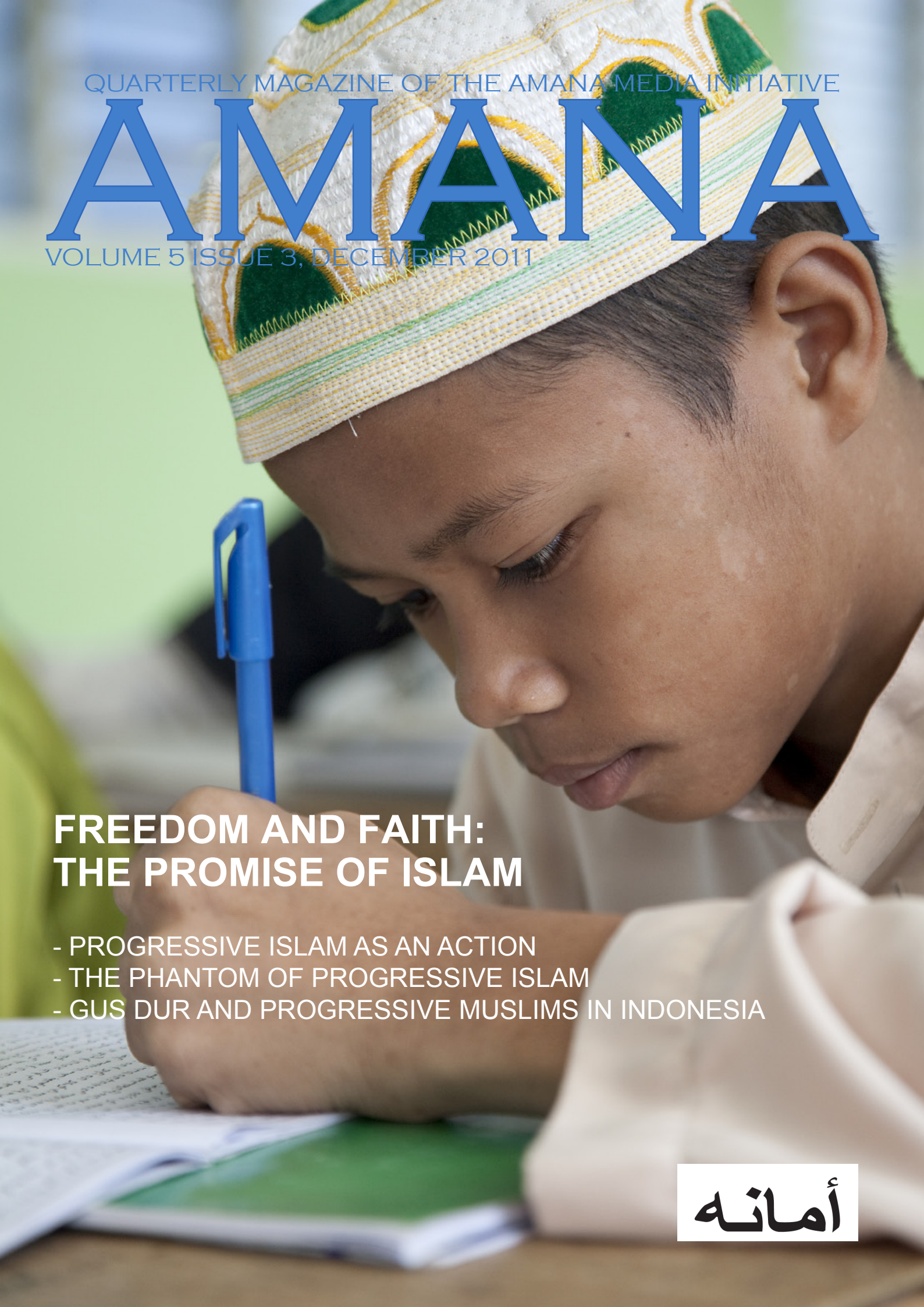

FREEDOM AND FAITH: THE PROMISE OF ISLAM

- PROGRESSIVE ISLAM AS AN ACTION
- THE PHANTOM OF PROGRESSIVE ISLAM
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Editorial

Islam began its journey towards peace with one sacred book, the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition in the 7th Century. Since then, leading into the 21st century, its journey to peace has met many obstacles. These obstacles largely originated from within due to the diverse interpretations of the Holy Book and the way it was adopted in different cultures. As a result, Muslims have been living in diverse traditions. Each tradition stands as tall as the people who have created, nurtured and upheld it. Even though historically these traditions have been created by Muslims themselves, yet, Muslims are not perceived as a homogenous *ummah*.

Within the tradition we witness strong non-liberative tendencies and practices which adversely affect the excluded sections in society: the most vulnerable, marginalized, migrants, women, children, youth and minorities. We cannot deny the fact that the image of Islam today to some extent is frightening. Part of it is our own making and part, the making of others. Muslims are in conflict with Muslims as well as with hegemonic powers.

It is generally accepted that Israel as an extension of Western hegemony has been occupying Palestinian land and suppressing them brutally. Israel and its allies argue that this has been their response to the threat to Israel's very existence. Some Muslims consider powerful non–Muslims, particularly Christian-dominated Western governments, who blindly support Israeli occupation and atrocities, as their enemy. Paradoxically, within the occupied West Bank, both Muslims and Christians are an integral part of the liberation movement. So Christians per se, are not the enemy of Muslims.

As Edward Said has remarked, "For Muslims as for non-Muslims, Islam is an objective and also a subjective fact, because people create that fact, in their faith, in their societies, histories and traditions, or, in the case of non-Muslim outsiders, because they must in a sense, fix, personify, stamp, the identity of that which they feel confronts them collectively or individually. This is to say that the media's Islam, the Western scholar's Islam, Western reporter's Islam and the Muslim's Islam are all acts of will and interpretation that take place in history" (1981,40).

It is not only in conflict that Muslims live with hegemonic power. They do so in cooperation as well. On the international front, the members of NATO are working quite well in integrating the Arab League and also Turkey, into a common project. The recent project has been to end Gaddafi's rule and seek to establish a multi-party democratic process in Libya. Among the emergent consensus themes for such cooperation are: the protection of civilians under autocratic governments such as in Syria (but not Yemen or Bahrain), isolation of Iran on the nuclear issue and a wide range of security cooperation. The recent move of the government of Qatar to allow the Taliban to open an office there in order to facilitate dialogue with the West in seeking peace in Afghanistan could be considered as a step in the right direction. Though this consensus project could also be divisive in nature among Muslims.

The system of governance in the Muslim world is not the same but the end results are identical, namely disparity in economic opportunities, access to education, employment, and promotion and protection of the rights of women, migrant workers and refugees. The disparity between rich and poor is not confined within Muslim societies, but is a common phenomenon in all societies irrespective of religious or cultural identities. But Muslims have an obligation to strive for a just and peaceful society.

This issue of AMANA has included articles highlighting engagement of Muslim scholars, leaders, and philanthropists namely Maulana Abul Kalam Azad , Abdurrahman Wahid and Haji Sattar Edhi who transcended in serving humanity. Other articles reflect on the role of women's organizations in conflict areas and young writers perceptions, quests and meaning of being part of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.

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GUS DUR AND PROGRESSIVE MUSLIMS IN INDONESIA

Abdurrahman Wahid, better known as Gus Dur (1940-2009), was a famous Indonesian leader. He is known as a champion of progressive Islam, although he belonged to a traditional Islamic background. He led the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), from 1984-1999. With an estimated 45 million members, NU is not just the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia but also in the world.

During his youth, Gus Dur studied at a pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding school) in Indonesia before undertaking studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt and Bagdad University in Iraq. He spent a number of years in Europe, but did not obtain a formal academic degree. However, in addition to English and Arabic, he also mastered French, German and Spanish. On returning home from his studies abroad, Gus Dur taught at the pesantren established by his grandfather, Pesantren Tebuireng, in Jombang, East Java. Not long after becoming a teacher there, Gus Dur rapidly became a prominent Islamic intellectual in Indonesia with such progressive and brilliant ideas that saw him elected as the leader of NU.

In the 1970s before Gus Dur became the leader of NU, in other parts of the Islamic world turmoil had arisen between the established powers and Islamic movements that tended to be conservative, even fundamentalist. There was Ayatullah Khomeini's movement in Iran, Jamaat al-Islamy in Pakistan and Ikhwanul Muslimin in Egypt. In the former two instances, the Islamic movements successfully took control of government and led their countries towards fundamentalist and formalistic Islamic understandings. Although Ikhwanul Muslimin or the Islamic Brotherhood was unable to seize power in Egypt, their influence in Egyptian society has remained strong. This trend towards conservatism and fundamentalism penetrated most of the Muslim world, including Indonesia.

In Indonesia, since the 1970s, there was an emergence of Islamic movements that tended to imitate the movements in Iran, Pakistan and Egypt. In several higher institutes in Indonesia, particularly the secular ones, these movements grew like mushrooms in the damp and were pioneered by younger lecturers, particularly those who had graduated from the United States, Japan, Europe and of course the Middle East. They recruited their best students to become activists for their beliefs. One key issue of these movements was the Islamisation of society and the state, either by seizing power through revolution or by participating in the political processes already in place.

Through his writings and speeches, Gus Dur embarked on a counter-discourse against the trend towards conservatism and fundamentalism. His strong basis in traditional Islam, in the pesantren circles and his great knowledge meant that the discourses that he offered were readily accepted by the traditional Islamic leaders in pesantren, though they did not completely escape controversy and debate. On the other hand, Gus Dur's vast understanding of modern scholarship allowed him to counter the discourses offered by the campus-based Islamic movements. Gus Dur also interacted with critical intellectuals from secular, socialist and Islamic circles in order to develop a progressive Islamic discourse. He closely monitored liberation theology and the anti-military movement in Latin America. This combination of elements made him a leading intellectual and a progressive Islamic activist of his time.

Gus Dur offered several important concepts to set Indonesian Islam on a different path from the fundamentalism present in other parts of the Muslim world. Such concepts included anti-revolution, Islamic indigenization (*pribumisasi Islam*), a sociocultural approach to Islam and integration between Islam and nationalism to form a plural Republic of Indonesia marked by unity in diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*). He used NU, which was a large organisation with strong and deep traditions in Indonesian Muslim communities, as a vehicle through which to actualize these concepts and objectives.

In many of his speeches Gus Dur spoke of his dis-

appointment with the revolutionary approach of Islamic movements. He believed that such an approach in Islam would only lead to violence, of which the lower class would largely be the victim. Of course Gus Dur used previous revolutions in Europe and Asia as examples. The revolution in Iran had more recently proved his predictions true. However Gus Dur was not against those who had the desire and believed in the theory of establishing an Islamic state, but he did believe it had to be done by first spreading and educating society about Islam. In other words, it was through this process of outreach and evolution that a Muslim society, which would fulfil the standards of Islam, could emerge.

On the other hand, Gus Dur did not want to allow Islam to be left behind the developments and demands of global changes. As an exponent of traditional Islam with modern aspirations, Gus Dur wanted to initiate a mass scale and in-depth discourse over the issue, which would involve all components of society, including non-Muslims. Gus Dur offered what he called indigenization of Islam (*pribumisasi Islam*). He never opposed influences from outside, whether they be Islamic or modern and western in nature. However, the process had to occur through dialogue that placed emphasis on the importance of local values and the local context, in this case, Indonesia. All influences from outside had to be discussed and be able to be absorbed in a process that would benefit Indonesian society. The process required that Muslims possess great knowledge of Islamic scholarship, both traditional and modern. Gus Dur often complained about the tendency for shallow understandings of Islamic scholarship by Muslim activists and intellectuals, even by those with higher education degrees.

At the time, formalization of Islam was one of the strongest aspirations of Muslim activists at secular universities. In response, Gus Dur suggested a strategy that he called a socio-cultural strategy. It emphasized on the substance of Islam, such as justice and equality, as the agenda for structural change within society and the state. He did not agree with a purely symbolic change that was marked simply by adding the term 'Islamic' to every object of change, such as Islamic state, Islamic party, Islamisation of sciences, Islamic banking and so on. As such, his socio-cultural strategy was a cultural approach to structural change. Thus although Gus Dur was in practice a representation of civil society and of the communities that had been oppressed by the harsh Indonesian military, in the end he had to be prepared to stand as president when structural change occurred, as represented by the fall of the military hegemony and the implementation of the first democratic election in 1999. From that moment on Gus Dur practiced structural transformation at the state level.

Gus Dur was elected as the General Chairman of NU's Central Board in 1984 at the height of the controversial law that required all political and social organisations to list the Pancasila, the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state, as one of their organizational foundations. The law was largely a way for the authoritarian Indonesian government to anticipate the strengthening of Islamic movements which sought to establish an Islamic state. The government's proposition, however, was opposed not only by Muslims but also by other groups because it was felt that it went against the spirit of democracy.

At that time, the NU Congress came to an important decision, where Gus Dur was a primary actor, after having just been elected for the first time as the General Chairman. The decision directly confronted Islamic conservatism and fundamentalism, as NU severed all formal relations with the Islamic political parties (amalgamated under the United Development Party, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan). NU chose to distance itself from all political parties, allowing its members to choose whichever party they preferred, even those without Islamic ideologies or symbols. NU also explicitly adopted Pancasila as its sole foundation and "Islam ahlu sunnah wal jamaah (Sunni Islam)" in the article on "aqidah (faith)", held above the sole foundation of Pancasila. NU then declared the plural Republic of Indonesia as the state's final form.

With these important decisions NU declared the Republic of Indonesia as the Indonesian Muslim state that did not require further Islamic formalization. In fact, it even told its members not to be involved in political parties purely because of their Islamic ideologies and symbols. Furthermore, NU gave all citizens the same rights in front of the constitution and the law regardless of religion, ethnicity or race. Through NU, Gus Dur advocated for minority groups and political victims of the New Order who were discriminated against despite being citizens with the same rights and values in the face of the law and state. Gus Dur transformed NU into

what Jose Casanova described as public religion.

After the fall of the New Order, Gus Dur established a political party that had its basis in the traditional NU and pesantren Islamic community but adopted a nationalist ideology. In the 1999 General Election his party took third place and Gus Dur was elected president by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in the most democratic election since the fall of the New Order's military government. During his presidency, Gus Dur implemented structural changes at the national level. He implemented drastic demilitarization and deconstruction of New Order structures, which angered those who supported the status quo.

During his presidency, Islamic political parties in parliament formed a coalition to work towards establishing an Islamic state to replace the Pancasila state. However, public discussions involving the wider Muslim community outside of parliament opposed these aspirations. Gus Dur, as president, faced much pressure and demonstrations from those Muslims who wanted Indonesia to become an Islamic state that applied Syari'ah Law, including Islamic criminal law (Jinayah). However his government opposed such aspirations.

One of the more prominent aspects of Gus Dur's policies, aside from demilitarization and deconstruction of New Order structures, was reformation in the field of citizenship. He wanted to raise the status of minority groups, groups who had been marginalized economically, political prisoners of the New Order, or those who were accused of being separatists and were thus targeted by the military, to become equal citizens in the face of the law.

As for the exponents of liberation movements that the military government had stamped as separatist, Gus Dur initiated civil dialogue and accepted them all as part of the Indonesian nation. Gus Dur gave the opportunity to members of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) in Aceh and of the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) to sit down together, to be treated as equal citizens, so as to find some common ground. He opposed their aspirations to seek independence and secede from the Republic of Indonesia, but not with guns and military force. For Gus Dur, the reformation in Indonesia should provide all citizens with the same status in the face of the law, so long as they remained part of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia.

Gus Dur passed away on 30 December 2009, but he left a great legacy for the Indonesian nation and especially for the NU and pesantren circle. Today, we have a mechanism of control in society based on traditional Islam which incorporates different religions, ethnicities and classes in order to maintain the unity of the Republic of Indonesia and a moderate and progressive understanding of Islam. Elements of fundamentalist and conservative Islam still exist and through democracy have spread to all state institutions and government bodies, including the parliament, the bureaucracy and civil society institutes. The challenge then is how to foster and strengthen the social mechanism that is Gus Dur's legacy?

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THE PHANTOM OF PROGRESSIVE ISLAM - WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Believers around the world, including jurists and religious leaders, consider justice and equality to be intrinsic values of their faith, woven deeply into the fabric of their lives. For them, living by their faith is a journey towards realizing these primary values. Yet at the same time, the dilemmas of religious life and politics in most narratives have also come to be represented in terms of an inner crisis within religion itself. There is a sense in which 'crisis' has even become the byword for religion, often misassociating with itself a sense of orthodoxy, medievalism and illiberalism. Religions today, more so than ever before, sit on a grid of paradoxes that reveal deep fissures between thought and practice and this tension between belief and perception, text and interpretation, seats itself as a central quagmire in today's debates about modernity and tradition.

This is true for Hinduism and Christianity as much as this is representative of debates about and within Judaism or Buddhism, but has an even more immediate resonance in the context of Islam given its monolithic representations to the outer world. I bring myself to this debate as an individual, who is interested in the questions of how modern legal systems negotiate the terrains of traditional authority, but also as someone who is deeply drawn to the diverse modes of representing religion. Who represents Islam? In what particular way, with what kind of authority, and to what ends? Why is it that a Deobandi ulema is still considered a better arbiter of the Muslim voice than say a doctor in Pune, or an academic in Delhi or an entrepreneur in Kochi? At a connected level, it is also a harsh fact that most progressives do have badges of sophistry, weak theological grounding and intellectual prejudice inflicted on them. These contrasting attitudes and responses surely do pull the Muslim society in conflicting directions, bringing them closer to their original positions than any middle path on the bridge between freedom and faith. At the end what we have is either freedom or faith but rarely the force of both. My intent here is to argue and illustrate, in brief, that this distance reveals more about the impulses and contingencies of contestations between the occupants of these worlds, rather than the Islamic faith itself. And thereby, it is not the faith that calls for reform, but our ethics of conversation and engagement with those who believe differently than us. In what follows, I seek to lay out what is actually at stake in these debates between the old and the new, and project Islam as an ideal location to secure a stable synthesis between freedom and faith that helps us grow wiser as we age.

Barely a year ago, the AMAN annual assembly brought together faith-leaders, jurists, students and activists from around the world to ponder over one simple question – who is a progressive Muslim? It generated a wide range of answers drawing from diverse personal opinions of what delegates considered mattered in being a Muslim. But what stood out for me was what Asghar Ali Engineer, social reformer and a leading Islamic theologian himself had to say. Quoting from the Holy Quran, Engineer said – "A progressive Muslim is one who is firmly grounded in the Quranic values of truth (*haq*), justice (*adl*), compassion (*rahman*), wisdom (*hikmah*) and does service to others rather than being served by others…..progressive Islam not only does not adopt a sectarian approach but is respectful of entire humanity and human dignity as per Quran (17:70)."("Who is a Progressive Muslim"? Notes from AMAN General Assembly, Pattani, Thailand in February of 2011. Excerpted from the blog Indian Muslims on December 25, 2011).For the perplexed, this was less of an answer and more an invitation to find answers oneself. Different people reading this might differently interpret what truth means in the context of revealed knowledge, and whether respect co-relates with equality in all contexts .Yet, this is striking for its own symmetry with the liberal vocabulary of justice and dignity, and for its emphasis on principles and values, over practices and rituals to define the progressive space within Islam.

As the Holy Quran reveals, and Asghar Engineer's answer further emphasizes, there is nothing extraordinary about progressive Muslims as all the faithful are called to serve the principles of truth and justice and compassion, as a way of life. Much of the effort to define oneself as a progressive Muslim is a struggle with the self, of seeking valid interpretations of Quranic principles in a changing world. The call to compassion is in itself a call for progressive thought, and finds itself relevant from prehistoric times to post-modernity, often as one of constitutive principles of distinct religious thoughts. This finds special resonance in our times where we are still struggling to adopt and enforce common norms against cruelty and torture in times of war and conflict. The challenge of a progressive Muslim then, is to think about evolution and belief in ways that does justice to the history of ideas of the Islamic religious tradition. This history would often reveal that the founding of a condensed and organized body of religious thought such as Islam represented a moment of exceptional progressivism at times defined largely by the grammar of anarchy, fear and violence. It is incontestably ironical then that a vision as timeless as that of Islam is battling to be relevant today, where faces of injustice and sectarianism are more, not less, manifest.

In offering a simple conjecture, let me say that the enduring creed of Islam and the universal nature of its claim relates solely to Quranic principles and not to the practices and rituals, which are so often canonised by its adherents as judgment cast in stone. The moral force and unrelenting significance of these practices for an ordinary Muslim extends only to the degree to which they correspond fairly and clearly to these principles. And this is precisely the itjihad that the faith calls every faithful to make – to struggle to correspond practice with principle, evaluate what a principle commands in a changing world and a resultant ordering of priorities It is impossible to repress the luminosity of liberalism inherent in this crucial interpretative tool of Islamic jurisprudence as it seeks of Muslims a self-knowledge appropriate for their times.

It is well-settled that most of the verses of the Quran, as revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) over a period of twenty-three years, came in response to the conditions faced by him and his believers at that unique point in history. And though the prescriptive force of Quranic principles is not in any doubt, the role of itjihad in developing contextual interpretation has seen sharp disagreement. In fact, some of the most divergent beliefs within different sects of Islam source from this single question of just how seriously, sometimes even literally, does one have to take the verses, without any interpretative function. However, in addressing this dilemma, one does not have to choose between conservative Islam and progressive Islam, or adhere to a particular sect, but only remain aware that truth, by its very nature, is contextual. There are no absolute truths, except the struggle to discover them itself. Seeking absolute truths in an evolving universe, of which our living experiences constitute only a small fraction, is an oxymoron.

Vaclav Havel, the legendary dissident and revolutionary, famously articulated that, truth is not only what is said, but to whom it is said, how it is said and why it is said – essentially, the truth is the context itself. Islam seems to have come to terms with this fact of life much before the rest of the world did. By equating knowledge with light and ignorance with darkness and postulating that ilm is infinitely more significant than ibadah, Prophet (PBUH) had sown the seeds of an inherently progressive social order. Knowledge-seeking was to be the highest duty of a Muslim, and the calls to serve the ends of truth, compassion and justice were nothing, if not a summon towards a journey of interpretation and discovery. It is a fact of our being that we seek to decipher the future within the constraints of our present knowledge. It is a process by which we seek to exert some influence on how the future reveals itself, what comes first, what next, in what measure and how we respond and adapt to these new genealogies of knowledge. This is a struggle which has defined much of humanity's quest to evolve, often leading the present or the past to wrest control of the future. Human history has bore witness to this social psyche at different stages of its growth – most notably, from the trial of Socrates to the hostility spawned by Co-

pernicus's theses and Galileo's 'heresies' , before finally coming to be governed by their insight through a tumultuous process of argument and exchange.

By these standards, Islam proved to be a tremendously progressive force. It did not make knowledge-creation the preserve of the few, but a duty for all. But what limits could one cast on compassion, within what boundaries could one encircle truth and to what particular moment could one freeze the idea of justice? They were essentially liberal precepts in a conservative world that sought to build bridges between tradition and modernity. The promise of universalism and permanence that runs through Islam must have based itself on these enduring tools of progress. Yet, what could have been a civilisational project of itjihad, of freethinking and self-discovery, was gradually crippled by too much emphasis on rules and modalities of fiqh, deep knowledge of Quran and qualifications or standing for hermeneutical interpretation. Itjihad was slowly restricted to a small minority of Muslims who met these expansive conditions thus paving the way for its fading out of Islamic public culture. It would not be wholly inappropriate to argue that this itself was a consequence of consensus between different sects which came together to temper the force of progressivism inherent in itjihad. Individual itjihad would have almost banished the force of collectivities that shaped the politics of authority within Islam during the early medieval and medieval phases. In many ways, Islam faced this crisis for being too progressive and too liberal, with modern sensibilities, in a time and world which was essentially pre-modern.

In today's world, the future of these liberal contestations is shaped not only by debates within Islam, but to a greater extent by debates between Islam and other religions. There are many within the Muslim community who believe in the process of reflection and interpretation to find their answers, but today they face opposition not only from their ulemas and clerics, who view them as too modern, but also a majority of Hindus and Christians and others who view them as too backward. In a way, the task before the jihadis (those who struggle) has become more delicate, as responding to the claims made by members of other families (religions) presupposes their acceptance as an authoritative voice of their own family first i.e. Islam. These internal and external forces surely implicate the future of progressive Islam in dangerous ways, and it is crucial to hold onto a few guideposts in this age of turbulence.

First, the struggles within Islam over meaning and interpretation closely parallel the dilemmas which modern legal systems and constitutionalism face in evolving themselves to changing conceptions of knowledge, authority and representation. It is possible that each looks to the experience of the other in learning something about its own challenges. Second, the progressives and liberals, have a huge stake is bringing about an orderly transition in Muslim societies and this would not be secured by condemning Islam as backward-looking. It is of categorical imperative that the non-Muslims sincerely engage with and acknowledge the inherent progressivism of Islam's message, on terms acceptable to Muslims. We must help in challenging stereotypes that represent a rich, plural and diverse community through outmoded clichés before we join hands for gender justice campaigns or madarsa reform initiatives. Thirdly, it bears special reminder to the progressives and liberals amongst us that our engagement with the Muslim community should encourage and empower them, rather than alienate them further. This alienation has much to do with our own misperceptions about Islam, and we are duty-bound to popularise the progressive and liberal narratives of Islam. At the same time, Muslims around the world, and especially in a plural and divided society like India, must cultivate a broadmindedness for criticism as an engagement with it can often serve as the fire of purification.

Those of us who chant freedom as a way of life must also enquire if it makes sense without a context. New forms of knowledge and science may tell us what lies next but they barely supply the philosophical apparatus and ethical groundwork that could sieve subtly through its subterranean maze of possibilities and tie it to a meaning worth living for. In a way thus, science takes us to these new possibilities, but

struggles to anchor it to an underlying moral sensibility. At times, this context is constructed by societies around us, their varying stages of progress and the nature of their problems, but for many, the context for freedom is supplied through faith – in principles, practices, and purposes. One could posit that on this conversation between stipulations of science and the anxieties of morality will hinge our ability to meet the future on our own terms.

Islam has long been a source of rich insight about how faith matters to freedom, and what freedom might in turn have to offer to faith, but its future dynamism will no doubt be tested through the pulls and pressures of this exchange. At the end, Islam was and will continue to remain a deeply progressive faith, but our ability to transcend the million stereotypes that abound will depend upon our ability to survey and explain its present state through a historical lens, while at the same time using its unique and progressive history as a lesson for our times. What is at stake after all at the centre of these debates is not the recovery or loss of religious tradition, but human comprehension of social change in an evolving civilization. This entire project is probably more relevant to Hinduism, the religion of my birth, but I sought out Islam to impress upon the possibility that one can engage with the culture and concerns of the others with the facility just of a human being. I remain aware that the groundwork for a progressive theological jurisprudence can only be laid by a Muslim, yet my musings might be of some interest given the universal nature of Islam's message.

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MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD – HIS PASSION FOR FREEDOM AND COMMUNAL HARMONY

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a unique personality of great Islamic scholarship, patriotism and great passion for communal harmony. However, it is highly regrettable that his services to the country have almost been forgotten. Eleventh November 2011 was the Maulana's birthday and this year the Government of India also remembered him and schools were asked to celebrate Maulana's birthday since it is also 'education day'.

Maulana Abul Kalam was the son of Maulana Khairuddin of Calcutta (now Kolkata) who was a highly respected *Alim* and had thousands of disciples. He had married an Arab woman from Mecca and Maulana was born during Maulana Khairuddins stay there. Thus in a way Arabic was his mother tongue and Maulana had great command over it. He was brought up in orthodox Islamic tradition and his father wanted him to succeed him. If he had accepted this offer he also would have had a large number of disciples and would have been highly influential like his father. But the Maulana came under the influence of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and read his writings avidly. However, he was highly independent minded and soon distanced himself from Sir Syed's emphasis on loyalty to the British Empire though he accepted his views on modernity and modern education. He was passionately committed to India's freedom and tried to join the underground movement in Bengal but unfortunately those underground leaders thought he was not fit for joining it, doubting him.

For Maulana patriotism was an Islamic duty as the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that love of ones country is part of ones faith (*Iman*). And this love of country demanded its freedom from foreign slavery and thus he considered it his duty to free his country from British slavery. He became Congress President at a very young age, he was perhaps, the youngest president of the Congress party.

Like Gandhiji he was aware that Hindu-Muslim unity was essential for India's freedom. Thus when he became President of the Congress, in the Ramgarh session of the Congress, he in his presidential address concluded his speech by saying that "even if an angel descends from heaven with a gift of freedom for India from Allah I would not accept it until there is Hindu-Muslim unity as loss of India's freedom is loss of India but loss of Hindu-Muslim unity is loss of entire humanity". These are very profound words and for Maulana this was not mere rhetoric but was his deep commitment on the basis of his understanding of the Quran. Maulana's *tafsir*(commentary) of the Qur'an which he wrote in early twenties during his Ranchi incarceration is considered as a great contribution to *tafsir* literature from the Indian subcontinent. He had devoted the first volume of his *tafsir* (he could not complete it due to his highly busy political schedule and he had to write it all over again as the British police destroyed his earlier manuscript) to what he calls *wahdat-e-din* i.e. unity of religion. Maulana had deep conviction, as we find from his *tafsir* , about unity of all religions and he has shown achievements of his scholarship on expanding this concept in his *tafsir* and that is why his pronouncement about Hindu-Muslim unity was not mere political rhetoric, much less opportunism, but a deep religious conviction.

He was a great statesman and though he was a great supporter of the Khilafat movement he was the first to discard it when Kamal Pasha staged a coup in Turkey and removed the khalifa from power and declared the institution of khilafat as an outdated one. He also welcomed modern reforms of Ata Turk and advised Muslims to give up efforts for protecting the institution of khilafat

which Turkish leaders themselves had disowned.

Maulana also opposed Jinnah's demand for a one-third representation for Muslims in parliament when the Nehru Committee Report came for discussion before the Congress Session of 1928. He argued that in a democracy no community can be given over representation and as for minority rights, the Constitution can take care of them through special provisions as the Indian Constitution did by providing for Articles 25 to 30. Azad did not agree with Jawaharlal Nehru on denying two cabinet seats to the Muslim League in 1937 in U.P. as Muslim League lost in that election very badly. Maulana Azad advised Nehru to take two ministers nominated by Muslim League as refusal to take them would have a long term adverse fall out and the Maulana proved right. Jinnah became furious and began to denounce the Congress government as a 'Hindu' Government which would never give justice to Muslims. Maulana always thought of future implications and not mere immediate consequences.

Nehru and Azad were not merely good friends but had deep respect for each other. Nehru has paid glorious tributes to Maulana for his scholarship and mastery over several languages. Maulana's knowledge of other religions was also very deep and profound. His commitment to women's rights was as if he lived today. It is well known that Muslim theologians generally do not support gender equality and want women to be confined to the home. Maulana was one of the exceptions.

He translated the book *Al-Mir'at al-Muslimah* i.e The Muslim Woman, published in Arabic in Egypt, which stands for gender equality and summarises the debate which was taking place in Egypt on women's rights. Azad chose to translate this book since he was in favour of gender equality. It is important to note that he commented on the verse 2:228 that "this is a revolutionary declaration of gender equality more than 1300 years ago" (Maulana was writing in the 1920s). The only two other noted theologians who stood for gender equality from the Indian sub-continent were Maulavi Mumtaz Ali Khan who was a colleague of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulana Umar Ahmed Usmani who died recently in Karachi. Both were eminent theologians and were uncompromising in upholding gender equality.

Maulana also had clearly predicted what is happening today in Pakistan. First, it is important to note that, like his conviction about Hindu-Muslim unity, it was also Maulana's strong conviction that it would be wrong to divide India on religious grounds. Also, he knew that when a democracy begins to function it has to take care of the rights of minorities and Muslims were no mean minority. They were more than 25% before partition and today, if the country would not have been divided, they would have been more than 33%. Maulana had predicted during partition that, if Muslims think Hindus are their enemy, tomorrow when Pakistan comes into existence and there will be no Hindus, they would fight among themselves along regional, ethnic and sectarian lines. This is what is happening today in Pakistan. Not only has sectarianism grown, religious extremism is at its apex. Killing has become a common and an everyday affair. When religion is associated with politics, history of all religions show, power becomes far more important than religion and religious values. Power becomes the goal and religion a mere instrument. Maulana knew this very well and that is why he was far more inclined towards a secular democratic polity than a religious one.

However, Maulana could not prevail and save the country from partition since powerful vested interests such as the feudal lords from U.P. and Bihar and Muslim middle classes (afraid that they may not get services or quick promotions) on one hand and the British imperial interests, on the other, were bent upon dividing the country.

Dr Asghar Ali Engineer is the Chairman of the Asian Muslim Action Network and also leads the Indian based Institute of Islamic Studies and Centre for Study of Society and Secularism in Mumbai

PROGRESSIVE ISLAM AS AN ACTION

A discussion on Progressive Islam may lead one to certain traps. On one hand, it could be perceived by many as an ideology to introduce Western perspectives in several developing countries such as those in Asia. The meaning of "progressive" is seen as closely related to the process of development and therefore often associated with the intent to develop and "enlighten" the current Asian circumstances with a Western paradigm. On the other hand, Progressive Islam is also assumed as a concern to find a way to contextualise Islam with a Muslim perspective. What is inherent in this assumption is that, to change perspective, one requires a certain degree of mental faculty or the capability to think. This is usually left to the circle of academics or people who are recognised by the middle class and have the power and capital to rethink their perspective. It is not familiar to the common man who usually recognises authority from and/or becomes a follower of his/her religious clerics/Ulama, without question.

The history of progressive Islam in Indonesia was developed by discourses ranging from culture to politics. Indonesian academies are more than familiar with the different kinds of terminologies attempting to explain progressive Islam such as: Prophetic Islam, leftist Islam, liberated theologies, religious socialism, etc. These terminologies are produced from discourses concerning poverty alleviation and social inequality, including gender justice and pro-minority thinking. Thinkers like Abdurrahman Wahid, Nurcholis Majid, Moslem Abdurrahman have influenced the young generation's understanding of Islam within the Indonesian context. Currently, pluralism is also a part of strengthening this perspective to combat perceptions formed by radical ideologies.

With the two different positions on progressive Islam above, one may ask: how can we know whether an action is with or without the perspective of progressive Islam? What are its indicators? Should we recognize people by the way they talk about or react to certain discourses that use the term "progressive Islam"? Can the farmers, domestic workers, the poor woman or the minority speak about progressive Islam? These questions will further trap us into understanding progressive Islam as a topic of mere debate. We thus ought to change the question to: how can progressive Islam be the spirit of a Muslims' actions? This would assure that Muslims would focus on their acts and start to produce actions that can be called progressive.

Here, what determines the significance of the progressive action comes from the Muslim habitus itself. The term habitus or in social theory also called disposition, guides every human interest while performing a certain action. In the history of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had strongly imbibed the Muslim habitus based on 4 main identifications: *Siddiq* (revealing the truth), *Amana* (trustworthy, reliable), *Tabligh* (disseminating truth in educative ways), and *Fathonah* (wisdom). Through these actions, he wanted to explain that the acts of a Muslim have a distinct character. While the Prophet spoke to his wife with gentleness, it demonstrated the habitus of Tabligh. He wanted to teach husbands to respect their wife starting from speech. On one occasion, he explained about the Muslim's obligation to perform Salat or prayer five times a day, after he revealed the unbelievable journey of his ascension to the sky (*Isra' Mi'raj*). This action represented the habitus of Siddiq. It meant that a Muslim's actions should also consist of this nature.

If the term "progress" in "progressive Islam" refers to an action that brings advancement or progression, then there have to be indicators that those actions have helped society to be in a better state than it was in.

In Indonesia, some organisations have used violence to suppress the existence of religious minorities. Several NGOs who condemn this action have raised concern over this matter in the form of demonstrations and other means, to pressurise the Indonesian government to act firmly against the suppression of religious minorities. Here, we see the habitus of Sid-

diq in action. However following merely this would not see any progress or betterment of the situation and stagnation would prevail. Thus we can take the habitués of Amana and Fathonah here to produce a tolerant action. This action could be the commitment to protect the victims without any discrimination, to foster interfaith dialogue or to ensure the protection of the rights of the minorities.

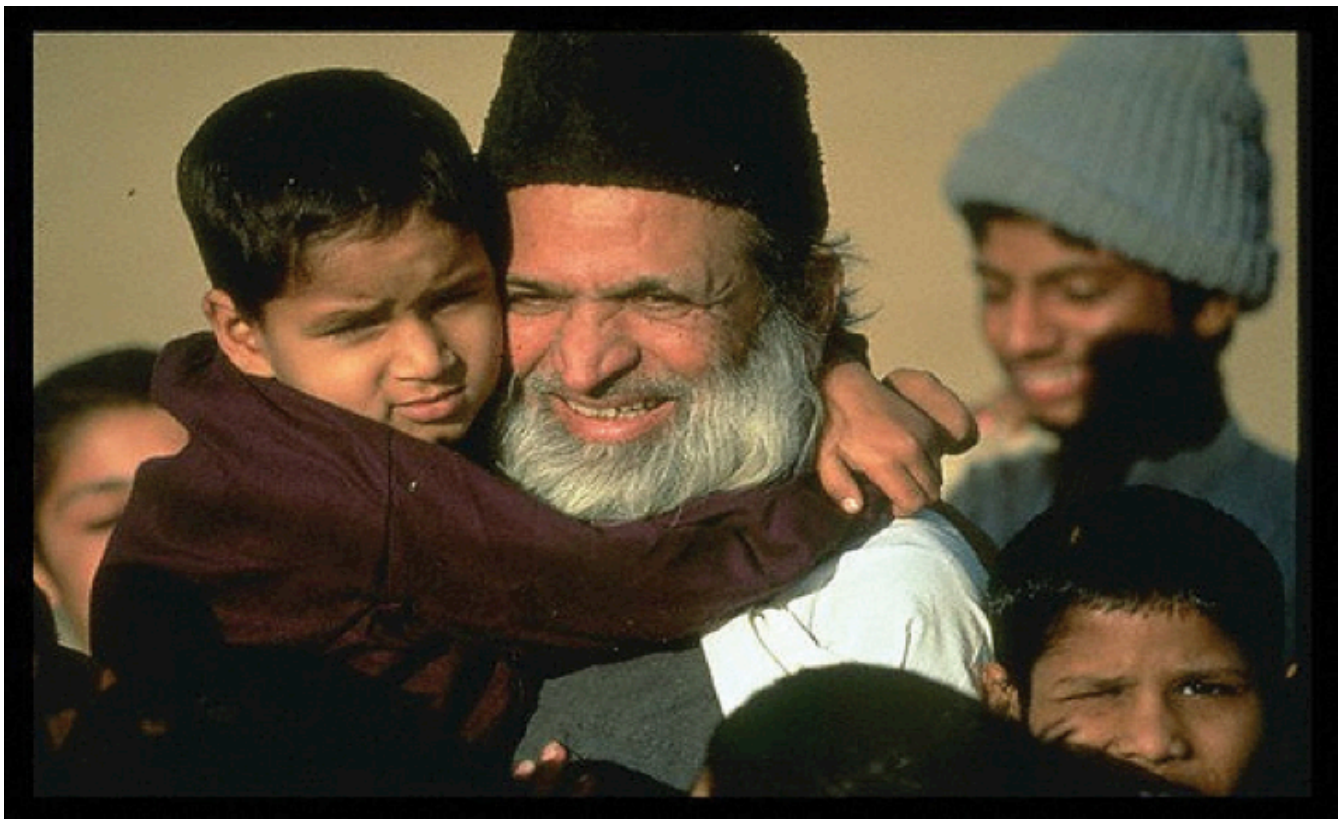
This will expand the discourse on pluralism and would indicate that an action performed to further tolerance is a progressive action and a sign of progressive Islamic ideals. In this way, every Muslim from every social class can partake to produce this progressive action. In Javanese tradition, every person of the younger generation has to come to the elderly neighbours, especially the oldest, regardless of their religion. This has been imbibed in the Javanese society as a form of local wisdom. This action would be a part of Muslim action based on the habitués of Fathonah. For Christmas this year, my organization (AMAN Indonesia) organized a small dinner for all the staff to celebrate Christmas with the Christian staff.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that change does not begin from just changing a perspective. Progressive Islam will be more beneficial to the society if we put it into action rather than go about it only as an intellectual discourse. If it is to be a form of spirit (i.e. the spirit of progressive Islam), then it will be dependent on the form of action that exemplifies this spirit. There is no need for us to continue to speak at length in theory, defining and discussing what and how we can change our perspectives to adopt the worldview of progressive Islam. What is urgently needed in the Muslim world are actions that can be rightly called actions of a progressive Muslim.

We rarely confront injustices with actions that have been espoused in stories found in the Qur'an. During discussions on progressive Islam what is cited is only a verse or two to back or strengthen one's arguments. It is rare to hear one say that we should begin to observe and practice the (wisdom found in the) way Prophet Yusuf organised agriculture, Prophet Ibrahim communicated with his son as his equivalent, or even how Maryam dismissed slander and defamation of a woman's self-worth. It is these progressive actions in the tradition of Islam that pave the way and give strength to Islamic culture for the present generation and the generations to come.

Nur Imroatus S. is a community empowerment worker of AMAN Indonesia and also a researcher at CSRC (Center for Study of Religious and Culture) Islamic State University "Syarif Hidayatullah" Jakarta.

MAULANA ABDUS SATTAR EDHI



Whenever one talks about humanity in Pakistan and perhaps the wider Islamic world, one person, with a long white beard, traditional Pakistani clothes (shalwar kameez) wearing a Jinnah cap comes to mind. His name is Maulana Abdus Sattar Edhi, an old man with young ambitions. Born on January 1, 1928 in Bantva, a small town in Kathiawar, a former district of the state of Gujarat in British India, Edhi migrated to Karachi with his family after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. With his aim to serve humanity no matter what the circumstances be, he started getting trained under a doctor to be able to give basic medical care to poor patients. The journey had begun already; a small dispensary in a shop purchased in 1951 fueled the mission with zeal and vigor. At the age of eleven, Edhi had to take care of his mother who was paralyzed and then became mentally ill with time. The one who takes good care of his parents and especially a mother is promised in the Quran to be blessed in both worlds. Edhi's mother passed away when he was nineteen years old. When he looked at people, miseries were everywhere; from men to women and from children to the old. The newly born Islamic republic had no system of providing basic necessities of life to its citizens, let alone catering to the ordinary needs of special people and the special needs of ordinary men. But Abdus Sattar Edhi was a staunch practitioner of the humanistic values of Islam and was living in an Islamic state. He knew that building an Islamic state does not mean building a religious structure without inculcating the basic human values of the religion into the minds and actions of the people. Response to his first appeal was very positive and the sum of Rs 20,000 was raised for the Edhi Foundation.

Headquartered in Karachi, the foundation then gathered the services of Bilquis Bano too, a nurse at the Edhi dispensary, who got married to Abdus Sttar Edhi in 1965. Four principles were adopted for success by the noble man and those were truth, simplicity, hard work and punctuality. The foundation began working and now, demonstrated by its own website, can proudly claim:

- The World's largest privately held ambulance service, with a fleet of 1800 ambulances
- 335 Edhi Welfare Centers all over Pakistan with 24 hours service
- Edhi Air Ambulance Service with one Helicopter and two Aircrafts.
- Edhi Marine Ambulance Service with a fleet of 28 Rescue Boats.
- 15 Edhi Homes for 7500 mentally retarded persons, orphaned children and victimized women
- a Shelter Home for destitute & injured animals
- a Missing persons Service
- 20 free dispensaries in 20 Cities
- Free Kitchen (Langer) in 20 Cities
- Old age homes ,Child adoption centers (until now, 21000 abandoned children have been given to needy parents)
- Emergency service with 500 trained medical persons - in case of natural disasters
- Free clinics, laboratories and diagnostic centers, maternity homes, blood banks, nursing training centers, immunization centers, information Bureaus to provide information about accidents/emergencies/national disasters to print and electronic media and rehabilitation centers (for addicts)

The founder, enlightened by the Islamic values of truth, piety and simplicity has been described by his own colleagues, who observe him day and night, in these words:

Despite the growth of the foundation, Edhi remains a very humble person. Dressed always in grey homespun cotton, he has a hands-on approach to his work, sweeping his own room and even cleaning the gutter if need be. Apart from one room which he uses as his own living quarters, the rest of the building serves as his workplace in Mithadar, a locality of old Karachi that is full of narrow streets and congested alleyways. Adjoining their living room is a small kitchen where Bilquees usually prepares the midday meal. Next to it is a washing area where bodies are bathed and prepared for burial.

When Edhi is not travelling to supervise his other centres, a typical day for him begins at five in the morning with Fajr prayers. His work starts thereafter answering any calls for help, organizing and meeting people in need, while afternoons are spent at various centres and hospitals all over the city. In the evening he dines with hundreds of poor at his "langar" [free community meals common among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs] at another Edhi centre in the city. His Fridays are invariably spent at homes for the destitute children where Edhi personally helps bathe the ones who are physically handicapped, before joining them for Friday prayers. Occasionally, when he is able to, he also takes them out for picnics.

This is the portrait of a human being who truly believes in humanity. This is also a portrait of a person who represents the religion of Islam in its genuine form and manifestation, Love, respect and dignity. This is what he carries in his heart for the whole world irrespective of caste, creed, religion, ethnicity or language. That is why numerous international awards have been bestowed upon him, along with the 'Nishan-e-Imtiaz,' the highest civilian honor by the Government of Pakistan. The Prime Minister of Pakistan has recently nominated Mr. Edhi for the Nobel Peace Prize, for which he had been nominated more than once, earlier as well. A Muslim is a person who obeys Allah almighty and his Proph-

et Muhammad (peace be upon him) according to the teachings of the holy Quran and Sunnah (i.e. practice and sayings of the Prophet). Edhi is a man who has become a practical exegesis of the Quran and Sunnah, telling the world that, if you want to understand the real spirit of this religion, follow me. You will find personification of humanism.

What he faced in becoming such a noble being is described in his own words as follows:

"I had accepted at the outset that charity was distorted and completely unrelated to its original concept. Reverting to the ideal was like diverting an ocean of wild water. Another major obstacle in the promotion of welfare was exposed...the disgust of man towards mankind. There was only one expression, one reaction from everyone...cringing."

Haris Bin Aziz is a journalist currently working as senior copy editor at CNBC Pakistan.

ISLAMIC VALUES IN PRACTICE; REFLECTIONS FROM VOLUNTARY WORK IN GUJARAT

My introduction to Muslim organizations and activists working for the community began in the tragic and ghastly carnage of 2002 in Gujarat. For those who may not be aware I will briefly recount the details of this tragedy. The anti-Muslim carnage of 2002 in Gujarat is a black chapter in the history of independent India and a blot on the secular fabric of a democratic nation. According to civil society estimates more than 2000 people were killed, hundreds of women gang-raped before being burnt alive and properties worth millions gutted. All this happened while the police remained mute witness. Several reports by human rights organizations document how the carnage in Gujarat maimed and terrorized an entire community with complicity of the state. The chief minister denied all through that the situation was out of control, in fact he tried everything in his means to take credit for having taught a lesson to an entire community. The politics of Gujarat reached the abyss of sectarianism and parochialism by positioning a deep divide between the majority Hindus and the minority Muslims. Close to half a million people were displaced, their homes burnt down, forced to flee and take shelter in relief camps set up by Muslim organizations or in kabristans (burial grounds) in Muslim neighbourhoods.

Since those in the government refused to fulfill their responsibility of guarding and protecting the lives and properties of innocent citizens, the responsibility to help them with relief, shelter and rehabilitation fell on civil society. The civil society comprising both secular groups and groups from the Muslim community did a wonderful, and at the same time valiant job of helping innocent women, men and children who lost everything in the attacks. It was an act of courage because to help people against the hostility of those in the ruling establishment demands deep commitment and mettle. There was a risk of being harassed under various rules and regulations that govern voluntary organizations. There was a risk of direct backlash in the form of attacks from those in the Hindu right wing who master-minded the violence. And yet it is remarkable that a handful of organizations and individual activists were not deterred in their commitment to stand by the victims and those in dire need of help. It was indeed a salute to India's democracy that secular groups and activists from all over the country openly supported those who were trying to help the victims. They supported the fight against injustice and communal violence.

I saw the Islamic values of kindness, compassion and justice coming to the fore in the efforts of these organizations and activists. The relief camps were set up by ordinary Muslims with very meager incomes or low educational backgrounds. They were driven by a desire to help and a commitment to stand by those fellow human beings who were in trouble. Some of the biggest relief camps were set up in Shah Alam dargah and Chartoda kabristan with six thousand to twelve thousand inmates. They included women, men, children and old citizens who were all forced to flee when the right-wing mobs attacked and the police shut their eyes. Although the camp organizers were short of resources they tried their best to ensure two meals a day for every inhabitant. There was a shortage of food grains, shelter material, medicines, doctors, other necessities etc. There were pregnant women who had to deliver babies but could not go to hospitals because of the violence and the curfew imposed. Civil society mobilized a few doctors who gave voluntary time to perform the deliveries and to treat the sick and those injured in the violence. It was incredible, the way ordinary members of the Muslim community came forward to work with eminent non-Muslim groups and activists to address the humanitarian crisis by providing relief and rehabilitation.

Although about a dozen groups were very active at the time I would like to specially mention the Aman Samudaya, which I had the privilege to be a part of. It was designed as a societal response encompassing engagements at various levels – the individual, the family and the community. Through its everyday and long term interventions through Aman Pathiks (messengers of peace), it tried to change the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of the soci-

ety. It engaged in social healing, psycho-social care, rehabilitation, legal justice issues and emphasising alternative and progressive traditions espousing values of peace, justice and equality. The backbone of the Aman Samudaya were its Aman Pathiks, the peace volunteers, working intensively with the affected families. Drawn from both religions and mainly women from the affected Muslim community, the Aman Pathiks underwent intensive training processes – psycho-social counseling, Para-legal work, and peace building. There were about 200 full time Aman Pathiks covering different relief camps and the inmates therein. Their work led to more and more people from the community coming forward to take responsibility for their areas and locality.

A very crucial dimension of the voluntarism witnessed at the time was the desire of affected women to take up the cause for self and those who were worse hit than themselves. Muslim women and young Muslim men came out in large numbers for the cause of justice, communal harmony and peace. They were supported by democratic institutions in the country as well as progressive non-Muslim groups, academics, artists, writers, activists and media from across the country.

Zakia Soman is a social activist from Gujarat, India. She is the founder member of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan [Indian Muslim Womens' Movement]

The Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan [Indian Muslim Womens' Movement] was formed in January, 2007 in Delhi. It is a democratic organization of Muslim women, led by Muslim women, which fights for the citizenship rights of the whole community and particularly Muslim women in India. The Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan works for all the rights and duties emanating from the Holy Quran as well as from the Constitution of India. In its fifth year, the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan's membership has crossed 24,000 members across 15 states. BMMA strives to build a progressive feminine voice of the Muslim community. Mindful of the patriarchy that has prevailed in the community and the denial of womens' rights consequently, the BMMA strives to build Muslim womens' leadership across the country. In different states it works on the issues of education, jobs, security, law and health.

UNHOLY WAR

'Jihad' is a term that has been used, misused and debated since the attack on the twin towers. This article attempts to avoid rehashing the debate. Instead, it seeks to revisit, etymologically and rationally, what the term means and also look at some related 'misused' Islamic terminology to better understand a religion which has been in the limelight lately for all the wrong reasons owing to misinterpretations and violent actions of self proclaimed saviors of Islam, rather than for all the values it actually stands for. Derived from the verb 'jahada' which means 'to exert', 'to struggle' or 'to strive', Jihad literally means striving towards a worthy goal. Muslim scholars have laid down five kinds of jihad with reference to their use in the Quran and in the Hadith (book on the sayings of the Prophet), and they are:

1. Jihad of the heart/soul

2. Jihad by the tongue: a struggle of good against evil waged by writing and speech.

3. Jihad by the pen and knowledge: a struggle for good against evil through scholarly study of Islam, ijtihad (legal reasoning), and through sciences (such as medical sciences).

4. Jihad by the hand: a struggle of good against evil waged by actions or with one's wealth, and

5. Jihad by the sword or armed conflict.

Again, Jihad is broadly classified as Jihad-al-Akbar or Greater Jihad which signifies struggle against ones own soul and Jihad-al-Asghar or the Lesser Jihad meaning the external physical effort often implying fighting. Jihad has had two variant meanings through the centuries, one more radical and the other less so. It is a term which has assumed grave importance in modern times and is very controversial owing to the duality of its character. Thus, in order to draw a conclusion, it is important to study both the perspectives: one refers to Jihad as holy war and the other refuting the same.

The first holds that Muslims who interpret their faith differently are infidels and therefore legitimate targets of Jihad. Benjamin Barber uses the term to signify a range of rapid practices which he calls the essential Jihad and which, is, he concludes despite caveats, "relatively inhospitable to democracy and that inhospitality in turn nurtures conditions favourable to parochialism, anti-modernism and hostility to others - the characteristics that constitute what I have called Jihad". Thus, this school of thought believes Jihad is synonymous with 'holy war', basing their belief on those militants who make slaughter of the other 'a higher duty'. Scholars like Daniel Pipes ("What is Jihad", New York Post, December 31, 2002) believe that Jihad in the use of territorial expansion has always been a central aspect of Islam.

The second perspective, on the other hand, lays down that according to Islamic teachings, it is unholy to instigate or start a war; however some wars are inevitable and justifiable. The scholars of this school further argue that calling Jihad, 'holy war', is incorrect as the translation of 'holy war' back into Arabic would be 'Harbun Muqaddasatun' and not Jihad. The decree to which the Quran places emphasis on respecting and saving lives can be understood by taking a look at the following verse; Quran 5:32....."We decreed for the children of Israel that anyone who murders any person who had not committed murder or horrendous crimes, it shall be as if he murdered all the people and anyone who spared a life, it shall be as if he spared the life of all the people."

Further, Gibril Haddad has analyzed a basis for the belief that internal Jihad is the greater Jihad. He identifies the primary historical basis for this belief in a Hadith in which the Prophet is reported to have told warriors returning home that they had returned from the ''lesser Jihad to the greater Jihad". The greater, he said, was "the struggle against oneself".

Having understood both worldviews on the term it can thus be concluded that terrorists have no religion, since no religion in the world preaches killing of the innocent. However, these extremist groups place themselves under the mantle of the Prophet with a view of reinventing tradition to support their self declared ''unholy wars" of violence and terror. An example of the misuse of legal rights guaranteed by Islam is provided by the following excerpt from Osama Bin Laden's speech in 'declaration of the world Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders on 23rd February, 1998'; ''All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his Messenger and Muslims.....The Jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim country...As for the fightin g to repulse (an enemy) it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty....on that basis, and in compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies- civilian and military is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it, in any country in which it is possible to do it."

It is important to note here that according to Usul-Al- Fiqh (principles of jurisprudence) the following are the prerequisites for a fatwa, which is a legal pronouncement in Islam made by a Mufti, a scholar capable of issuing judgments on Islamic law, issued at the request of an individual or a judge to settle a question where Islamic jurisprudence is unclear.

1. The Fatwa has to be in line with relevant legal proofs, deduced from Quranic verses and Hadiths;

2. It has to be issued by a person having knowledge and sincerity of heart;

3. It should be free from individual opportunism and should not be dependent on political servitude; and

4. It should be adequate with the needs of the contemporary world.

The question here thus to be answered is : how pure by heart, non opportunist and non political Osama bin Laden is/was to qualify to issue a fatwa himself. Evidently, it is clear from the above analysis how both Jihad and other Islamic terms (fatwa etc.) have been repeatedly misused by extremists, Muslims and non Muslims alike to serve their own needs. Jihad may have both offensive and defensive interpretations but it owes its extremist connotation to its use by militants to justify their misleading strategies and goals attempting to mobilize the masses to unite for 'the unholy cause' of meeting their own, self constructed ambitions in the name of religion, in this case, Islam.

Mariya Salim is the Editor of AMANA. She is also the regional program coordinator at AMAN

Remembering Dr Razia Akter Banu

When everything is made to be broken,
When everything is meant to come to a conclusion,
When every journey comes to a destination,
When every life comes to an end,
When every mountain has a peak,
When every suffering comes to a close,
When every seeking comes to an opening.

But some has no ending,
only IF,
our love is unbreakable,
our destination clear,
our life is goodness,
our mountain in light,
our suffering for others,
our waiting for a noble end,
our heart sincere and
our heart a grace,
a grace of God's mercy,
His mercy to all.

- Yunus Yasin

Prof. U.A.B. Razia Akter Banu, was a soft spoken but renowned scholar. She taught political science in Dhaka University. Besides her academic interests, she was also socially engaged. Dr. Razia has been associated with AMAN and served as a Council member from Bangladesh, making an immense contribution. She co-hosted the first AMAN Assembly in Dhaka along with the late Mohammed Ataur Rahman in the year 2000.

Dr. Razia was awarded a Fulbright scholarship and a number of other prestigious fellowships. She has written and published extensively on the liberating teachings of Islam in promoting the rights of women in general, and Muslim women in particular; the normative values of the family; the impact of Hudud Law in Pakistan; ethnic conflict, autonomy and national integration; religion and politics in South Asia and the political culture of Japan.

AMAN members pray that her departed soul may rest in eternal peace and expresses heartfelt condolences to her husband Prof Talukder Maniruzzaman and rest of the family members.

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

The role of women in peace-creation needs to be expanded not only in the informal sectors but in the formal sector as well. Facts show that women's representation in the peace process after the Poso conflict has been low. There were only four women involved in the Malino Declaration which was dominated by government elites, religious and community leaders, mostly men [Endah Trista Agustiana]. The demand for women to participate more actively has raised the question, whether or not women's representation, as a gender identity, can contribute positively? If so, what kind of contribution may we see?

The effort to dismantle a patriarchal culture in the peace process becomes urgent when gender blindness is considered as the main cause of the terrible experiences of women in conflict. Peace processes require a strong commitment to respect humans as a united entity without looking at race, religion, political preference and gender identity. This commitment needs to be maintained by ensuring that all people have equal and proportional rights and duties, including right and duties of women in the peace process.

Another important point is related to the issue as to how women perceive themselves in the peace process. Identity is about the way we perceive ourselves and others.

Mohd.Fikri Pido
Indonesia

Events at AMAN:

A "Youth, Conflict and Peace Workshop" was held in Shantiniketan, West Bengal, in coordination with AMAN Foundation Kolkata from September 23-25, 2011.

A week long Youth for peace workshop (Asia and the Middle East) held in Bangkok in December 2011 saw participation of 28 young leaders from thirteen countries. The workshop was organized with the support from Diakonia Thailand.



The Amana Media Initiative (Amana) is a broad-based media project committed to promoting greater understanding and peace within Muslim communities,betweenfaithsandamongvariousculturalcommunitiesinAsia. Amana means trust, stemming from 'aman', the Arabic word for peace. Amana was founded in April 2005 by the Asian Resource Foundation (ARF) and the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN). The ARF supports holistic development by building awareness to mobilise and share resources in order to help marginalised groups in Asia. AMAN aims to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities in Asia towards people's empowerment, human rights, justice and peace. With over 1500 members, Amana's network spans Asia and is coordinated from Bangkok, Thailand.

Publications: AMANA Magazine, Amana news online, Amana website (www.aman-asia.org)
Focus: Islam and peace, interfaith partnerships, development initiatives, human rights, gender and peace
Further information about the Amana Media Initiative is available at www.aman-asia.org

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