

THE  
ISSUE  
OF  
BLASPHEMY

The Islamic Perspective



MAULANA  
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

On 17th February 1989, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie for having insulted the Prophet in his novel 'Satanic Verses.' The 'Islamic' Government of Iran announced a reward of 2.6 million dollars for Rushdie's would-be assassin if he were an Iranian, the sum being reduced to 1 million dollars if he were of some other nationality. Two days later, Rushdie issued an apology, saying, 'Living in a world of many faiths, the experience has served to remind us that we must all be conscious of the sensibilities of others.' Khomeini did not accept his apology, however, and as quoted in 'The Times of India', insisted, 'Even if Salman Rushdie repents and becomes the most pious man, it is incumbent on every Muslim to employ everything he's got, his life and wealth, to send him to hell.'

Soon after this, several Sunni Ulama, too, came out in full support of Khomeini's fatwa. They declared that Rushdie had engaged in the most extreme form of blasphemy, and that, therefore, he deserved nothing less than the death penalty.

Khomeini's fatwa angered vast numbers of non-Muslims across the world. They protested against the fatwa, challenging the right of a citizen of one country to order the death of a person living in, and a citizen of, another country.

They felt that the fatwa and the agitation that it spurred, were a dangerous form of intimidation, a menacing danger to free speech. In short, they began to feel that the very presence of Islam in their societies was a threat to their lives and that Muslims were simply uncivilized people. It is ironic how, when Islam, properly understood, is a religion of peace, and when the Prophet Muhammad is referred to in the Quran as a mercy for all mankind (21:107), the image of this religion has been made such that many non-Muslims feel it to be a threat to their lives.

Undoubtedly, Rushdie's novel was absurd and scandalous, but the reaction of Shia and Sunni Ulama and other Muslim leaders to it was certainly even more absurd. If Salman Rushdie had insulted the Prophet, it is also the case that Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters among the Muslim Ulama were guilty of insulting Islam. This is because their reaction, and the violent agitations that it triggered, helped create an image of Islam as a barbaric and uncivilized religion. Rushdie authored his novel in the name of secularism, while the Shia and Sunni Ulama reacted to it in the name of Islam. If Rushdie gave a bad name to secularism, the Shia and Sunni Ulama gave Islam a bad name throughout the world.

In the present book, the author takes a look at the issue of blasphemy from the Islamic point of view to clear misconceptions about Islam. In the book, it has been explained that in Islam, blasphemy is a subject of intellectual discussion rather than condemnation, protest, and retaliation. Several verses in the Quran show that 'abuse of

the Prophet' is not a subject of punishment. Instead, sound arguments should be presented to address the mind of the blasphemer.

God sent more than one lakh prophets to different regions. Their contemporaries almost always responded negatively by using abusive language. (Quran, 36:30, 16:101, 7:66) However, the Quran does not prescribe physical punishment for them. Rather the Quran commands the Prophet to refrain from using abusive language in retaliation:

“But do not revile those they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God out of ignorance.” (6:108)

Many such verses in the Quran show that we have to abstain from negative reactions until the last moment in such situations.

Incidents that are termed today as abusing the Prophet were prevalent during the life of the Prophet as well. When the Prophet presented his message before the Arabs, they misbehaved with him. Here are some of the epithets given to prophets as mentioned in the Quran: “a liar” (40:24), “possessed” (15:6), “a fabricator” (16:101), and “a foolish man” (7:66). However, nowhere does the Quran prescribe any physical punishment for these offences.

It clearly shows that ‘abuse of the Prophet’ is not a subject of condemnation or seeking punishment; rather, it is a subject of removing their misunderstanding through sound arguments to address their minds. In other words,

peaceful persuasion should be used to help the person understand the truth of the matter rather than trying to punish him. There is ample evidence that tells us what to do in such cases.

Zaid bin Sa'nah, a Jewish scholar, noted that according to the Torah, two notable signs of the Prophet of Islam were:

“His forbearance outpaces his ignorance, and increased ignorance only heightens his forbearance.”

To test this, Zaid bin Sa'nah loaned money to the Prophet of Islam during a time of need, then prematurely demanded repayment, speaking harshly. He recounted, “I seized the collar of his shirt and cloak, looked at him sternly, and demanded, ‘Will you not pay me my due?’”

In response, rather than reacting harshly, the Prophet of Islam chose a gentle approach and repaid him more than the owed amount. Witnessing this act of exceeding generosity, Zaid became convinced that Muhammad was indeed a true prophet and subsequently became his follower. (*Al-Mu'jam al-Kabir* by Al-Tabarani, Hadith No. 14954)

It is interesting to note the response of the Prophet and his Companions on such occasions. They never indulged in aggressive activities against non-Muslims. Instead, they prayed for them and tried to remove their misconceptions by engaging in discussion with them, adopting a peaceful method.

In ancient times, people generally gave expression to their thoughts in poetry. The opponents of the Prophet used to

recite abusive couplets directed against him. To counter such couplets or poems, the Prophet would ask one Hassan bin Thabit, whom *Encyclopaedia Britannica* calls 'poetic defender,' to counter literary attacks on him in the form of couplets. Hassan was Islam's first religious poet.

We find many such incidents in the life of the Prophet. The Prophet peacefully countered their arguments with arguments. He attempted to satisfy the other party at an intellectual level. With these examples of the Prophet and his Companions, can resorting to violence be justified? Muslims, therefore, must deal with such cases by reasoned arguments rather than seeking to mete out punishment.

All Islamic teachings are based on reason and argument. As per this Islamic injunction, if a person commits 'blasphemy,' the responsibility of Muslims is to meet the concerned person and try to remove his misunderstanding by peaceful means. If they fail to understand, then according to the teachings of the Prophet, Muslims are left only with one option, that is, to pray for them in all sincerity.

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SECTION  
ONE



## ISLAM IN WESTERN LITERATURE

Dr. Philip K. Hitti (d. 1978), a renowned scholar of the Arabic language and history, is considered an authority on Oriental issues in the Western world. He has authored several books on Arabs and Islam, many of which have been translated into European and Asian languages. Dr. Hitti held various prestigious university positions and is also known for authoring research papers for several encyclopaedias.

Professor Hitti's book '*Islam and the West*' was published in America in 1962. It consists of 190 pages and examines the cultural relationship between the Christian and Muslim worlds. The author relied on primary sources rather than translations. The book is divided into two parts. The first part has three chapters introducing Islam as a 'Religion,' 'State,' and 'Culture.' The fourth chapter discusses 'Islam in Western Literature,' while the fifth and sixth chapters explore the 'Impact and Influence of the East on the West' and 'Impact and Influence of the West on the East' respectively. Lastly, the seventh chapter introduces the movement that seeks to synchronize 'Western civilization and Islam in various Muslim countries.'

The second part of the book consists of a compilation of excerpts from the Koran (the spelling Hitti uses while referring to the Quran in this book) and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, known as Hadith, Tafsir, Islamic

history, and anecdotes from the lives of various Islamic scholars. A total of 29 excerpts are included in this section. The following is a selection from the fourth chapter titled “Islam in Western Literature,” quoted from Hitti’s book:

“The preceding chapters have presented a distinctive portrayal of Muhammad, the characterisation of the Koran, and the depiction of Islam, which sharply contrasts with their counterparts in medieval Western literature. In that literature, the Prophet is typically depicted as an imposter, a false prophet, while the Koran is portrayed as his ambitious fabrication and Islam as an indulgent way of life, both in this world and the next.

Religion held significant importance in both Christendom and the Muslim world during those times. Each side claimed exclusivity and perfection for its religion, asserting it as the sole repository of absolute truth. However, the clash of ideologies was overshadowed by the more impactful clash of politico-military forces.

For a period of 150 years following Muhammad’s time, as we have previously learned, his Arabian and Arab followers, initially from Medina, Damascus, and later Baghdad, expanded their dominion by conquering Byzantine territories and occasionally threatening the very gates of the Eastern capital of Christendom. Over a span of four centuries, until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Muslim Seljuq and Ottoman Turks posed a significant threat to the powerful neighbouring Christian empire.

Moreover, for nearly eight centuries, starting from 711, Muslims held a portion of Spain and occasionally launched incursions into France. Sicily remained under Muslim control for over two hundred years and was a strategic stronghold against Italy. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Europeans fought as Crusaders on Muslim lands. The memories of past Crusades persisted, and hopes for future ones lingered for generations.

Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and other religions of lesser development did not experience the same level of abuse and condemnation as Muhammadanism (Islam) did. These religions did not pose a threat to the medieval West and did not offer any competition. Consequently, it was primarily fear, hostility, and prejudice that influenced the Western perception of Islam and shaped its attitude. Islamic beliefs were viewed as beliefs of the enemy and, therefore, were treated with suspicion if not outright dismissed as false.

Additionally, there was a significant linguistic barrier. For approximately six centuries after establishing military and political contacts between Christendom and the Islamic world, Europe lacked organised institutions for a formal study of the Arabic language, the Koranic language. Throughout that period, there is no record of any European Latin scholar who had a comprehensive understanding of Arabic and firsthand knowledge of Islam. This absence allowed legends and myths to fill the void left by the lack of knowledge.”

## The Image of Islam in Early Christendom

The vast array of traditions that influenced the medieval and early modern Christendom's perception of Islam was a blend of various sources found in Syro-Byzantine, Hispano-French, Siculo-Italian, and Crusading literature, both oral and written. Clerics and theologians were skilled in the art of crafting narratives. It is important to note that any similarities between the resulting image and the historical reality of Islam are purely coincidental.

The renowned Syrian Theologian St. John of Damascus (d. 749) can be regarded as the pioneer of the Byzantine tradition. A young John had been present at the early Umayyad court and possessed knowledge of Arabic, Syriac, and Greek. He stood out among intellectuals of his time. In his two dialogues, titled "Between a Christian and a Saracen," it is evident that John drew upon debates he participated in in the presence of the caliph. These dialogues served as a powerful defence of Christianity and a guide for Christians in their discussions with Muslims.

John portrayed Islam as a form of idolatrous worship centred around a false prophet who developed his teachings based on biblical sources with the guidance of an Arian monk. This depiction was closely linked to the notion of Muhammad as a heresiarch. The early Christian scholars, including John, found primitive Islam to bear striking similarities to Christianity yet viewed it as fundamentally different, justifying its classification as a heresy. This was one of the earliest and most enduring Christian perspectives on Islam.

Dante (d. 1321) placed Muhammad and Ali in the ninth circle of hell, reserved for “sowers of scandal and schism,” reflecting his condemnation of them.

The first notable Byzantine figure to mention Muhammad and address Islam was the chronicler Theophanes the Confessor (ca. 758-818). Theophanes, who founded a monastery and later received canonization, included references to Muhammad in his work ‘Chronographia.’ Without citing specific sources, Theophanes followed the teachings of St. John and referred to Muhammad as “the ruler of the Saracens and a pseudo-prophet.” It was a natural progression from this characterization to associate Muhammad with the antichrist figure.

During the same period, a Dominican contemporary of Dante, who had visited Baghdad, put forth a theory. According to this theory, Satan, unable to halt the progress of Christianity in the East, devised a scripture as a hybrid between the Old and New Testaments. He used a man with a diabolical nature as his instrument, and that man was Muhammad. The scripture in question was the Koran.

Abd al-Masih bin Ishaq al-Kindi authored the earliest comprehensive polemic that gained popularity in Spain. It was purportedly written during the Abbasid court of al-Mamun (r. 813-833), although it likely emerged a century later. The context of this polemic was a written invitation to al-Kindi, extended by a descendant of the Prophet who was in close proximity to the caliph, to convert to Islam. This

invitation provided an opportunity for the Christian Arab al-Kindi to defend Christianity and criticize Islam.

Contrary to expectations, al-Kindi directed his focus on the vulnerabilities of Islam, portraying Muhammad as a morally indulgent murderer. He depicted the Koran as a compilation of fabricated revelations and characterized Islam as a religion spread through deceit, violence, and enticing immoral practices. This perspective can be found in Reading No. 15. Similar to St. John, al-Kindi was an Oriental Christian, belonging to a subjugated community living under specific disadvantages. Both of their works, after being translated, exerted significant and long-lasting influence throughout the Western world.

It was only natural that the Muslim conquest and occupation of the Iberian Peninsula would fuel an enduring sense of bitterness and hostility among Spanish Christian authors, particularly those of a clerical background. A church deacon and translator of the Koran named Mark of Toledo, who thrived in the late twelfth century, expressed a typical sentiment: the place where “many priests had once offered divine worship to God” was now tainted by the devotion of wicked individuals to the detestable Muhammad, and churches that were once consecrated by the hands of bishops were now desecrated places of worship.

The intellectual atmosphere at that time was so strongly anti-Muhammadan that even stories could be readily accepted and perpetuated, no matter how fantastical or lacking in factual basis. For instance, Eulogius, a bishop of Cordova

renowned for his scholarship, recounts a tale from a Latin manuscript a monk wrote. According to this account, upon Muhammad's death, his followers anxiously awaited the descent of angels to carry away his body. However, dogs appeared instead and consumed it. This story was believed to be the origin of the annual slaughter of a significant number of dogs by Muslims.

Living in the Islamic stronghold of Spain, Eulogius would have easily recognized the only element of truth in the entire fable: the Muslim perception of dogs as unclean animals. Eulogius was a prominent figure in a fervent religious movement that advocated voluntary martyrdom at the hands of Muslims, a fate he ultimately experienced in 859 under the order of the Umayyad caliph.

From Latin, the story of the dogs consuming Muhammad's body found its way into French literature. In an early French epic poem called "La Chanson de Roland", both swine and dogs are depicted as devouring Mahumet (Muhammad). The swine version gained popularity as it provided a simplistic explanation for the Koranic prohibition on pork consumption. Another variant of the story suggests that the swine took their opportunity while the victim was unconscious during an epileptic fit. Yet another version substitutes drunkenness for epilepsy, serving the dual purpose of explaining the Koranic injunction against alcohol consumption.

In a later edition, Muhammad's coffin was depicted as suspended in mid-air between heaven and earth. This

portrayal persisted until 1503 when Ludovico di Varthema, the first European visitor born into Christianity to visit Makkah and Madinah, expressed surprise at not finding the suspended coffin. Di Varthema, who converted to Islam and joined the holy pilgrimage, substituted the coffin fable with a strange piece of misinformation: “Babacher [referring to Abu Bakr, the first caliph] was a cardinal and wanted to be Pope.” Other unreliable sources even portrayed Muhammad himself as a cardinal.

The anti-Muslim sentiment reached its peak during the Crusading period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, solidifying the deeply ingrained image of Islam. This Islamic stereotype became so entrenched that it became challenging to eradicate. As the Crusaders failed to eliminate Islam through military conquest, a new approach emerged: to destroy it through persuasion. The idea was to replace eviction with conviction, giving rise to the missionary movement.

The Carmelite friar order was founded by a Crusader in 1154 on Mount Carmel, from which it derived its name. The Franciscans followed the Carmelites, and in 1219, St. Francis of Assisi visited Cairo and initiated Franciscan missionary activities. In the same year, his followers arrived in Acre. However, the most influential missionary of the era, and indeed medieval Europe, was Raymond Lull, a Spanish (Catalan) church figure. Born around 1232 and



died in 1315, Lull devoted his talents and tireless energy to the “refutation of infidel errors.”

Lull meticulously planned spiritual crusades to convert Muslims. His unwavering belief in the power of argumentation and polemic debates remained steadfast until his death. In preparation for his mission, he studied Arabic and taught it at the Franciscan monastery he established in Miramar in 1276. His knowledge of Arabic and understanding of Islam were unparalleled at that time.

Following the establishment of the Arabic Studies School in Toledo in 1250, Lull’s school became the oldest in Europe, earning him the distinction of being a pioneer of Arabic studies in the Western world. Moreover, he is credited with influencing the Council of Vienne in 1311 to establish centres of Oriental studies, particularly Arabic, in Rome, Bologna, Paris, Louvain, Oxford, and Salamanca. However, the implementation of this resolution proved more challenging than anticipated. Finding both teachers and students proved to be difficult. Lull’s educational efforts yielded temporary rather than lasting results, and his missionary activity in Tunisia proved disappointing.

His attempts to instil Christian Trinitarian doctrine in the minds of unitarian Muslims proved futile. Eventually, he resorted to vehement attacks, shouting in the streets, “The law of the Christians is holy, and that of the Moors is false.” This only fuelled the anger of a mob in Tunis, who attacked him and stoned him to death, turning him into a martyr.

## The Koran Translated

An earlier breakthrough in the linguistic barrier between Christendom and Islam occurred in France with the translation of the Koran into Latin, making it the first foreign language into which the holy book was translated. This translation was undertaken around 1141 under the guidance of Peter the Venerable, the head of Cluny's Benedictine abbey. The team of translators consisted of three Christians and an Arab collaborator. In addition to the translation, Peter also composed a "refutation of the beliefs of Muhammadans." Following this translation, a French rendition of the Koran was published in Paris in 1649 by Sieur du Ryer, who had previously served as the French consul in Alexandria. In the same year, an English translation titled "The Alcoran of Mahomet" was also published, aiming to satisfy the curiosity of those interested in exploring what was referred to as "Turkish vanities." The term "Mahomet," a corruption of Muhammad, has various forms and spellings, with "Muhammad" having the most variations at forty-one. This particular translation is commonly attributed to Alexander Ross. With the decline of the Moors in Spain, the Ottoman Turks emerged as the primary champions of the Islamic faith. Initially, Martin Luther believed that the Turks could be seen as a divine punishment for the sins of Christendom, but when they besieged Vienna in 1529, he changed his stance and preached the necessity of waging war against them as infidels.

The first English translation of the Koran directly from the original Arabic was completed in 1734 by George Sale. Sale had privately studied Arabic under two Syrians, one from Aleppo and another from Damascus, and the Society employed him to promote Christian Knowledge in London. Sale's translation was dominant in the English-speaking world for more than a century.

The early translations of the Islamic holy book into Latin, Spanish, and French were accompanied by unequivocally condemnatory statements. However, these statements should not be taken as a true reflection of the sincere opinions of the translators. Such statements were likely to be included to seek ecclesiastical permission for publication and to protect the translators from accusations of heresy or potential prosecution for disseminating blasphemous material. In 1960, the Egyptian government still considered Sale's translation to contain objectionable comments in his "Preliminary Discourse," resulting in orders to withdraw copies from the library of the American University at Cairo.

### **In the Field of English Literature**

A significant development occurred in the early seventeenth century when Oxford University established a new chair of Arabic and appointed Edward Pocock (also known as Pococke) as its inaugural professor in 1636. Pocock had served as a chaplain for six years at the English factory of the Levant Company in Aleppo, where he gained proficiency in Arabic and firsthand knowledge of Islam. During this

time, the threat posed by Turkey to Christian Europe had diminished, and the Ottoman Empire opened up for trade and travel. While there is little evidence of English visitors to Persia before the latter half of the sixteenth century (Venetians had been there since the fifteenth century), the creation of the Oxford chair marked the emergence of professional European Arabism. As its first occupant, Edward Pocock was arguably the most prominent Arabist of the century. He edited and translated Arabic manuscripts, introducing a critical approach to Islamic material. Pocock debunked the widely accepted tale of the suspended coffin, stating that Muslims laughed at it, recognizing it as a Christian invention. He also questioned the famous story that the founder of Islam had trained a white pigeon to sit on his shoulder, pick grains from his ear, and pass for an angel dictating to him. This story persisted until the nineteenth century. In Shakespeare's play *Henry VI*, there is a passage (Act I, Scene ii, lines 140-141) that alludes to the contrasting inspiration of Mahomet with a dove which is described in these lines:

“We Mahomet inspired by a dove,  
Thou with an angle art inspired then.”

Long before Shakespeare, John Lydgate (d. ca. 1451), an early English poet, provided a detailed account of Muhammad's life and even mentioned the colour of the dove associated with him, describing it as “milk white.” Interestingly, in the eighteenth century, bird enthusiasts named a pigeon breed “Maumet” (derived

from Muhammad). It is worth noting that the dove holds significance as a Christian symbol representing the Holy Ghost (Luke 3:22) and does not carry any specific Islamic connotation.

The term “Maumet” was also used to refer to an idol. Although Muhammad demolished numerous idols at the Kabah, his followers strictly adhered to monotheism, rejecting the use of idols, images, or icons. Western storytellers depicted him as a deity and an idol. In medieval English encyclical plays, Mahoun (a variation of Muhammad) is repeatedly portrayed as an object of worship. Some mystery plays even included complete religious services dedicated to him. This portrayal of Muhammad as a god was present even before the Turks and Saracens, the groups associated with him in later centuries.

“Maumet” eventually came to be associated with the meaning of a puppet or doll. Shakespeare used this term and popularized it further. Additionally, not only “Maumet” but even “Alkaron” (Koran) were depicted as objects of worship among Muslims. It is claimed that the Saracens, before their conversion, performed elaborate rituals involving burning frankincense and blowing brass horns before their idols. One such idol mentioned is Apollo. According to *La Chanson de Roland*, after their supposed “defeat” at the Battle of Saragossa in 778 by Charlemagne’s troops, the Saracen army expressed their fury by attacking and destroying their god Apollo’s idol.

Another renowned writer from the Elizabethan era, Francis Bacon, refers to Muhammad as a “Mountebank.” He mentions this in his essay “Of Boldness” as follows:

“Mahomet (Muhammad) convinced the people that he possessed the power to summon a hill to come to him so that he could pray from its top for his followers. A crowd gathered to witness this event. Mahomet repeatedly called upon the hill to approach him, but when the hill remained motionless, he showed no sign of embarrassment or hesitation. Instead, he confidently declared, ‘If the hill does not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the hill.’”

Muhammad’s famous quotation has become a widely recognized proverb, although its origins cannot be traced back to Islamic tradition. However, not all medieval writers unquestioningly embraced the prevailing anti-Muhammad sentiments and the associated clichés. William of Tripoli, a Syrian-born Dominican bishop during the Crusades, authored a treatise titled “*Tractus de statu Saracenorum*” in 1270, which acknowledged Muhammad as a false prophet but minimized the inclusion of fantastical elements and derogatory expressions. William highlighted points of agreement between Islam and Christianity in this scholarly work. He advocated for the use of missionaries rather than soldiers in reclaiming the Holy Land, similar to his contemporary Raymond Lull. Lancelot Addison, a former chaplain of the English forces in Algiers, anonymously published “*The First State of Mahumedism: or An Account of the Author and Doctrines of that Imposture*” in London

in 1679. In this publication, Addison consciously made an effort to avoid the incorporation of myths and legends that had become associated with Muhammad and Islam. Occasionally, he presented the fabulous version of an incident and its corresponding historical facts.

Humphrey Prideaux, D. D., the Dean of Norwich and a contemporary of Addison, authored a comprehensive biography of Muhammad that employed various translated Arabic sources and Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin sources while applying critical analysis. He dismisses the pigeon story and “many other such Stories” as lacking any foundation or likelihood of truth, stating that the Arabians would have easily seen through such tricks. Nevertheless, the central theme of the book asserted that Islam was a perfect example of a fraudulent religion. This biography remained a standard reference in the West for over a century.

In the eighteenth century, a more tolerant attitude began to emerge. Western Arabists had translated more reliable sources of information; travellers and traders had returned with more favourable impressions; and diplomats and missionaries had contributed to the overall knowledge. George Sandys, a traveller, and colonist who visited Constantinople, Egypt, and Palestine and documented his journey in 1615, praised various Turkish expressions of piety, including their practice of almsgiving, which extended even to Christians and Jews.

In general, travellers relied more on conventional knowledge rather than firsthand experience, while

missionaries carried preconceived biases, often interacting primarily with Oriental Christians who were unlikely to offer unbiased perspectives. Unconsciously, missionaries painted a darker picture of Islam, aiming to generate sympathy and support for their cause. Even specialized professors struggled to overcome the weight of inherited tradition. In 1784, Reverend Joseph White, a successor of Pocock, delivered the renowned Bampton lectures, which aimed to confirm and strengthen the Christian faith while refuting heretics and schismatics. One of his lectures focused on Islam, specifically addressing “Mahomet’s imposture.” More recently, distinguished scholars such as William Muir, author of “The Life of Mahomet and The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall,” David S. Margoliouth, author of “Mohammed and the Rise of Islam,” and “The Early Development of Mohammedanism,” and Henri Lammens, who wrote “Mahomet fut-il sincère?” at the Université Saint-Joseph of Beirut, have shown traces of outdated ideas.

### **A New Trend Emerged in Recent Times**

Historians and essayists presented a more favourable view of Muhammad, the Koran, and Islam than theologians, novelists, and poets. One notable figure in this regard is Simon Ockley, a professor of Arabic at Cambridge University, who authored a two-volume “History of the Saracens” (1708-1718). Before Ockley, most historians focused on the Turks, often portraying them as the “terror of the world.” Ockley, however, began his history with the death of Muhammad,



leaving his life to be covered by Prideaux. Although Ockley used terms like “the great impostor” to refer to Muhammad and equated “the superstition” with Islam, he displayed fairness and impartiality in his treatment of certain historical events. For example, when recounting the conquest of Syria, he contrasted the honourable conduct of Abu-Bakr’s army, which followed instructions not to harm women, children, palm trees, or crops, with the rapine and treachery displayed by the Byzantine defenders. Ockley’s book gained considerable recognition and was the primary source for Arab history until Gibbon’s rise to prominence.

Edward Gibbon, a key figure in shaping modern English historiography, dedicated a chapter (Chapter 50, published in volume V of his renowned work “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” London, 1788) to the subject of Muhammad and Islam. However, he did not significantly alter or expand upon existing knowledge on the topic. In the opening paragraph, Gibbon acknowledges his “total ignorance of the Oriental tongues” and eloquently presents familiar themes without making any original contributions. His primary sources include Ockley and Prideaux, as expected. Like Pocock, he dismisses the pigeon tale as lacking credibility (Note 166). In discussing the character of Muhammad, Gibbon highlights excessive enthusiasm as a dominant trait but notes the perilous and slippery nature of the transition from enthusiasm to imposture. It is commendable that Gibbon contextualized Islam within the broader world perspective, and his treatment of

the subject continues to exert some influence even in contemporary times.

In terms of his historical writings, Voltaire displayed more restraint than his works as a playwright. In his “*Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*” (1756), he aligned with the emerging spirit of tolerance, drawing comparisons between Muhammad and Cromwell regarding fanaticism and courage. However, he attributed far greater accomplishments to Muhammad than to the Lord Protector of England (Cromwell). In contrast, his “tragedy *Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le prophète*” (1742) depicted the protagonist, dressed in medieval attire, as an impostor, tyrant, and libertine. Voltaire’s critique of Islam was a natural extension of his critique of religion. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that the Koran contains passages that may appear sublime. Voltaire relied on English sources, especially Sale’s translation of the Koran, as he had resided in England and acquired proficiency in the language.

Goethe, the German poet (1749-1832), surpassed Voltaire in embracing the modern spirit and adopting a new international perspective. From an early stage in his life, Goethe was captivated by Oriental literary forms and themes, embarking on a poetic play based on Muhammad’s life, which he unfortunately never completed. As a man of letters, Goethe found it difficult to accept that the Prophet of Arabia was an impostor. His work “*West-östlicher Divan*” included a Latin translation of a pre-Islamic Arab ballad on vengeance. However, Persian literature truly

enchanted Goethe and other German poet-scholars. As early as 1656, Sadi's "Gulistan" had been translated into German by Olearius, who translated Sadi's "Bostan" (The Orchard) from Dutch. Extracts from the Gulistan, believed to have been translated from a Turkish version, had been rendered into French in 1634 by du Ryer, the translator of the Koran. In recent years, Sadi's two works have been translated more frequently into English than any other language. This is particularly evident with the Gulistan (rose garden), described by the author as having leaves that "cannot be touched by the tyranny of autumnal blasts, and the delights of whose spring the vicissitudes of time will be unable to change."

The works of another notable Persian poet, Hafiz, were translated into German by von Hammer in 1812. Goethe found the wisdom, piety, and peace he believed the Western world needed in Hafiz. He aspired to cosmopolitanism in German literature and cherished an ideal of *Weltliteratur* (world literature). During this period, the romantic school increasingly turned away from classical themes and embraced Oriental subjects and ideas, which resonated more naturally with their sensibilities.

Herder, a friend and compatriot of Goethe, was a philosopher and man of letters who shared a fascination with Hafiz and Sadi. He produced rhymed paraphrases of some Gulistan stories between 1761 and 1764. Herder's interest in theology and Hebrew poetry drew him towards the East, although he had no command of Islamic languages

and relied on translations, particularly those by the English Orientalist and jurist Sir William Jones.

Jones, known for his mastery of numerous European and Asiatic languages, had created a French metrical translation of the works of Hafiz in 1772. Before that, he had introduced Hafiz to the English literary world by publishing “A Persian Song.” Since then, more up-to-date and comprehensive translations of the works of Hafiz have been produced. Jones also translated the seven pre-Islamic Arabic odes and selected pieces from Sanskrit and later Indian literature. His major works, “Poems, Consisting chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages” (1772) and “Poesos Asiaticae Commentarioum”, were instrumental in fostering a deeper understanding. In 1784, Jones established the Bengal Asiatic Society, of which he served as president until he died in Calcutta ten years later.

Centuries before the flourishing of Sadi and Hafiz, there was Firdawsi (940-1020), whose magnificent epic remained relatively unknown in Europe until the nineteenth century. Firdawsi dedicated approximately thirty years of his life to crafting the Shah-Namah (Book of Kings), a monumental work of world literature consisting of 60,000 couplets. The Shah-Namah narrates and exalts the historical and legendary exploits of Iranian kings and heroes, from Adam to the Arab conquests. This account served as a wellspring of inspiration for subsequent Persian poets and nationalists, and in the nineteenth century, it was translated into English, German, French, and Italian, thus gaining wider recognition.

An eighteenth-century translation that may not have possessed literary greatness but had a lasting and extensive impact was that of the “Arabian Nights.” The initial rendition into French by Antoine Galland as “Les Mille et une nuit” spanned twelve volumes (1704-1717), followed by a partial translation from French into English in 1712 and a complete translation in 1778. Although incomplete, the first significant direct translation from Arabic was undertaken by William Lane (London, 1839-1841), and the Arabian Nights effortlessly captured the imagination of readers, establishing itself as the most beloved work of Oriental literature. It saw approximately thirty English and French editions throughout the eighteenth century, and since then, it has been published countless times. For ordinary readers, these folk tales from a different realm provided an escape from the harsh realities of life. Ballet dancers found in them novel themes and approaches, while for all readers, they offered a departure from common sense and the cold logic of reason, immersing them in a world where fantasy became a reality. Consequently, these tales stood in opposition to classical literature, aligning with the spirit of the romantic movement. Complemented by an increasing body of travel literature, these Oriental tales painted a vivid, enchanting, exotic, and enigmatic image of the Islamic world, drawing it closer to the hearts and minds of Westerners.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a noticeable shift had occurred in the scholarly view of Islamic culture, thanks to the efforts of English and French professors and further

supported by German poets and intellectuals. This change in perspective became increasingly evident. Thomas Carlyle's decision to portray Muhammad as the hero and prophet in his writings was both indicative of this new trend and an acceleration of it. In Carlyle's interpretation, there is a notable absence of discordant elements; in fact, it could be criticized for its lack of critical analysis. Such kinds of discussions that Muhammad was a deceitful impostor and that his religion was a baseless fabrication to be untenable were not acceptable to Carlyle. His portrayal of Muhammad had to be that of a true, genuine hero.

The material presented below gives some information on Islam in Western literature.

1. Latin translation in Migne *Patrologiae Graecae*, Vol. XCIV (Paris, 1860), cols. 1585-1598; vol. XCVI (1864), cols. 1335-1348.
2. *Inferno*, XXVIII, 31-32.
3. See, "Theodor", *Bibliander, Historiae Saracenorum in Machvometis Saracenorum principis* ([Zurich], 1550), pp. 3-6.
4. *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, Part III (Washington, 1923), p. 921.
5. *Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 184; *I Henry IV*, II, iii, 88.
6. *Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. II (London, 1824), p. 279.
7. *The True Nature of Imposture fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*, 8th ed. (London, 1723), p. 38.

8. George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610*, 2nd ed. (London, 1621), p. 57.
9. Joseph White, *Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford in 1784* (Oxford, 1784), p. 171.

For more on Islam in the literature of the West, consult Samuel C. Chew's *The Crescent and the Rose* (New York, 1937); Norman Daniel *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1960); Byron P. Smith, *Islam in English Literature* (Beirut, 1939).

10. In *Recherches de science religieuse*, Vol. II (Paris, 1911), pp. 25-53, 140-166.
11. Simon Ockley, *The History of the Saracens*, 5th ed. (London, 1848), pp. 94 seq. Ralph Waldo Emerson commented on Ockley's account of prodigies of individual valour in his "Heroism," *Essays*, first series (Boston, 1861), p. 226.
12. *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Vol. XXIV (Paris, 1828), p. 325.
13. *Oeuvres*, Vol. XIX (Paris, 1827), p. 443.
14. (Stuttgart, 1819), pp. 253 seq.
15. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London, 1897), p. 43.

For more information on Islam in the Western literature, refer to *Islam and the West*, *Islam in the Western Literature*, pp 48-63.

Note: In the book, the author P. K. Hitti uses the spelling 'Koran' for the Quran.

## **The Author's Comment**

The above chapter of the book, 'Islam and the West,' highlights the blasphemous activities carried out by some Christians during medieval times to distort the image of the Prophet of Islam. This serves as an example of the harsh treatment that prophets have historically faced. The messengers of God were champions of truth, standing against deception and falsehood. Consequently, they encountered strong opposition from their contemporaries. After the prophets passed away, their teachings were heavily distorted, making obtaining reliable information about their lives and messages exceedingly difficult.

The Prophet of Islam faced similar treatment but in its most severe form. His adversaries spared no effort to defame his character and distort his message.

However, there is a notable distinction between the situation of earlier prophets and that of Prophet Muhammad. The adversaries of the prophets preceding the Prophet of Islam were successful in distorting their life stories and the messages they conveyed. As a result, it is challenging to find reliable historical accounts about these previous prophets, except for what is documented in the Quran. However, the case of the Prophet of Islam is different. Despite the hostile activities carried out by his opponents, all their efforts were rendered futile.

Therefore, despite the blasphemous activities, the history of Prophet Muhammad and the text of his teachings have been fully preserved. This is a significant matter, providing



conclusive evidence that the Prophet of Islam is the final prophet (Quran, 33:40) and that he has been sent as a prophet for all of humanity. (Quran, 7:158)

Divine knowledge reveals that the previous prophets were not intended to be the culmination of prophethood. Hence, the chain of prophets continued, with one succeeding the other. Consequently, God allowed the hostile actions of their adversaries to be ineffective. However, the case of the Prophet of Islam was distinct; he was the final messenger and the last of the prophets.

The role assigned to the final Prophet by God was such that there was no need to continue prophethood. His life was safeguarded, and he received historical affirmation; his mission was successful, and a record of his life and teachings was preserved. Furthermore, if the followers of the Prophet stand for his mission, they will have the opportunity to receive divine assistance in continuing the prophetic mission.

In essence, if individuals rise to the occasion and commit themselves to conveying the preserved divine message, any attempts by adversaries to undermine the message will inevitably fail. No matter how much the opponent vilifies the message from God, it will ultimately meet a dismal defeat, just as it did in the case of the final Prophet. This is a verdict of the Lord of the World, and no one possesses the power to alter this divine judgment.

Preserving the Prophet's life and teachings is a prerequisite for the cessation of prophethood. In other words, the

conclusion of prophethood could not have occurred without the preservation of the comprehensive record of the revelations bestowed upon the Prophet. This record exists in the form of the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, known as Hadith and Sunnah.

In this world governed by cause and effect, the divine message revealed to the Prophet can only be safeguarded when a strong community consistently supports it. Therefore, contemporary Muslims must embrace the responsibility outlined above, as it guarantees the protection of their community. The duty at hand is to communicate the Prophet's message to humanity in an atmosphere of peace and goodwill.

God's assurance of protection against adversaries is contingent upon fulfilling this duty. (Quran, 5:67) Hence, the Muslim Ummah (community) does not need to undertake any extraordinary efforts for their security. Their sole obligation is to convey the divine message to humanity.

## AN UNISLAMIC RESPONSE

The Bangalore-based English newspaper, Deccan Herald, published an insulting story about the Prophet in its Sunday edition on December 7, 1986, by PKN Namboodiri. It was undoubtedly untrue. However, the response from the Muslim community was utterly contrary to the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet.

Outraged by the offensive article, a group of Muslims stormed the newspaper's office and set fire to the warehouse,

which contained printing paper worth ten million rupees. They referred to their actions as Islamic Jihad. However, such aggression from Muslims has no basis in the teachings of Islam. It was an unIslamic response.

Engaging in violent activities without seeking guidance from the life and teachings of the Prophet leads to adverse outcomes. It serves as an example of following personal desires and impulses.

God has granted freedom to everyone in this world of test. Therefore, incidents of misuse of freedom have occurred frequently throughout history. For instance, when the Prophet of Islam presented God's message to the Arabs, they mistreated him. In addition to physical harassment, they used derogatory terms for the Prophet, such as 'mad', 'magician,' 'liar,' 'condemned,' and more.

However, when we examine the early period of Islam, we find no instances of retaliation against those who blasphemed the Prophet. The Prophet's Companions did not organize protests, chant slogans against them, or resort to burning their homes and properties. Instead, they simply prayed for their guidance. Additionally, when necessary, they countered their allegations with logical arguments in poetry, which was common during that time. Ultimately, they left the judgment of such matters to God.

This example set by the Prophet and his Companions teaches us what an ideal response to such situations should be from the Islamic perspective. We should strive to dispel misconceptions through dialogue and scholarly articles

about Islam written in a serious manner. These are the only actions Muslims can take following Islamic teachings.

Any response other than that invites the wrath of God, as God Almighty sent His Prophet as a source of mercy, not destruction. Unfortunately, the temperament of present-day Muslims has deprived them of a great blessing—the spirit of sincere well-wishing, which is a defining characteristic of those who convey the divine message. They should be honest advisors to their people, as impactful speech can only come from a spirit of love and compassion for the listener. However, when provoked, Muslims' hearts harden towards others, and they no longer possess the desired mindset necessary to effectively convey the message of God's Prophet in a profound and reasoned manner.

This irony is evident in the grand celebration of the Prophet's birthday, while his followers, regrettably, have neglected to communicate his message. After the Prophet of Islam, this responsibility of conveying the divine message to all humanity fell upon his followers, who were required to have true well-wishes towards all nations. However, present-day Muslims have developed a predisposition towards a negative mindset.

## JIHAD OR DEFIANCE?

The Frontier Post, a Pakistan Daily, reproduced an article from a Western magazine in its January 1987 edition, featuring a picture of Adam and Eve. This caused a furious reaction, as a group of approximately one and a half

thousand Muslims surrounded the newspaper building and set it on fire along with all its equipment.

Similar incidents occur in various countries where Muslims have the freedom to act. However, regrettably, they employ this freedom to engage in destructive activities, which they label as 'Islamic Jihad'. Such acts are unquestionably unIslamic. They do not represent jihad but rather a rebellion or defiance considered the gravest crime in the eyes of God Almighty.

### **Emotionalism Holds No Place in Islam**

When discussing these incidents, it is often mentioned that disrespectful actions towards the Prophet hurt the sentiments of Muslims. However, Muslims need to understand that having one's sentiments hurt is not a valid justification for seeking revenge. Such acts are not punishable offences according to Islamic law (Shariah). Therefore, resorting to killing or destroying someone's property in the name of Shariah is an act of rebellion. It amounts to adding to the penal laws of Islam ordained by God for which no one has the right.

According to Shariah, Muslims are only permitted to convey the divine message to others while patiently handling all kinds of provocations. Engaging in anything else would be considered a crime rather than fulfilling Islamic obligations.

SECTION  
TWO

## THE STORY OF RUSHDIE

Salman Rushdie, an English author born in Mumbai, has written numerous works in English, including the renowned book “Midnight’s Children,” published in 1981. Another book, ‘The Satanic Verses,’ was published by British publisher Viking Press on September 26, 1988, in London. The book’s title refers to its main character, “Mahound,” a distorted version of the name of Prophet Muhammad.

On February 14, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, issued a fatwa (edict) calling for the death of Rushdie and his publishers, citing blasphemy as the reason.

Sunni scholars also joined this movement under the banner of ‘Islamic Jihad,’ as reported in the Daily Qaumi Awaz on February 20, 1989. Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (d.1999), the then Director of Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, justified Ayatollah Khomeini’s edict. He stated that Salman Rushdie, the author of ‘The Satanic Verses,’ had insulted the religion of Islam, causing outrage among Muslims worldwide, and that Muslims expressed satisfaction with the Shia leader’s decree.

Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi further asserted that Islam dictates that those who insult the Prophet must be punished with death, a viewpoint agreed upon by all Muslim scholars, jurists, and theologians. Numerous statements, letters, and articles were published in newspapers on this matter.

Muslim writers and orators fervently called for the death of Salman Rushdie, with the Muslim communities of India,

Pakistan, and Bangladesh taking the lead in this campaign. Protests were also organized on the streets of London. However, the majority of the Muslim world did not actively participate in this self-proclaimed jihad. Even in Iran, besides Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers, the general public did not display significant enthusiasm for joining this campaign.

The Urdu Newspaper “Qaumi Awaz” (February 23, 1989) reported a scholars’ meeting in Makkah. During the meeting, Dr Abdullah Umar Naseef stated that Salman Rushdie was an apostate and that apostasy in Islam carried the punishment of death. He called for legal proceedings to be initiated against Salman Rushdie in an Islamic country in absentia. Dr. Naseef further asserted that Rushdie’s work did not fall under the category of freedom of speech but was instead a criminal act disguised as such. However, the Muslim World League was not enthusiastic about this campaign.

On March 7, 1989, the Iranian government severed diplomatic relations with Britain and recalled its diplomatic and ambassadorial staff from London, as ‘The Times of India’ reported on March 8, 1989.

### **Counter Reward**

‘The Times of India’, in its news item titled “For a civilised Khomeini,” published on February 20, 1989, Section 2, page 1, reported that the British newspaper magnate Mr. Robert Maxwell had pledged 16 million (\$10.6 million) as



a reward to anyone who could “civilise” Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian ruler. “The People,” a London weekly tabloid, stated that the money would be given to anyone who could convince Ayatollah Khomeini to repent and publicly recite the sixth and ninth commandments from the Christian Bible, which are “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not bear false witness.”

Mr. Robert Maxwell’s statement is seen as a satire, presenting Islam as a religion associated with violence while portraying Christianity as a religion characterized by compassion and tolerance.

### **Distorting the Image of Islam**

The *TIME* magazine featured a cover story on February 27, 1989, discussing Ayatollah Khomeini’s condemnation of the book ‘The Satanic Verses’ as being against Islam. The report also touched upon the reaction of political leaders in the West, expressing their outrage at one country calling for the death penalty on citizens of another country. It raised concerns about how free societies can effectively protect themselves and their citizens against such intense and unpredictable intimidation (p. 6).

As depicted in the *TIME* report, the perception of the people in the West indirectly impacts Islam. In other words, it suggests that the West, which has established an environment of free movement within their countries, views the entry of Islam into their society as a serious threat to their way of life. This perception stems from regarding it

as the introduction of uncivilized individuals into a civilized society. It is indeed perplexing that Islam, a religion of peace with a Prophet who came as a mercy to humanity, is perceived as a societal threat by some individuals.

### **The Verdict of the Riyadh Conference**

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held a meeting in Riyadh from March 16 to March 19, 1989. The conference was attended by the foreign ministers of 46 Muslim countries. Alongside the issue of Afghanistan, the topic of Salman Rushdie was one of the most sensitive matters on the agenda. The conference began with an inaugural speech by the Saudi ruler, Shah Fahad. Over three days, the representatives of the Muslim countries deliberated on various aspects of the issue. On March 16, 1989, a joint verdict from all countries participating in the conference (except Iran) was issued, firmly rejecting Ayatollah Khomeini's death fatwa against Salman Rushdie. Diplomats considered the rejection of the Iranian fatwas to be a significant step. The conference declared Salman Rushdie's book as an act of maligning Islam and urged the international community to avoid offending the sentiments of representatives from different religions. In his inauguration speech, Shah Fahad emphasized the importance of allowing wrongdoers to repent and called for moderation in addressing such issues (*Qaumi Awaz*, March 17, 1989).

This verdict indicates that the self-proclaimed Islamic Government of Iran stands as an exception in advocating

for the assassination of Rushdie. At the official level, the other Muslim countries believe that while Rushdie has written a highly objectionable book, it does not justify the issuance of a religious fatwa to incite Muslims worldwide to kill Rushdie wherever he may be found. They emphasize peaceful rebuttal rather than resorting to violence with bombs and bullets.

### **A Fallacy**

The articles advocating for the death of Salman Rushdie attempted to justify their stance by claiming that Rushdie had offended the sentiments of one billion Muslims worldwide. However, these claims lack factual basis. Evidence shows that over 99% of the letters and articles published on this matter were written by Muslims from India and Pakistan. Additionally, Urdu-speaking Muslims from the subcontinent displayed greater enthusiasm in their participation. The demonstrations organized in foreign countries were primarily led by the Indian and Pakistani diaspora, with Arabs and non-Arab Muslims residing in these countries playing a minor role in the protests.

On April 3, 1989, 'The Times of India' featured a news item on its last page titled "Anti Verses Stir Intensified in the U.K." The report highlighted that Muslims living in Britain had decided to escalate their agitation against 'The Satanic Verses' and were even willing to defy British laws to sustain their campaign. This announcement was made during a conference held under the auspices of the Muslim

Institute, led by Dr. Kalim Siddiqi (d. April 13, 1996), an Urdu-speaking Muslim migrant from India who had settled in England.

As reported in “Qaumi Awaz” (May 2, 1989 edition), another demonstration organized by Muslims from the Indian subcontinent took place in London, led by Moinuddin Chowdhary, a migrant from Bangladesh. Approximately 20,000 Muslims participated in this protest against Salman Rushdie’s book and engaged in acts of violence and vandalism.

From this, it can be reasonably inferred that the protest campaigns in foreign countries, carried out in the name of Muslims worldwide, were led by a few individuals from the Indian subcontinent rather than representing the entire global Muslim population.

Muslims from countries such as Arabia, Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia were not prominently involved in these protests. Even in India and Pakistan, only Urdu-speaking Muslims were at the forefront, while non-Urdu speakers, such as Muslims from South India, did not significantly participate in the campaign. This fact serves as evidence that this is a campaign driven by a small minority within the Islamic world, unrealistically considering itself the sole representative of Islam.

### **A Ridiculous Reaction**

Salman Rushdie’s book is undoubtedly absurd. However, the reaction of Shia and Sunni scholars towards it was even more absurd. If Salman Rushdie insulted the Prophet, then

Ayatollah Khomeini and the supporting Ulama are also guilty of insulting Islam.

Their actions misrepresented Islam to the world, portraying it as a violent and uncivilized religion. Rushdie wrote his book in the name of secularism, but Muslim scholars reacted in the name of Islam, resulting in a global defamation of the religion.

Those who have read Salman Rushdie's book can attest to its superfluous writing style, lacking any literary charm for the reader. Several reviewers have criticized the book, claiming that it is a below-average academic work and that Rushdie is not a proficient English writer. Auberon Waugh, a renowned British literary critic, even went as far as to state that "Mr. Salman Rushdie deserves to be punished for bad English." Serious commentators in the West have used terms like 'dense,' 'impenetrable,' and 'unreadable' to describe it. Khushwant Singh, in his review, remarked, "Even as a novel, 'The Satanic Verses' is not readable."

However, given the substandard nature of the book, it would have been better to ignore it, allowing it to fade away naturally.

Dr. Abdul Karim Mohd. Al-Hasan Bakkar has expressed in his writing that the best criticism of Salman Rushdie's book would have been to ignore it simply. Salih al-Qasim, a well-known writer from Jordan, also made a valid point that many books in the past have been ignored by religious scholars, allowing Islam to remain strong and revered, while books that blasphemed against Islam faded into obscurity.

The same principle of ignoring should have been applied to Rushdie's book.

The title of Salman Rushdie's book is based on a false story that originated during the fifth year of the Hijri calendar when chapter 53 of the Quran, An-Najm (The Setting Star), was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. The fabrication of false stories is a crime that others have committed in the past, similar to Rushdie's actions. However, the Prophet and his Companions did not impose capital punishment on those fabricators, unlike the Shia and Sunni scholars from Iran and India who demanded it for Rushdie. If the punishment for this crime were as advocated by these scholars, the Prophet and his Companions would have imposed it in Makkah. However, they did not do so, indicating that the fatwa issued by these scholars is based on personal inclination rather than the teachings of the Quran and Hadith.

Salman Rushdie used the term 'Mahound' to refer to Prophet Muhammad in his book, which is undeniably blasphemous and highly provocative. The term combines 'Hound,' which refers to a dog in English, with 'M,' a shortened form of 'Mine.' This suggests Rushdie intended 'Mahound' to mean 'My dog' (God forbid).

It is important to note that this blasphemous and absurd name for the Prophet is not an invention of Salman Rushdie. It originated in Europe after the Crusades (1096-1271) when European Christian nations failed to defeat them despite their two centuries of crusading against Muslims. In their efforts to malign Islam and the Prophet, the Crusaders

resorted to various tactics, including distorting the name of the Prophet. However, in the past 700 years, no one has ever been punished with death for coining such a name, nor has any fatwa been issued for such an offence.

Furthermore, the basis of Salman Rushdie's book was a fabricated story that emerged in Makkah in the 5th year after Hijra (AH). However, the Prophet Muhammad did not impose a death penalty on the fabricators of this story.

Abdullah bin Ubayy of Madinah was the first person to spread fabrications similar to those used by Salman Rushdie against the wives of the Prophet. However, despite people's insistence, the Prophet of Islam prohibited his killing. In his "Divine Comedy," Dante of Italy (1265-1321) referred to Prophet Muhammad as the Prophet in Hell.\* Sultan Usman Ghazi (1258-1324), the founder of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, was a contemporary of Dante. However, he did not issue a decree offering a reward for anyone who would behead Dante. Shakespeare (1564-1616) portrayed the Prophet of Islam as a 'false prophet' in one of his plays. Shah Jahan (1592-1666) was a contemporary of Shakespeare, but Indian religious scholars did not advise Shah Jahan to send armed men to England to kill Shakespeare.

The reason behind this restraint was not the insensitivity of believers or the past kings; instead, they considered such provocations meaningless. They understood that if a dog

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\* Based on the principle of "*Naql e kufr, kufr na bashad*," quoting disbelief for clarification or illustration does not equate to disbelief.

barked at an elephant, the best and most effective response for the elephant would be to ignore it and move on.

## **Established Greatness**

According to the Quran, the Prophet of Islam has been granted the position of Mahmud—a station of praise and glory (17:79). In other words, his prophethood is scientifically and historically established. His status of prophethood has been eternally established for the whole world. Every propaganda against such a Prophet is false. Therefore, it can never harm anyone.

If someone were to say, “The Himalayas are just a small mound,” no one in the world would doubt the greatness of the Himalayas. Similarly, no article or book written against the Prophet of Islam would, to any degree, diminish his dignity and glory.

Let us consider an example to illustrate this point. ‘The Times of India’ (February 24, 1989) published a detailed letter by Mrs. Zahida Khan from New Delhi in which she narrated her experience with Salman Rushdie’s book, ‘The Satanic Verses.’ She wrote, “The offending book was brought to India by a visitor, and during her stay here, I read it. But I assure you and my community leaders that my faith in the Prophet Mohammad has been strengthened.” (*The Times of India*, February 24, 1989, p.8)

If Muslims become enraged by a statement against a Prophet whose greatness is so well established, they only



demonstrate their narrow-mindedness. Such activities do not in any way diminish the greatness of the Prophet.

### ‘THROWING DUST ON THE SUN’

Salman Rushdie stated in an interview (*The Times of India*, October 8, 1988) that his book ‘The Satanic Verses’ aims to explore religion and revelation from a secular perspective. However, it would be more accurate to describe it as an attempt to present the viewpoint of an insincere individual, as this particular interpretation of secularism has not been defined by any reputable scholar.

This book is an outrageous and offensive novel targeting Islam and the Prophet of Islam. While it correctly mentions the names of Hamzah and Ayesha, it distorts the name of the Prophet as ‘Mahound’ instead of Muhammad. Throughout history, certain Christian scholars and Orientalists in Europe have employed various means to defame the Prophet, driven by their antagonistic sentiments. Salman Rushdie’s deliberate use of this perverted name in his book is a reprehensible act.

Prophet Muhammad is the most esteemed figure in human history. His character is undeniably a source of inspiration for all of humanity. The magnificence and reverence surrounding him are so evident that all serious individuals have acknowledged them.

One of the remarkable qualities of Prophet Muhammad is that God Almighty bestowed upon him eternal victory.

Despite facing intense opposition in ancient Arabia, he triumphed over all the tribes. Even the two mighty empires of his time, Byzantine and Persia, crumbled after encountering the Muslims. Although the Jews and Christians of his era became his adversaries, they were unable to inflict any harm upon him.

Following the Crusades, the Christian nations of Europe made concerted efforts to distort history and defame the image of Prophet Muhammad. However, despite their thousand-year endeavours, they ultimately failed. With the advent of the scientific revolution, human knowledge advanced to a point where the literature produced by the opponents of Prophet Muhammad was proven entirely unfounded. In subsequent generations of Christians themselves, individuals emerged who rejected the writings of their predecessors. Notably, Thomas Carlyle referred to Prophet Muhammad as a Hero in his book, “On Heroes, Hero-Worship, And the Heroic in History” (in its chapter ‘Muhammad: The Hero As Prophet’), published in 1840. In his book “The 100,” Michael Hart, published in 1978, declared Prophet Muhammad “the supremely successful man in history.”

Writing a baseless book or uttering foul words against someone whose greatness is widely acknowledged is comparable to throwing dust on the sun. Whoever attempts to throw dust on the sun only ends up with dust in their own mouth, ultimately proving themselves wrong.

Likewise, the magnitude of the greatness of the Prophet of

Islam is such that no one's pen can tarnish it. Human history, knowledge, and even the vast expanse of the universe would reject any such endeavour. Who could defame the image and distort the history of an individual whose arrival has forever altered the course of human history?

## A WORK OF FICTION

Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' was reviewed in the New York Weekly, *TIME* (February 13, 1989). Commentator Paul Gray expresses the view that the protests from the Muslim public against the book were unnecessary and undesirable.

However, I cannot fully agree with the commentator's perspective. Gray states that the book merely reflects on history, implying that since it is based on historical events, there should be no uproar about it. However, this assumption that the book is grounded in historical events is unfounded. The reality is that this book is a work of fiction, both in its style and its historical references.

The reviewer goes on to say, "The Gibreel-Mahound exchanges are based, in a distorted and hallucinatory manner, on an episode in the life of Muhammad—the Prophet's early willingness to include in the Quran an acknowledgement of three female deities and his later repudiation of these verses as satanically inspired. If Muhammad was willing to admit that he had been deceived, it is difficult to see why a tangential, fictional version of this long-ago event should

cause such contemporary uproar.” (*TIME*, February 13, 1989, p.42)

The “incident” referred to in this passage is related to Chapter An-Najm of the Quran. The relevant verses are as follows:

“Have you considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza, and the third one, Manat? ‘What! For you the males and for Him the females?’ That, indeed, is an unfair division.” (53:19-22)

During ancient times in Arabia, three idols—Lat, Uzza, and Manat—held significant reverence among the people. These idols were attributed with various qualities and regarded as symbols of greatness. Yaqut al-Hamwi, in *Mu'jam Al-Buldan*, mentions that the Quraysh used to recite the following words while circumambulating the Kabah:

“By Al-Lat and Al-Uzza, and Manat, the third one. Indeed, they are the exalted ones, and their intercession is to be hoped for.” (*Mu'jam al-Buldan* by Yaqut al-Hamawi, Vol. 4, p. 116)

When the verses mentioned above from Chapter An-Najm were revealed to the Prophet in Makkah, he recited them as usual in a gathering that included both polytheists and Muslims. As the Prophet uttered, “Have you considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza, and the third one, Manat?” (53:19-20), some polytheists added their own words. Upon hearing the names of their idols, they immediately recited in unison, following their preexisting practice, expressing

the greatness and anticipated intercession of these idols. These words were: “They (idols) are revered, and their intercession is anticipated.”

It is important to note that the Prophet had no association with these additional words. The polytheists simultaneously spoke these words, akin to a chorus. Some commentators suggest that Satan influenced the polytheists by whispering these words into their ears. Thus, the polytheists mistakenly believed that the Prophet had spoken those words. However, this was not the case. It was, actually, the word of Satan and not the word of the Prophet. Satan had manipulated the polytheists, not the Prophet, causing their voices to blend with his.

This kind of synchronized chanting or slogans in the chorus is not uncommon. Similar incidents occur during meetings and events in various forms. For instance, let us consider a scenario where the leader of the ruling party is delivering a speech. The audience consists of members from the ruling party and the opposition. During the speech, if the leader mentions the name of the opposition party leader to criticize him, it is not unusual for the opposition party members to start chanting slogans in support of their leader, such as “Zindabad, Zindabad” (Long live, Long live). However, it would be incorrect to claim that the leader of the ruling party raised slogans in praise of the opposition party leader. The mention of the name was solely for the purpose of criticism.

## MISINFORMATION

The incident described above is similar in nature. However, some opponents of Islam have distorted the story and falsely attributed the words of the polytheists to the Prophet. They have presented a twisted version of events. On this basis, the opponents want that instead of considering the entire Quran as the word of God, God forbid, attempts should be made to declare it as the word of Satan.

The fact that the opponents of the Quran fail to provide any objective evidence to disprove its authenticity serves as sufficient proof of its truthfulness. It is unethical to grant historical significance to a fabricated and false story to create doubt about the veracity of the Quran.

## MISINFORMATION

The English newspaper 'The Indian Express' (October 19, 1988) featured an article by the editor Mr. Arun Shourie titled "But What About the Verses Themselves?" The article raises several points, but we will focus on the part directly related to the Quran. The central idea conveyed in the article is that the government banned Salman Rushdie's book, 'The Satanic Verses,' due to its potential to offend religious sentiments. By drawing a parallel, Mr. Shourie argues that if this is the case, the Quran should also be banned as it contains verses that may hurt the feelings of other communities.

Mr. Arun Shourie attempts to create the impression that the Quran commands its followers to kill disbelievers by

quoting certain verses related to war, suggesting that these verses would be offensive to non-Muslims. Consequently, he argues for the necessity of banning the Quran.

Under the guise of freedom of speech and rational discourse, Mr. Shourie's argument can be seen as an unjust accusation or a rational distortion. He presents verses from the Quran without proper context and provides his interpretation that is not inherent in the verses. Let us highlight two key references from his citations.

Arun Shourie quotes two verses from the second chapter of the Quran about this matter:

“Slay them wherever you find them [those who fight against you]; drive them out of the places from which they drove you, for [religious] persecution is worse than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, slay them—such is the reward for those who deny the truth.” (2:191)

“Fight them until there is no more fitna [religious persecution] and religion belongs to God alone. If they desist, then let there be no hostility except towards aggressors.” (2:193)

After quoting several verses about war, Arun Shourie proceeded to translate a verse from Chapter 33 of the Quran:

“It is not fitting for a believing man or woman to exercise any choice in their affairs once God and

His Messenger have decided for them. Anyone who disobeys God and His Messenger is in manifest error.” (33:36)

By selectively presenting quotes from war-related verses, he creates the perception that the Quran instructs the killing of non-Muslims. According to the Quran, when a command from God is given, believers must obey it without hesitation, leaving them with no alternative.

This interpretation by Arun Shourie is unrelated to the Quran, is inaccurate, and arises from taking verses out of context. The verses’ actual context becomes evident when examined in their proper context.

Let us examine the second chapter and provide the translation of the entire passage from which the words mentioned above are taken:

“And fight in God’s cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression, for indeed, God does not love aggressors. Slay them wherever you find them [those who fight against you]; drive them out of the places they drove you, for [religious] persecution is worse than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they fight you, slay them—such is the reward for those who deny the truth. But if they desist, God is most forgiving and merciful. Fight them until there is no more fitna [religious persecution] and religion belongs to God alone. If they desist, then let there be no hostility except towards aggressors.” (Quran, 2:190-193)



Verse 190 of Chapter 2 can be interpreted as follows: “Fight those who fight against you.” This verse pertains explicitly to defensive warfare. It is not a universal or general directive but relates to an emergency in which specific individuals have initiated an aggressive war against believers. Consequently, this verse instructs defensive rather than offensive warfare. Hence, an accurate English translation of this verse would be:

“And fight in God’s cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression, for surely, God does not love aggressors.”  
(Quran, 2:190)

No law or international standard considers defensive warfare objectionable or criminal. The Ministry of Defence is a crucial governmental institution in many countries, highlighting the importance of defence. It is not possible to abolish the institution of defence within a country. If we cannot take such action, then what right do we have to object to a command in the Quran that aligns with global laws and national and international norms? The right to defend oneself against external aggression is a legitimate right of any nation.

Furthermore, Arun Shourie has quoted the following verse out of context:

“It is not fitting for a believing man or woman to exercise any choice in their affairs once God and His Messenger have decided for them. Anyone who

disobeys God and His Messenger is in manifest error.” (Quran, 33:36)

This verse is entirely unrelated to war. Instead, it was revealed in the context of social reform. Further details can be found in the books that provide commentary on the Quran. In summary, the verse relates to a specific situation involving Zainab bint Jahsh, a woman from the noble Quraysh family and the Prophet’s cousin. The Prophet proposed marriage to her on behalf of Zayd bin Haritha, a formerly enslaved person. Zainab and her family rejected the proposal, considering it an unequal relationship. Zainab herself stated, “I am better in lineage than Zaid.”

Zainab and her family were all Muslims, yet they refused to accept the proposal. At that time, this verse was revealed in the Quran, which meant that Islamic law was based on God’s commandments, not national and family traditions. Therefore, if one believed in God and His Messenger, one should do what was commanded in divine law. We learn from traditions that as soon as this verse was revealed, Zainab and her family abandoned their racial pride and agreed to marry Zainab to Zayd bin Haritha as commanded by God.

From a realistic perspective, this verse heralds a significant social revolution. It establishes human equality for the first time by eliminating artificial notions of superiority and inferiority. This verse of the Quran serves as a source of liberation from racial discrimination, not only for the believers of the Quran but also for all nations. It reminds us

of the day when humanity, bound for thousands of years by the chains of social inequality, was set free. A new process was initiated, culminating in establishing human equality as a social norm in modern times.

If a person possesses perceptive eyes and the courage to embrace reality, they will perceive the essence of true humanity in this verse. However, for those lacking insight, this light will appear as darkness.

Let us consider an example—articles 96-106 of the Indian Penal Code on the right of self-defence. Article 96 grants an individual the right to engage in self-defence. Consequently, if someone is attacked and responds with a counter-attack in self-defence, it will not be deemed a legal offence in the eyes of the law. In other words, “Nothing is considered an offence when exercised as a right to private defence.”

If someone claims that these provisions of the Indian Penal Code grant unrestricted freedom to any person to kill anyone opposing their religion, they are undoubtedly mistaken. By extrapolating a specific provision, they misconstrue the command of religious freedom as derived from the right to self-defence.

The law concerning religious freedom in India cannot be inferred from the Penal Code alone. To understand this, one must examine the section of the Indian Constitution that addresses fundamental rights. Only then will it become apparent that Indian law guarantees complete freedom to individuals about their religion. According to this law, no one can be deprived of their right to hold any

belief they choose, nor can they be coerced to do so by another individual.

Mr. Arun Shourie committed a similar error in comprehending the Quran. He mistakenly conflated the principles of defence with those of religion. The verses he has cited from the Quran regarding ‘fighting’ address the issue of self-defence, outlining the appropriate actions for Muslims in the face of aggression from others.

Regarding the second matter, which pertains to the Quranic perspective on freedom of religion, one should examine the verses that specifically address religious freedom. Some relevant verses in this context include:

1. “There shall be no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error. But whoever refuses to be led by Satan and believes in God has grasped the strong handhold that will never break. God is all-hearing and all-knowing.” (Quran, 2:256)
2. “So, [O Prophet] exhort them: your task is only to exhort; you are not their keeper.” (Quran, 88:21-22)

Numerous verses in the Quran explicitly affirm that religious faith is a personal choice. Every individual has the right to embrace any belief system or religion they desire and the freedom to change their beliefs at will. Religion is devoid of compulsion, and only peaceful dissemination of the message is permitted.

In essence, Islamic law grants every individual and nation the right to self-defence when faced with aggression. However,

when it comes to religious freedom, it acknowledges and upholds the right for everyone to practice their chosen religion. The Quranic injunctions regarding warfare (*qital*) pertain to the first issue, while the second is unrelated to combat or violence.

## THE OBEDIENCE OR DISOBEDIENCE OF GOD'S COMMAND

I have read Salman Rushdie's book, 'The Satanic Verses.' There is no doubt that this book is absurd. My opinion regarding its language and content aligns with that of others. However, my viewpoint differs from those Muslims who advocate for the killing of Rushdie and consigning him to hell.

What Salman Rushdie presents in his book is not something new. Such statements and narratives have been circulated for centuries, even during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Understanding the approach taken by the Prophet of Islam in such situations can help guide us in similar circumstances. The Islamic perspective asserts that there is no need for independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) or analogy (*qiyas*) in matters where we have the example of the Prophet Muhammad to guide us. Let us explore this with a few examples.

1. One of the claims made in Salman Rushdie's book is that the Quran included verses brought by the angel Gabriel as well as verses brought by Satan, which is why he titled his book 'The Satanic Verses.' Rushdie's theory is based on

the story of Gharaniq, which specific individuals fabricated while the Prophet Muhammad was in Makkah. However, when Makkah was conquered in 8 AH (After Hijrah), the Prophet Muhammad gained complete authority over the polytheists who had propagated this story. Yet, he did not declare that these individuals had invented the false tale of Gharaniq and deserved to be killed or condemned to hell. On the contrary, the Prophet forgave them and said, "Go, you are all free" (Ibn Kathir, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 3, p. 570).

In this matter, the Prophet relied on the ideological power of Islam rather than the power of the sword. Through the ideological influence of Islam, the opponents were conquered. Once granted freedom, they were deeply impacted by Islam's faith and the prophet's noble character. Consequently, they wasted no time embracing Islam and becoming devoted servants of God.

2. In his book, Salman Rushdie derisively refers to the Prophet of Islam as 'Mahound' in an attempt to distort his image. This name originated in Europe after the Crusades (1095-1291).

Another example of such malicious behaviour during the Prophet's time is narrated in the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) and Seerah (biography of the Prophet). Although the Prophet's grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, had named him Muhammad, meaning 'the praiseworthy,' the Quraysh of Makkah mockingly referred to him as Mudhamman, which means 'the condemned'. Abu Lahab's wife, Umm Jamil, a poetess, composed a poem using the term '*mudhammam*'

(condemned person) and recited it with disdain. The verse went as follows: “Mudhamman asaina, wa amruhu abaina, wa dinuhu qalaina” (*Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, Vol. 10, p. 269), which translates to: “We disobeyed a condemnable person. We rejected his message and detested his religion.”

Once again, we witness that the Prophet of Islam did not declare that these individuals had committed an unforgivable crime deserving of death. On the contrary, he redirected his Companions’ attention from human words to the word of God. He emphasized that it held no significance if these people condemned and oppressed him. The Lord of all humanity and the universe had eternally elevated him to the esteemed position of Muhammad, meaning ‘praiseworthy.’

3. Salman Rushdie has committed another highly outrageous act in his book. He depicts the wife of the Prophet as a wicked woman, which is undeniably provocative. No Muslim can read this part of the book without being deeply disturbed.

However, it is crucial to note that Rushdie is not the first to commit this crime of character assassination against the Mothers of the Believers. This vile act had already occurred during the time of the Prophet himself. Some hypocrites in Madinah falsely fabricated an incident involving Safwan bin Muattal, causing immense distress to the Prophet.

This fabricated tale spread extensively, impacting even sincere Muslims. For a month, the atmosphere in Madinah was saturated with rumours. This distressing situation only ended when God intervened by revealing the truth

in the Quran. The Quranic revelation declared that this fabrication was utterly baseless, a false propaganda without any foundation. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2661)

Nevertheless, the Prophet did not issue an order to kill all those involved in this false campaign of immorality. Although some Companions offered to take action against them, the Prophet did not permit it. Consequently, the perpetrators of the false tale of immorality were left alive. Their leader passed away naturally in Madinah.

This sets the precedent established by the Prophet. Islam does not prescribe capital punishment for individuals who blaspheme the Prophet. It is important to emphasize that “hurting the sentiments of Muslims” is not a provision within Islamic criminal law. If Muslims choose to take such actions, they do so in direct disobedience to the teachings of the Prophet. Furthermore, if they carry out these actions in the name of Islam, they must realize that their attempts to punish the offender make them even more culpable in the eyes of God than the offender himself. Present-day Muslims who engage in such behaviour are driven by their own desires rather than obeying the will of God and following the guidance of His Messenger. Their actions reflect disobedience to the teachings of Islam.

### **Writing and Speaking without Considering Reason, Law, and Shariah**

A Muslim scholar authored an article published in the ‘The Times of India’ (March 1, 1989) addressing the issue of



blasphemy. This article also appeared in Urdu newspapers. The writer referenced Abdul Qadir Oudah's book, *At-Tashri' al-Jina'i al-Islami* (Criminal Law of Islam), which discussed "enforcing Islamic punishment outside one's country."

The writer conveyed the belief held by many Muslim jurists (Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali) that Islamic law applies to every Muslim, regardless of their place of residence, due to the principle of internationalism. However, the Hanafi school of thought holds the belief that Islamic punishments would not apply to Muslims residing outside the Muslim-majority lands since an Islamic government cannot enforce its laws there (*At-Tashri' al-Jina'i al-Islami*, Vol. 1, p. 278).

By referring to this source, the author aims to demonstrate that, according to most Muslim jurists, the concept of "national borders" is not relevant when it comes to implementing Islamic punishment. Therefore, the author suggests that if Salman Rushdie, a UK resident, were in a foreign country, he could still be subject to Islamic punishment, as it would be considered an Islamic act.

However, this argument is a complete fallacy and lacks conviction among jurists. The referenced source has no connection to the theory of "international enforcement of punishment." Instead, it pertains to the jurisprudential debate between *Dar al-Islam* (lands under Muslim rule) and *Dar al-Harb* (lands at war with Muslim countries). It addresses the question of whether a Muslim's life and property are safeguarded based on their adherence to Islam or their geographic location. Here is the translation of the

relevant passage from Abdul Qadir Oudah's book, *At-Tashri' al-Jina'i al-Islami*:

“According to the opinions of Maliki, Shafi'i, and Ahmad, the status of a Muslim residing in *Dar al-Harb* who has not migrated to *Dar al-Islam* is similar to that of other Muslims residing in *Dar al-Islam*. By embracing Islam, they have preserved their lives and wealth, regardless of how long they remain in *Dar al-Harb*. They are not prohibited from entering *Dar al-Islam* whenever they wish. Conversely, Abu Hanifa's view is that a Muslim residing in *Dar al-Harb* who has not migrated to *Dar al-Islam* does not enjoy infallibility or protection despite being a Muslim. According to Abu Hanifa, infallibility (*'ismah*) is not only related to Islam but also to the land.” (*At-Tashri' al-Jina'i al-Islami*, Vol. 1, p. 278)

The quoted passage above has no relevance to the issue of insulting the Prophet. It solely addresses a specific aspect of the *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* debate. These two scenarios are distinct from the matter at hand.

During the war between two countries, the lives and property of individuals may become permissible targets. Abdul Qadir Oudah states in his book that the bloodshed of a person living in *Dar al-Harb* becomes permissible upon entering *Dar al-Islam* without permission. Similarly, the bloodshed of both Muslims and Dhimmis (protected non-Muslim communities) becomes permissible when they enter *Dar al-Harb* without permission or official order. However, their lives are protected if they enter with permission and

under the guarantee of safety. (*At-Tashri' al-Jina'i al-Islami*, Vol. 1, p. 278)

One question arises regarding the country deemed *Dar al-Harb*, which is at war with Muslims. Should both Muslims and non-Muslims living there be legitimately killed? There is a difference of opinion among jurists on this matter. Some argue that both can be killed because the protection of life and property is related to the “Dar” or land. Therefore, every inhabitant of a country with which a state of war is established, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, should be considered subject to the laws of war unless they migrate to *Dar al-Islam*.

Another group of jurists distinguishes between the Muslim and non-Muslim populations residing in *Dar al-Harb*. According to their perspective, non-Muslims can be legitimately killed, but not Muslims. They believe that infallibility, the protection of life and property, is based on one’s religious belief, regardless of whether one resides in *Dar al-Islam* or *Dar al-Harb*.

These issues are discussed in the book mentioned earlier (page 278). However, it was unjustifiably linked to the issue of blasphemy, leading to the erroneous declaration that the blasphemer must be killed regardless of his place of residence.

The second point mentioned above is that being a Muslim, Salman Rushdie falls under the jurisdiction of Islamic law, which prescribes death as the punishment for apostasy. Furthermore, if an Islamic government fails to enforce this

punishment, any Muslim can carry it out on the offender (Volume 1, page 535).

This implies that if someone travels from India or Pakistan to England and personally decides to shoot and kill Salman Rushdie, their action would be in accordance with Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence). However, the reference cited in support of this view does not substantiate this claim at all.

Abdul Qadir Oudah discusses a different matter in his writing. It pertains to the scenario where two countries are at war, one being a Muslim state where both Muslims and non-Muslims reside and the other being a non-Muslim state where both Muslims and non-Muslims reside.

However, the article's writer presents Abdul Qadir Oudah's writing in a flawed manner. He suggests that travelling to England to kill Salman Rushdie would be justified by Shariah. From an Islamic perspective, this is indeed an act of rebellion rather than of obedience to God.

## THE WISDOM OF AVOIDANCE

The Quran commands believers to thoroughly verify the correctness of news brought by an evil-doer to avoid unintentionally harming others and later regretting their actions (Quran, 49:6). When confronted with unfavourable news, it is natural to feel provoked and seek retaliation against the other party. However, the above Quranic verse explains that impulsive reactions in such situations do not align with Islamic principles. The Islamic approach encourages

taking the news seriously, acting with understanding, and refraining from emotional outbursts. The more serious the case, the more cautious the analysis, as emphasized in the following Hadith: “Acting without haste is from God, and acting with haste is from Satan” (*Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2012).

By the grace of God, I adhere to this Shariah rule. Therefore, when I came across the news regarding Salman Rushdie’s book, I took the initiative to obtain and read his original 547-page English book, ‘The Satanic Verses.’ Simultaneously, I revisited the Shariah ruling on this matter. Among various jurisprudential books, I acquired Allama Ibn Taymiyyah’s Arabic book, *As-Sarim al-Maslul ‘ala Shatim ar-Rasul* (The Open Sword against those Who Insult the Messenger), which comprises 600 pages and is considered the most comprehensive and detailed work available in the Islamic library on this subject. Following this necessary two-phased research, I began writing on the subject.

However, the haste and flawed manner in which some Muslim leaders expressed their statements suggests that they may have spoken and written vehemently against the book based solely on hearsay without reading the original text. I also observe a lack of responsibility among them to re-examine the Shariah ruling on the matter or to read Ibn Taymiyyah’s entire book before commencing their campaign.

An example of this haste can be seen in the case of Ayatollah Khomeini ordering the assassination of Salman Rushdie.

Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Hasani Nadwi initially issued a statement in the Urdu newspaper ‘Qaumi Awaaz’ (February 20, 1989) endorsing Ayatollah Khomeini’s edict as the correct stance. However, a few days later, he published another statement in the magazine *Ta’meer e Hayat* (March 10, 1989), where he amended his previous statement, merely reporting the reaction of Muslims to Ayatollah Khomeini’s edict. While the first statement was a personal confirmation of the fatwa, the second statement served as a report on Muslim sentiments.

Similarly, former Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami, India, Maulana Abul Lais Islahi’s statement praising Ayatollah Khomeini’s edict calling for the assassination of Salman Rushdie was published in the weekly magazine ‘Nai Duniya’ (March 3-9, 1989). However, he later published a detailed statement in the newspaper ‘Dawat’ on March 28, 1989, in which his approach had changed entirely. If the first statement aligned with Ayatollah Khomeini’s position, the second statement resembled the unanimously adopted stance of the conference of 46 Muslim countries in Riyadh.

Considering these circumstances, it appears that Muslim religious leaders, concerning Salman Rushdie’s book, have violated God’s command. While Salman Rushdie’s book itself exposed him, its publication also exposed Muslims worldwide. According to the aforementioned Quranic injunction (49:6), Muslim leaders were obligated to thoroughly investigate the matter and make a decision considering all aspects. However, they displayed great

irresponsibility and resorted to knee-jerk reactions by making strong statements against the book.

If Muslim leaders had thoroughly investigated the matter, they would have discovered that Salman Rushdie's work is not only based on fiction but is also of sub-standard literary quality, rendering it unreadable. If the book had been ignored, it would have naturally faded away. However, the thoughtless uproar by Muslims needlessly revived its prominence. In the chaos, even those who would have never considered reading the book were inclined to purchase and read it.

Margareta du Rietz, a reader of *Time Magazine*, aptly commented on this issue. In an article published in *TIME* on March 20, 1989, she observed that the novel had received little attention until Khomeini's intervention, which propelled it to worldwide fame. According to the *New York Times*, Salman Rushdie's book became a best-seller in the United States.

Various publications in newspapers and magazines have discussed Salman Rushdie extensively. A letter by WM Sheikh, titled 'Ignore Rushdie,' was printed in the 'The Times of India' on November 9, 1988 as follows:

"I have read various comments on Salman Rushdie's controversial novel, 'The Satanic Verses,' including his letter to our Prime Minister, and I believe that the decision to ban the book is both unfortunate and unnecessary. Some years ago, Mr. Rushdie wrote a novel called 'Midnight's Children,' published in 1981,

which brought him fame but not substantial wealth. Following this novel, Mr. Rushdie embarked on a lecture tour in India. I had the opportunity to attend two of his lectures, one at the University Hall and the other at the President Hotel. On both occasions, I found Mr. Rushdie to be a delightful intellectual.

However, over the years, Mr. Rushdie has become a shrewd businessman. He strategically revolves his novels around controversial themes. Immediately after 'Midnight's Children,' he wrote the novel 'Shame' about Pakistan, which was promptly banned in the country. This was precisely Mr. Rushdie's intention. Every literate individual in Pakistan likely paid exorbitant prices to purchase and read this novel.

This time, he has employed the same tactic in writing 'The Satanic Verses.' I am sure that every bookseller in India must be secretly selling or will sell this book to the Indian public at inflated prices, ensuring Mr. Rushdie's financial success. Therefore, I urge my Muslim brethren in India and Pakistan not to be deceived by Mr. Rushdie's cunning tricks and strategies.

His comments on the Prophet of Islam appear lukewarm compared to those written by men like Edward Gibbon. The writings of Christian authors about the Prophet of Islam, particularly during the aftermath of the Crusades, are filled with lies and clear defamation. Compared to those works, Mr. Rushdie's writings should not deceive us. He can



be considered a mediocre writer and, at worst, an unremarkable wordsmith. If we ignore his book, I am confident it will disappear naturally.” (*The Times of India*, 9 November 1988).

If Muslim leaders had followed the Quranic injunction in this matter and pondered on it before taking action, they would have undoubtedly realized that the appropriate response to this book is guided by a statement from the second caliph, Hazrat Umar Farooq, who said, “Destroy falsehood by remaining silent about it.” (Abu Nu’aym al-Asfahani, *Hilyat al-Awliya*, Vol. 1, p. 55)

This statement by Hazrat Umar Farooq carries great significance. It signifies that even if something appears false, engaging in a confrontation or fighting against it to eliminate it is unnecessary. Therefore, even if something is incorrect, there are times when it is essential to remain silent.

Proving falsehood to be false is more significant than killing the liar. This unique advantage is found in ignoring falsehood, as it inflicts a greater punishment on the perpetrator. However, ignorant individuals are unaware of this wisdom. They are accustomed to noise and fail to understand the language of silence.

The Prophet of Islam endured various hardships, yet he never commanded the killing of anyone who insulted him. The Quran frequently mentions persecution, but it never prescribes the killing of those who inflict it. Instead, the Quran encourages ignoring their hurtful words and placing trust in God (33:48).

This implies that the answer to humiliation and persecution does not lie in seeking revenge or punishing the offender. Instead, one of the successful responses is to rely on God and maintain silence. One should not take matters into one's own hands but instead await the natural course of God's law (nature).

This represents a unique wisdom of Islam, as described by Amir Mu'awiyah, the first Umayyad ruler: "Where my verbal warning is sufficient, I do not raise my sword. Where my silence suffices, I do not speak." (Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari, *Gharib al-Hadith*, Vol. 2, p. 413)

### **Print Media, Electronic Media**

Muslim leaders should have realized that their actions were not as straightforward as they believed. This directly challenged the core beliefs of the entire Western world. Mr. Edward Mortimer accurately pointed out, "While the religion of Muslims is Islam, our religion is also 'freedom.' Just as Muslims feel angered when their faith is insulted or attacked, we experience the same level of distress when our religion (freedom) is under attack. If insulting the Prophet is considered blasphemy to Muslims, then insulting freedom is equally blasphemous to us." (*The Times of India*, February 28, 1989)

That is why, just like the Muslim world has protested against Salman Rushdie, the Western world has shown support for him by presenting arguments in his favour. The Western world's backing of Salman Rushdie is not due to its "hostility

towards Islam,” as claimed by Muslim leaders. Instead, it stems from defending their own religion, commonly called ‘freedom.’ Similar to how Muslims are motivated to protect their faith, the Western world is driven to safeguard their religion, also known as ‘freedom of expression.’

Consequently, this conflict has transformed from being a “Muslim vs. Rushdie” battle into a “Muslim vs. West” confrontation. As a result, the Western world once again finds itself filled with animosity and disdain towards Islam, reminiscent of the intense hatred that arose after the Crusades and persisted for centuries. However, the modern scientific revolution has vastly diminished this religious animosity, allowing for a more moderate environment where Europeans could become acquainted with Islam.

These circumstances became favourable, and following the Second World War, the propagation of the Islamic message began to occur naturally in Europe and the United States. However, this process experienced its first setback in 1979 with the so-called Islamic Revolution in Iran. The subsequent barbaric events perpetrated by the revolutionaries disgusted people worldwide, tarnishing the image of Islam. It is worth noting that the Iranian revolution was primarily an “anti-Shah revolution” rather than an indeed “Islamic revolution.” Islam could have been spared from disgrace if its leaders had labelled it as an “anti-Shah revolution.” Instead, by branding it as an Islamic revolution, Islam subsequently acquired a negative reputation.

Then, in 1989, Muslims initiated an incredibly irrational movement against Salman Rushdie—a movement that practically targeted the entire Western world, reigniting deep-seated animosity towards Islam throughout the West. Naturally, Muslims were unable to harm Salman Rushdie physically, but their senseless campaign that completely disregarded Islamic teachings ruined all opportunities for introducing Islam to people.

Through their impulsive actions, Muslim leaders created an unfavourable environment for Islamic outreach programs. They placed significant obstacles in its path. Under the natural order of things, it is solely up to God to create favourable conditions for spreading Islam. The blunder committed by Muslim leaders is unquestionably unforgivable. Their offence is undoubtedly far more grave than Salman Rushdie's. In their pursuit of justice for Salman Rushdie, Muslim leaders have committed a more serious criminal act.

The first headline on the front page of the 'The Times of India' (March 9, 1989, Section 2) reads as follows: "Verses' Rekindle Islam-West Conflict."

The Reuters report highlights that the political and military rivalry between Islam and the West, which had endured for thirteen centuries and resulted in bitterness, prejudice, and misunderstanding between the two, has been revived by Salman Rushdie's novel. Following the so-called Iranian revolution in 1979, Rushdie's book has become the second major catalyst for conflict between Islam and the West.

This historical conflict traces back to the Muslim invasion of Spain and France. Subsequently, during the Middle Ages, the Crusades and the subsequent European conquest of the Muslim world in the 19th century intensified hostilities, leading both sides to regard each other with animosity and suspicion. (“Verses Rekindle Islam-West Conflict,” *The Times of India*, March 9, 1989, p. 1).

According to the article, there exist latent sentiments of hatred and contempt between Islam and the West.

This report accurately reflects the existing animosity between Islam and the West, which has hindered the spread of Islam in the Western world for centuries. Despite the modern scientific revolution significantly diminishing the atmosphere of hatred by rendering religion less influential in the minds of modern individuals, underlying currents suggest that negative sentiments towards Islam persist among Western populations.

Now, the question arises: how should we respond in such a situation? Our duty, guided by the Quran and Sunnah, is to cultivate a favourable environment through ‘unilateral patience.’ This approach aims to create a moderate atmosphere once again, enabling the effective introduction of Islam to the people of the West.

The significance of establishing a conducive atmosphere for the propagation of Islam is so immense that the Prophet himself endured insults and persecution during the Hodaybiyyah agreement to open avenues for communicating

the message of Islam. Despite its rightful position, he willingly omitted the title “Prophet of God” (*Rasoolullah*) as he came to the world with God’s message.

According to the teachings of the Prophet, Muslims should have completely disregarded Salman Rushdie’s book, allowing any non-Muslim interest in it to wane naturally. This approach would have had the advantage of preserving the opportunities for conveying the message of Islam emerging in the West. Eventually, a time would have arrived when the Western world would have begun studying Islam with an unbiased and objective mindset. Gradually, the Western world would have come under the blessings of God’s guidance.

It is a factual reality that, for various reasons, new opportunities for spreading the message of Islam have emerged in the Western world. However, it is equally valid that the current Muslim leaders have failed to recognize or utilize these modern possibilities. Just as some individuals are colour-blind and can only perceive one colour while remaining oblivious to others, Muslim leaders have demonstrated blindness toward the potential opportunities for spreading the message of Islam worldwide. They seem to observe everything else but fail to grasp the significance of inviting people to embrace God.

Muslim leaders remain oblivious to the opportunities for calling people to God, but when something tarnishes their communal reputation, they engage in un-Islamic actions as

a means of seeking retribution for perceived insults. Their inability to recognize the unfolding prospects for spreading the message of Islam worldwide has led them to overlook all the avenues for inviting people to God. Consequently, their unjustifiable actions are polluting the world as they seek revenge.

According to the teachings of Islam, as revealed in the Quran and Hadith, the actions of Muslim leaders are indeed criminal rather than Islamic. If God's religion is indeed as described in the Quran and Hadith, then the activities of Muslim leaders today are entirely contrary to Islamic teachings. These activities do not align with what God and His Messenger have prescribed. The fame and leadership that current Muslim leaders have attained through these unjustified activities have rendered them incapable of heeding any advice. However, the time is near when the truth will resonate throughout the heavens and the earth by the cry of an angel, and then they will have no choice but to accept it. Although, by that time, their acceptance will not benefit them.

## THE 'ERA OF FREEDOM'

'The Times of India' (February 28, 1989, Section 2) published an article by British journalist Edward Mortimer, which is partially reproduced below.

**'The Rushdie Affair Directly Threatens the  
'Free World'**

We find ourselves caught up in a religious War, a war of ideas... Their (British people) reaction arouses no less passionate feelings of outrage in us because it is equally offensive to our religion. By "our religion", I do not mean Christianity. The Christian establishment is, in fact, very awkwardly placed in this affair: it disapproves strongly of incitement to murder but feels some sympathy with the Muslim demand for censorship of "blasphemy". However, Christianity is no longer the religion of Britain in the sense that Islam is the religion of Iran. It is not Christianity that binds us together as a community because we have long since given up trying to impose religious uniformity on ourselves or to exclude unbelievers and members of other faiths from full participation in our national life. The religion of this country and of the "Free World" to which it belongs is, precisely, freedom. Its founding fathers are Locke, Voltaire, Burke, Wilkes, and Tom Paine, the authors of the American Constitution and the *La Déclaration des droits de l'Homme*. Unlike Iranians, we are brought up to think it primitive to fight over metaphysical beliefs but to think of fighting for freedom as something admirable. Of course, like other peoples, we practise this religion imperfectly, and not everyone takes it as seriously as journalists, the self-appointed priests or mullahs of the cult. But the idea of sentencing a writer to death for what he wrote is just as offensive to modern Western sensibilities as the idea that Christ might have liked to make love to Mary Magdalene or that the Prophet might occasionally have listened to



Satan is to traditional Christian or Muslim ones.” (By arrangement with *The Financial Times*)

Here is a summary of Edward Mortimer’s perspective: According to the author, the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie’s work has sparked a religious war, a conflict of ideas. The reaction of the British people evokes intense feelings of outrage because it is equally offensive to their own religion. However, the author clarifies that when referring to “our religion,” it is not Christianity. The Christian establishment finds itself in an uncomfortable position regarding this affair. While it strongly disapproves of incitement to murder, it holds some sympathy for the Muslim demand for censorship of “blasphemy.”

In Britain, Christianity is no longer the binding religion of the country, as Islam is the religion of Iran. The sense of religious unity and exclusion of non-believers or followers of other faiths in national life is a thing of the past. Instead, the religion of Britain and the broader “free world” is “freedom.” The foundations of this religion can be attributed to figures such as Locke, Voltaire, Burke, Wilkes, and Tom Paine, the authors of the *American Constitution* and the *La Déclaration des droits de l’Homme*.

Unlike Iranians, the British are taught to consider it primitive to engage in conflicts over metaphysical beliefs and to view the pursuit of freedom as something admirable. While this religion of freedom is not practiced perfectly by all, and not everyone takes it as seriously as journalists who have assumed the role of priests or mullahs of the cult, the

idea of sentencing a writer to death for his words is just as offensive to modern Western sensibilities as the notion of Christ being romantically involved with Mary Magdalene or the Prophet occasionally listening to Satan is to traditional Christian or Muslim beliefs.

The statement made by Edward Mortimer, as quoted above, is entirely accurate. The uproar caused by ignorant Muslims in the case of Salman Rushdie is indeed the reason behind the strong reaction from the West. However, it is incorrect to label the Western attitude in this matter as anti-Islamic or a conspiracy against Islam.

While it is not of any benefit to label such issues as “anti-Islamic” on the part of the West, the harm that arises from such public outcry is certain. Engaging in anti-West activities will only breed hatred and a desire for revenge in the hearts of the Muslims.

To effectively communicate the peaceful message of Islam, a state of normalcy and goodwill between the communicator and the audience is essential. Unfortunately, these harmful activities have resulted in animosity between Muslims and people from other nations rather than fostering goodwill.

Although the concept of absolute freedom may initially seem contradictory to Islam, a deeper examination reveals that it is favourable to Islam. This is because the modern revolution that prioritizes freedom has, for the first time in human history, created a global environment where the doors for introducing Islam to people have been widely opened. Freedom generates opportunities; therefore, the

greater the freedom in the world, the more opportunities for Muslims to call people to God. Opening the door to peaceful endeavours is akin to opening the door to various divine blessings.

In ancient times, the recognition of freedom of expression was lacking, making it challenging to convey God's message freely due to religious persecution. However, the modern era has established freedom of expression as an absolute right. Consequently, it is only in this modern age that there are no barriers to openly communicating God's message to humanity.

This modern revolution, as highlighted by Edward Mortimer in his article, is a result of the concept of freedom. Freedom of expression grants individuals the ability to express their thoughts freely—an unprecedented development in human history. Freedom of thought and expression have become inherent and inviolable rights.

However, this freedom should apply to everyone, not solely limited to Muslims. To enjoy complete freedom for oneself, one must grant the same liberty to others. The world operates as a two-way traffic system; one cannot expect privileges without affording them to others. Just as one needs to provide opportunities to others on the road to drive their cars, similarly one cannot have opportunities for oneself without allowing them for others.

While there should be a code of conduct governing this "traffic," it can only be implemented in matters that pertain to everyone. It cannot be enforced in issues that concern

specific individuals or communities. The principles guiding this code should aim at fulfilling general needs rather than the needs of particular individuals or communities. Applying a universal rule to an individual or group is impractical. Therefore, even if a ruler, driven by a desire to bring about reform among their people, implements laws that favour one group or community while discriminating against others, they can never succeed. Such laws will remain mere words on paper.

An example of this is seen in Salman Rushdie's book. The controversial publication was banned in India and Pakistan. However, illegal editions continue to circulate in both countries, with the only difference being that the book is now available through the black market instead of the open market. Despite the legal ban, imposing an absolute prohibition on the book was impossible.

Democratic countries grant their citizens the right to free trade. This freedom has allowed traders in various commodities, such as clothing, shoes, and grains, to make substantial profits by establishing commercial enterprises. However, it has also resulted in the existence of illicit goods like alcohol being sold openly. Yet, millions of Muslims are taking advantage of this environment of free trade, benefiting their families and national institutions by earning a profit. No Muslim has refrained from benefiting from this freedom simply because it has also enabled the trade of alcohol.

In matters of personal interests, Muslims have practiced this wisdom. However, when it comes to communal matters,

they immediately demand the closure of liquor stores before engaging in trade. They assert that they will not take advantage of the freedom of trade until all such unIslamic activities are prohibited.

The Hodaybiyyah Treaty serves as an example in this context. It was a 10-year peace agreement, and the Prophet sought to ensure that the opposing party would honour the peace clause during that period, refraining from attacking him or his allied tribes. Therefore, he first committed not attacking the opposing side or its allied tribes. Despite being on the path of justice according to God's testimony, while the other party was on the path of injustice, the Prophet obtained this right from the other party only by agreeing to grant it to them.

Another aspect to consider is that since freedom is available to everyone, it will inevitably result in some individuals misusing it. For instance, there will be those who unnecessarily criticize Islam or publish books that Muslims find insulting to their faith. However, Muslims should place their trust in the invincible truth of Islam rather than relying solely on the legal system. Why should trivial matters cause fear when Islam itself stands as an absolute truth?

If Muslims were aware of the invincible truth of Islam, they would effectively counter the arguments of their opponents with stronger and more compelling reasoning. They would respond to arguments with powerful counterarguments. However, in contemporary times, Muslims tend to take great pride in the cultural aspects of their religion while

lacking rational arguments to address the religious misunderstandings of others effectively. Instead of providing sound, logical arguments, they often become angry when the Prophet is insulted. In this regard, Muslims should focus on addressing their own shortcomings rather than reacting with anger towards others. They fail to realize that their reactive behaviour is tarnishing the reputation of Islam.

Muslims strongly react against figures like Rushdie, citing the protection of the honour of the Holy Prophet as their motive. However, their efforts are futile if their reactions genuinely aim to protect the Prophet's honour.

Swami Shardhananda, the founder of the Shuddhi movement in India, authored a book called "Rangeela Rasool," which sparked a strong Muslim protest in the Indian subcontinent. They considered the book highly insulting to the honour and greatness of the Prophet of Islam. Tragically, in December 1926, Swami Shardhananda was assassinated by a Muslim youth named Abdul Rashid. His widowed mother, however, willingly allowed her only son to be sacrificed in an attempt to save the honour of the Prophet.

Despite this extreme step to protect the Prophet's honour, the desired goal has not been achieved. Following his assassination, Swami Shardhananda became a national hero in India, gaining the status of a "martyr." When India gained independence in 1947, a tall statue of Swami Shardhananda was erected at Chandni Chowk, a major intersection in the Indian capital, New Delhi.

The truth is that such actions can only be described as meaningless acts of self-sacrifice in the name of the Prophet's honour rather than being seen as efforts to save his honour. Despite their claims, these activities have no connection to true sacrifice for the Prophet's honour. They are simply acts of foolishness devoid of reason or basis in Islam.

Due to their defeatist mentality, Muslims are easily provoked by people's negative comments and tend to retaliate. However, others do not hold the same level of sensitivity towards their own religions as Muslims have developed. As a result, when Muslims express harsh words about their faith, they are often disregarded. Yet, when non-Muslims utter offensive words against Islam, Muslims quickly become infuriated. Since others do not react to Muslims' words, Muslims subconsciously believe they do not say anything negative about others while others continue to speak against them. However, this perception is untrue. The reality is that while others remain unperturbed and do not retaliate, Muslims are quick to lose their composure and respond in kind.

To illustrate this point, let us consider the example of Ahmed Deedat (d. 2005), an Indian-origin South African Muslim author and orator on Comparative Religion, who engaged in debates against other religions and published literature based on confrontational models, often employing strong language. An instance of his language can be seen in interviews published in his English bulletin, *Al-Burhan* (December 1988). In response to a question mentioning

various religions, he used the harsh words, "Bulldoze them all" (*Al-Burhan*, December 1988, p.3).

Muslims highly appreciate the words of speakers like Ahmad Deedat and often express their admiration through applause. However, when others use similar language to criticize Islam, Muslims become angry. For instance, if someone were to say "bulldoze Islam and Muslims" in India, it would undoubtedly enrage Muslims and potentially spark a violent campaign against him. Such a double standard is not viable in today's world.

Muslims must comprehend that they are being tested in this world. Consequently, God has granted absolute freedom to everyone. Therefore, Muslims should also extend the freedom they enjoy to others. In reality, by failing to recognize the rights of others to freedom, Muslims cannot deprive them of the freedom granted by societal norms and by God Himself. Nonetheless, by reacting in an unwarranted and un-Islamic manner, Muslims continue to provide reasons for people to ridicule Islam and Muslims.

A Muslim should be the strongest advocate and supporter of freedom of expression because the free exchange of thoughts facilitates their peaceful mission of spreading the word of God to all of humanity.



## ‘GREATER PUNISHMENT’

In ancient Arabia, poetry held a similar position to modern-day journalism. If a matter needs broader attention today, it is disseminated through newspapers and digital media, whereas poetry served this purpose in ancient Arabia.

During the time of the Prophet, notable poets were residing in Makkah, such as Ka’b bin Zuhair, Abdullah bin al-Ziba’ra, and Hubayra bin Abi Wahab. They composed poems to insult and denigrate the Prophet. However, when Makkah was conquered in the 8th year after Hijrah, they fled out of fear of retaliation. Hubayra passed away as a non-believer (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 2, p. 420), while the other two eventually became ardent supporters of Islam.

Upon their departure from Makkah, the Prophet did not allow his followers to pursue them or offer rewards for their capture. Instead, he prayed for their guidance and created circumstances to awaken their conscience, encourage repentance, and lead them to embrace Islam. Further details regarding this matter can be found in the books of *Seerah* (Biography of the Prophet).

In summary, both poets, Ka’b bin Zuhair and Abdullah bin al-Ziba’ra eventually embraced Islam. Subsequently, they began composing poetry praising the Prophet, shifting their focus from abusive language to supportive expressions. Their acceptance of Islam signified a rejection of their previous actions. Their remarkable talents, previously employed against Islam, were now utilized to advocate for the faith.

By reflecting on their life examples, let us contemplate the wisdom behind this transformation.

1. Ka’b bin Zuhair eventually arrived in Madinah due to the insistence of his brother Bujair bin Zuhair. Upon seeing him, one of the Ansar (helpers) confronted Ka’b and requested Prophet Muhammad’s permission to kill “that enemy of God.” However, the Prophet did not allow it and instead prayed for Ka’b. As a result of this kind gesture, Ka’b bin Zuhair embraced Islam. Before he accepted Islam, he was among the leading poets who composed abusive poems against the Prophet. However, after entering the fold of Islam, he became a great admirer of the faith and began writing poetic praises about the Prophet. One notable composition is the encomium (naat) of Baanat Su’ad, which holds a prominent place among poems in praise of the Prophet. Ibn Hisham includes 59 lines of this encomium in his book, wherein Ka’b writes that “the Messenger of God is a luminous star that serves as a source of light” (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Part 2, pp. 503-513). This example demonstrates how an individual who previously blasphemed the Prophet was transformed by witnessing the non-reactive behaviour of the Prophet and the Muslims, leading him to surrender, believe in the message, and acknowledge the Prophet of Islam as a source of guidance and enlightenment. Undoubtedly, this approach proves to be far more effective than resorting to violence against the blasphemer. It exemplifies recognizing the truth about the Prophet by an erstwhile enemy, showcasing that responding

positively with valid counter-arguments to negative words holds greater significance than taking their lives.

2. Abdullah bin al-Ziba'ra was a prominent poet of Makkah known for his intelligence and insolence. During the time in Makkah, a verse was revealed in the Quran stating, "You and what you worship instead of God will be fuel for Hell" (21:98). Upon reciting this verse to the people of Makkah, Abdullah bin al-Ziba'ra made a statement to Prophet Muhammad, questioning whether those worshipped alongside God would be in Hell along with their followers. He drew a comparison, mentioning that just as we worship angels, Jews worship Ezra (the Prophet), and Christians worship Jesus, the son of Mary.

The statement made by Abdullah bin al-Ziba'ra was indeed provocative as it involved mocking and insulting God, the angels, and the Prophets. However, his words did not provoke the Prophet, nor did he instruct his Companions to consider it an unforgivable crime deserving of death. Instead, the Prophet responded positively and seriously, stating that those who desire to be worshipped alongside God would be in the company of those who worship them. (*Tafsir al-Tabari*, Vol. 16, p. 418)

Although Abdullah bin al-Ziba'ra had committed blasphemy, the Prophet's reasonable response rendered his words meaningless. When Makkah was conquered in the 8th year after Hijrah, Abdullah fled to Najran. His conscience told him that he had committed a crime that could lead to his execution. However, his escape did not bring him peace of

mind. Instead, he found himself in a state of uncertainty, doubting his faith.

In the case of Abdullah bin al-Ziba’ra as well, the Prophet did not offer a reward for his capture or instruct his Companions to kill him wherever he was found. On the contrary, efforts were made by the Muslims to awaken his dormant conscience. One incident mentioned in the books is when the Muslim poet Hassan bin Thabit Al-Ansari composed poems to stir his conscience. These poems were sent to Abdullah bin al-Ziba’ra. One couplet stated, “You should not lose someone like the Messenger; your hatred for him has taken you to a far-off place like Najran, where you are isolated and living a dishonourable life.” This couplet struck Abdullah bin al-Ziba’ra’s conscience like an arrow. Subsequently, he left Najran and returned to Madinah, where he accepted Islam under the guidance of the Prophet. (Ibn S’ad, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Vol. 1, p. 391) After embracing Islam, he openly acknowledged his past mistakes through his poetry. Previously, he had mocked the Prophet, but now he composed poems praising the Prophet and his message. Some of his poems are recorded in Ibn Hisham’s book (*Al-Sirah*, Vol. 2, p. 418).

The conscience lies dormant within every human being. Our primary task is to awaken the conscience, as the early believers did. If killing someone is an act of revenge, then awakening a person’s conscience is an act of goodwill. Undoubtedly, the act of goodwill is far superior to the act of vengeance.

Imposing the death penalty on someone who mocks or denounces the Prophet of Islam is futile. Such an act of killing does not refute the objections raised by the individual. Instead, it creates the perception that since there was no logical or scholarly response to the strong objection, fanatics resorted to the easier option of killing.

Throughout history, many truthful and remarkable individuals have been killed by the tyrants of their time. In this historical context, people tend to associate the victim of violence with righteous individuals who stand for truth. They elevate the victim to the status of a hero, recognizing that the same fate that befell Truth has also befallen the murdered person. Thus, being killed by opponents adds them to the list of “Martyrs of Truth.”

This is not a mere assumption. On the contrary, it is precisely what occurred after the announcement of the death penalty for Salman Rushdie. For instance, a leading article titled “Censored by Religion” was prominently published in the ‘The Times of India’ (March 5, 1989), highlighting the repercussions of such censorship.

In the above article, Salman Rushdie is being compared to historical figures who were either murdered or faced attempts on their lives by their opponents. Examples include Socrates, Galileo, Martin Luther, and even the Prophet of Islam, whom the people of Makkah sought to kill. The article highlights the plight of the famous scientist Galileo in his final days, stating: “Galileo was confined to his villa under strict house arrest for the rest of his life, a fate that could well be Rushdie’s in a different manner today.”

As we discuss the issue of blasphemy against Islam and the Prophet of Islam, it is essential to note that the best response to such objections is to refute them with sound arguments. Engaging in a dialogue and countering objections through logical and persuasive arguments is far more challenging and impactful for the opponent than resorting to physical violence.



SECTION  
THREE



## BECOMING THE SUBJECT OF RIDICULE

According to the Anglican Church, Christianity is the official religion of England. In ancient times, England had a law that punished blasphemy against religion, established in the 17th century. This law was based on the idea that an attack on religion would be seen as an attack on the State (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 2, p. 75).

Currently, this law pertains explicitly to Christianity. However, some British Muslims, particularly some Indian Muslims residing in Britain, have been advocating for its extension to include Islam. The purpose would be to enable a legal case against Salman Rushdie to be brought before a British court.

The writer perceives this demand as entirely absurd and devoid of genuine leadership. Those who call for such a case to be registered know that such laws hold no practical value in the present circumstances.

Furthermore, it represents a clear example of shallow thinking. Muslim countries already have laws against the desecration of Islamic figures and Islam itself. Should Muslims then broaden the scope of these laws to include Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, allowing adherents of these religions to file lawsuits against Muslims for insulting their faith? If Muslims themselves cannot grant this right to others within their own countries, it is illogical to expect it in other nations. Such thinking undoubtedly reflects the

shallow mindset of our leaders, lacking any basis in the teachings of Islam.

Far from safeguarding the sanctity of Islam, this unfounded campaign has undeniably contributed to distorting the image of the religion. As an example, certain self-proclaimed Muslim leaders in Britain wrote a letter to the British government demanding the extension of this law's scope to include Islam. In response, John Patten, the Minister of State in the British Home Office, sent them a letter published on the last page of 'The Times of India' on July 6, 1989, p. 10.

PTI has sent this report from London. "In his reply to prominent British Muslim leaders, Mr. Patten stated that legal mechanisms were unsuitable for addressing faith and individual beliefs. He further noted that the Christian faith no longer relied on such mechanisms and recognized that the strength of one's belief served as the best defence."

The words of the British Christian Home Secretary hold a deep satirical meaning for Muslims. They suggest that their religion, Christianity, is robust enough to deem such a law unnecessary, even though they have legislation against blasphemy. Conversely, his words imply that the state of Islam is such that the sanctity of the religion can only be protected when there is a law in place to guard it.

Salman Rushdie is a British citizen and can only be prosecuted under British law, not under the laws of Iran or Pakistan. Offering a reward or making emotional appeals to

kill him amounts to justifying international anarchy. Islam is exempt from such actions.

Salman Rushdie's book did not cause any actual harm or damage to Islam. However, the reactions from the Muslim World have unquestionably inflicted significant harm upon Islam. Through their actions, these Muslim clerics have conveyed to the world that Islam is a religion associated with terror and barbarism. It is natural for individuals to be hesitant to objectively study a religion whose image has been tarnished in such a manner.

The greatest transgression of present-day Muslim leaders is their repeated actions that serve their leadership interests but ultimately undermine the cause of Islam. Undoubtedly, this stands as the greatest tragedy in the history of Islam.

## AN INTERACTION

On February 25, 1989, two American Professors, Dr. Archie L. Nations, and Dr. Peggy Starkey came to our Centre in New Delhi to discuss various Islamic issues. As a gesture, we presented them with several English books.

Towards the end of our meeting, they sought my opinion on the matter involving Salman Rushdie and Ayatollah Khomeini. I expressed that while the Shiite Imam Ayatollah Khomeini issued the "fatwa" calling for Salman Rushdie's assassination, Sunni scholars had also provided full support to it. Some scholars, like Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi, publicly endorsed this fatwa through press statements.

Other scholars who remained silent on the matter could also be considered indirect supporters of the fatwa since their silence implies indirect support in such cases.

I firmly expressed my complete disagreement with this fatwa, considering it both unlawful and un-Islamic. Here is a summary of what I conveyed to them on this matter:

“Ayatollah Khomeini issued a call for the assassination of Salman Rushdie, the author of ‘The Satanic Verses.’ Many Sunni scholars, either directly or indirectly, have endorsed this call. However, from an Islamic standpoint, this is unequivocally incorrect.

1. Why did Muslims demand the killing of Salman Rushdie? The general reason cited is that he committed blasphemy against the Prophet and Islam. Salman Rushdie’s book portrays certain “events” in a fictional manner, such as the story of the false accusation involving Hazrat Ayesha (the wife of the Prophet) and Safwan bin Muattal. These stories are old narratives, and Salman Rushdie did not invent them. He incorporated these incidents into his novel in a fictionalized form. Since the actual originators of these stories were not subjected to the death penalty by the Prophet of Islam, why should the author of ‘Satanic Verses,’ who merely repeated them, be punished with death?

2. When Islam prescribes punishment for a crime, it does not imply that any individual can take it upon himself to implement it in an ad hoc manner. In Islam, every punishment is a judicial punishment.

Let us assume that Salman Rushdie has committed a crime for which the death penalty is mandated under Islamic law. Even in such a case, an individual is not permitted to enforce the punishment arbitrarily, wielding a gun and shooting the person at their discretion. Even when a crime recognized by Shariah has been committed, necessary legal proceedings must be followed. It would be illegal and un-Islamic to kill someone without going through the required judicial process.

3. The punishments prescribed for various crimes in Islam can only be implemented within Muslim countries. For instance, Islam does have a sentence for theft. However, in practical terms, it can only be enforced within the jurisdiction of a Muslim Government. This does not mean that Muslims should travel to other countries to impose Islamic punishment on individuals they deem as thieves. Now, since Salman Rushdie is a citizen of the United Kingdom, a non-Muslim country, he falls outside the scope of Islamic punishment. Therefore, it would be un-Islamic for any Iranian or Pakistani to go to Britain, shoot Salman Rushdie there, and claim that they were following Islamic law. Such acts are acts of aggression rather than the enforcement of Islamic law.

4. If Muslims wish to respond to Salman Rushdie, their actions should remain within the peaceful domain. This may include countering his arguments with logical and scholarly articles or books, advocating a ban on its publication and distribution

in Muslim countries, and seeking legal measures for its prohibition in other nations. However, any form of aggression is not permissible from an Islamic perspective. If Muslims adopt an aggressive stance in this matter, it will undoubtedly be seen as inviting God's wrath."

Having understood Islam's view on this and other issues, the American Professors sent a letter upon their return to their homeland. It is being reproduced here.

Dr. Peggy Starkey  
Dr. Archie L. Nations  
12228 Old Creedmoor Road  
Raleigh, N.C. 27613

March 27, 1989

To:

Wahiduddin Khan,  
President, The Islamic Centre,  
C-29, Nizamuddin West,  
New Delhi-110 013, India

Dear Mr. Khan,

When we think of our time in Delhi, our minds immediately reflect on our visit with you and your son, Dr. Khan, who graciously assisted us while we were there. We are profoundly indebted to you for giving us time to talk with you and learn about India's Muslim faith.

Most of all, we are encouraged by the fact that there are Muslim religious leaders like you whose wise counsel needs to be taken very seriously, not only by the Muslim people but also by persons of other religious traditions as well. We think the hope for intercultural and international understanding and peace lies in the directions charted by such wisdom. Therefore, we are most grateful for the opportunity to meet and talk with you. You have strengthened our resolve to continue our efforts in Muslim-Christian Dialogue in the U.S. with a view toward the dissemination of accurate knowledge of Islam and better relations with Muslims.

We appreciate you sharing your thoughts concerning the Rushdie controversy with us, and we thank you for providing us with the articles and pamphlets you have written. If there is some way that we might receive information about your future publications and how we might obtain them, we would be most grateful.

Sincerely Yours,

Peggy Starkey

Archie L. Nations

### **A Reply to a Letter**

Dr. Muzaffar Shaheen from Rajouri (Jammu and Kashmir) expressed his thoughts in a lengthy letter: "Since the publication of Salman Rushdie's book, it has garnered significant attention from newspapers and magazines. The entire Muslim world has reacted to it, and the leaders'

protests have led to riots in Islamabad, Srinagar, and Bombay. However, no Muslim scholar has tried to respond to this book with rational and scholarly arguments. Isn't this book a challenge for our scholars rather than a general humiliation of Islam? Thus far, no reasoned refutation of this book has been presented by any Muslim scholar. Can our agitations rectify the erroneous impressions received by those who have read Rushdie's book and been influenced by its statements?"

In response to this letter, I wrote that it is a significant issue that extends beyond Salman Rushdie's book. It encompasses all similar situations. It has become a common practice for Muslim leaders and scholars that when a book or article is published, they issue strong emotional statements against it, leading to public agitation. However, they often fail to provide a reasoned response to the content in question.

I fully agree that each of these incidents should be taken as a challenge rather than an act of dishonouring Islam.

During the time of the Prophet, his opponents would employ provocative poetry to hurt the sentiments of Muslims, similar to how provocative events are reported in modern times. However, the Prophet and his Companions did not react in the same manner as present-day Muslim leaders. Instead, the Muslims of that time responded to provocation through poetry and oratory. This approach aligns with the Islamic way of addressing such matters, and contemporary Muslim leaders should follow the example set by the Prophet and his Companions.



Poetry served as the most powerful means of communication in ancient Arabia. Ideas intended for the masses were conveyed through poetry, allowing listeners to understand and memorize them easily. People then recite these verses on various occasions, ensuring the message spread far and wide.

However, with the advent of the printing press in modern times, the significance of poetry in communication has diminished. Journalism has become the primary source for conveying ideas to the masses. Thoughts and ideas meant to reach a broad audience are now published in newspapers, magazines, and digital media.

Just as early Muslims utilized ancient forms of communication, such as poetry, to prepare rebuttals, Muslims today should utilize contemporary resources, such as newspapers, books, and digital media, to present their views to the people. Muslim leaders must refrain from issuing hasty statements in response to such situations, labelling them as an ‘insult’ to Islam or disrespect to the Prophet. This approach represents an innovation (*bid’aa*) in Islam, as it only incites people without providing substantive answers to the objections raised.

This approach must be avoided. Instead, Muslim leaders should follow the Prophetic example of responding to claims through writing. In other words, if a question is raised in the media, the response should be given through newspapers, and if a question is raised in a book, the answer should be provided through books, and so on. Furthermore, these

responses should be rooted in Islamic ethics and presented as scholarly arguments rather than resorting to retaliatory provocation. By adhering to this principle, Muslim leaders can better serve Islam.

### **Wrong Representation**

Few instances in recent times have incited such a strong reaction from Muslims as the anger provoked by Salman Rushdie's book. Numerous statements and articles have been published in Urdu, English, Arabic, and other languages to express opposition to his work.

The essence of all these reactions can be summarized by a Muslim spokesperson's statement to 'The Times of India' (March 1, 1989), which reads as follows:

“We, as Muslims, like any human beings, should have the right to feel offended when our beloved ones are depicted as prostitutes.”

This statement, which uses the reaction of an ordinary person as a gauge to measure the response of Muslims, highlights an apparent misconception. The reaction of Muslims should be guided by the conduct of the Prophet of Islam rather than the behaviour of their fellow human beings. Therefore, since the parameters that govern the response of Muslims are religious, they should be evaluated in light of the Quran and Sunnah, not the actions of ordinary individuals.

In his book, Salman Rushdie ridiculed the Prophet for having multiple wives, referring to his household, God

forbid, as a 'brothel' (p. 376). The author also propagated the false story of Safwan bin Muattal, which maligns the character of Hazrat Ayesha (p. 387).

This fictional tale concerning Umm Al-Muminin (the mother of the believers) is not a new fabrication. It was first concocted in Madinah 1400 years ago by Abdullah bin Ubayy, who claimed to be a Muslim. His deceitful act is mentioned in the Quran. Salman Rushdie exploited this story to serve his malicious intentions.

It is evident from this that the wrongful act committed by Salman Rushdie against Hazrat Ayesha was initially perpetrated during the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam himself. Furthermore, this offence occurred when the Prophet had full authority over Madinah and the absolute power to punish the offender. The life and conduct of the Prophet serve as a model for us in every aspect. Therefore, we should examine how the Prophet dealt with the person who committed this crime and strive to emulate his example.

Historical records testify that the first perpetrator, Abdullah bin Ubayy, was not punished for this crime. Despite Hazrat Umar Farooq and even Abdullah, the son of the culprit, seeking permission to execute him, the Prophet did not allow his killing. Thus, despite enduring immense pain and emotional distress and being aware of his guilt, the Prophet did not sanction his execution, and Abdullah bin Ubayy was left to face a natural death.

This is the precedent the Prophet of Islam sets for us to

follow. We must tread in his footsteps. Justifying one's anger by citing the behaviour of ordinary individuals amounts to rebellion and holds no connection with Islamic teachings. The model for Muslims lies in the actions of the Messenger of God, not in the actions of other human beings.

## **A Review**

About the case of Salman Rushdie, an Arab scholar comments that when a Muslim becomes agitated upon the insult of their father or mother, it is only natural for them to feel anger towards the insult directed at the highest figure deserving their utmost love and loyalty, Prophet Muhammad (*Al-Ba'ath al-Islami*, June 1989, p. 85).

He further states that contemporary Muslims seem to have lost their religious pride and sense of honour, which is why we observe this unfortunate situation: despite Salman Rushdie committing such a grave crime of insulting the Prophet, Muslims are not displaying the level of anger and outrage that the incident warrants (page 93).

This style of emotional speech or writing holds no meaning. It lacks both reason and alignment with Islam. While incidents like these deeply disturbed individuals, a sincere person does not respond to humiliation by becoming enraged and plotting the death of the individual responsible for the insult. Such a reckless reaction is only a characteristic of an immature person. A purposeful individual always refrains from reacting to such provocation, understanding that it hinders their progress toward their goals.

In the case of Salman Rushdie's book, Muslim writers and speakers, in general, have adopted a similar negative and emotional approach, as exemplified by the quote mentioned above. However, this approach is incorrect. While it is indeed profoundly hurtful to hear abusive words directed towards one's mother, it does not mean that every time someone insults his mother, he should engage in a fight or seek to kill them. It is natural for a person to be affected by such verbal attacks, but it is unnatural and wrong to pray for that person to be condemned to Hell.

Jesus, for instance, was born without a human father from the womb of a woman. Despite facing accusations of illegitimacy and his mother being accused of adultery by the Jews in Palestine, Jesus did not order the execution of those who insulted him or his mother. Even though Jesus possessed miraculous powers to resurrect the dead, he did not initiate a campaign to kill those who had insulted him.

Likewise, in the early days of Islam, the hypocrites in Madinah falsely accused Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua, the wife of the Prophet and the esteemed Umm Al-Muminin, of immorality. Despite having the authority to do so, Prophet Muhammad did not punish the criminals by severing their heads and displaying them on city walls for committing such a heinous crime. If the Prophet and his Companions did not resort to such actions, present-day Muslims have no right to engage in such behaviour.

According to the Quran, the Prophet is meant to be an example or "uswa" (33:21) to follow. Therefore, if we

consider the Prophet a role model rather than a source of pride, it gives rise to the spirit of following his example.

This phenomenon of elevating the Prophet to a source of pride can be observed in Muslim communities worldwide. However, as mentioned in the Quran, the spirit of following the Prophet as a model seems to be lacking among them. Instead, by declaring him as the leader and king of the universe and the source of utmost pride, the sense of pride in the Prophet has grown to such an extent that people are always prepared to create a public uproar at the slightest sign of insolence towards him.

Some Muslims do not even hesitate to regard their Prophet as superior to God. Some express it indirectly, while others do so directly. For instance, a poet has written the following couplet:

*“Allah ke palle mein wahdat ke siwa kya hai?  
Jo kuchh hamein lena hai, le lenge Muhammad se.”*

The English translation of the above is as follows:

“What is there in the ranks of Allah but monotheism? Whatever we want, we can obtain it from Muhammad.”

Due to this mindset among present-day Muslims, they do not seem to be affected by derogatory remarks about God. Such statements do not provoke them or hurt their emotions. However, if someone utters a disrespectful word about their Prophet, they immediately become ready to engage in conflict.

Pakistan's Qudratullah Shahab has depicted the mindset of contemporary Muslims through two incidents from his early student days, as described in his book 'Shahab Nama.' We quote the incidents as follows:

“There was a solitary mystic (*majzub*), living away from human settlements, who would incessantly chant ‘Illallah,’ ‘Illallah.’ My Hindu friend and I would listen to him and imitate his chanting. To tease the mystic, my friend would add derogatory prefixes or suffixes to ‘Illallah.’ Although this mystic would reprimand us for disrespecting the name of Allah, we paid no heed to his words. One day, while we were both engrossed in mimicking his words, a passerby recited a few lines from a poem, one of which was as follows: ‘Had Muhammad not been born, the world would not have come to exist.’ My friend burst into loud laughter. Unfortunately, he also made insulting remarks about the Prophet. His words incited such anger within me that I grabbed a stone and struck the boy in the face with such force that half of his front teeth were broken.”

The author reflects on why his subconscious, which remained silent in response to jokes about God, became so enraged at the dishonour of the Prophet.

Most people become enraged when someone speaks ill of God's Messenger, and some are even willing to make great sacrifices to protect his honour. However, it has been observed that those who give up their lives to defend the Prophet's honour are not necessarily highly knowledgeable

in religious matters or renowned for leading a devout life. The intensity and irrationality with which people are disturbed, consciously or unconsciously, and their eagerness to safeguard the Prophet's honour stem from reverence rather than genuine faith. This often manifests as passionate fervour, which can escalate to madness among the masses (*Shahab Nama*, Delhi, 2003, p. 1202-03).

To be insensitive towards God and sensitive towards God's Messenger is undoubtedly a deviation from Islam and has no connection with true guidance. Those who dwell in such baseless reverence will come to realize, on the Day of Judgment, that their actions were based on their inventions and had nothing to do with the religion sent by God.

There is the religion of Islam, and then there is the religion of 'hero worship.' If a person truly follows the religion of Islam, their relationship with God and His Messenger will be similar. Therefore, they will be devoted to both God and the Prophet.

However, the religion practiced by many modern-day Muslims is not Islam but rather a form of 'hero worship.' They have not truly made God their ultimate focus; instead, they have elevated the Prophet to a 'hero.' This is why they remain silent when God is insulted but become immediately enraged if anyone speaks disparagingly about the Messenger.

Muslims may find contentment in their self-created version of religion. However, they need to recognize that the Quran



explicitly states a punishment, not a reward, for those who differentiate between God and His Messenger (4:150).

### **The Politics of the Procession**

Muslims across various parts of India, including Srinagar and Bombay, staged protests against Salman Rushdie (February 1989). However, in these protests, many Muslims became enraged for various reasons and resorted to violent actions. They broke the law and even threw stones at the police, resulting in the police opening fire and causing the loss of precious lives.

These acts of violence were undeniably absurd. It is important to note that India was the first country to ban Rushdie's book, even before Pakistan and Iran did so legally. With the practical ban already in place, one may question the rationale behind protesting against the book in India.

The leaders of these agitations naively claimed that their procession was not against India but against Britain, stating their intention to file a written complaint with the British High Commission.

This excuse only further highlights the incompetence of these leaders. It demonstrates their lack of wisdom while seeking to assume leadership roles. It is a recurring pattern during such processions or rallies that the individuals involved are not in a normal state of mind. They tend to overestimate their power and are driven by "mob psychology."

Because of this, those who participate in these agitations in large numbers often develop a sense of superiority, viewing

themselves as the “kings of the streets.” Consequently, they become easily provoked, even by minor incidents. They may engage in conflicts with the police, assuming that their numbers surpass those of law enforcement, resulting in most processions inevitably turning violent and leading to bloodshed.

Considering this, it was highly inappropriate to organize a procession concerning the issue of Salman Rushdie. If individuals wished to express their protest to the British Government, they could have done so through means such as postal mail or telegram. A small delegation could have visited the British High Commission to convey their message if a personal delivery was deemed necessary.

### **Some Important Comments**

King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia (without explicitly mentioning Salman Rushdie) expressed his perspective, emphasizing that the conveyance of the Divine Message should be done most effectively and persuasively. He stressed the importance of convincing other nations that Islam is a religion of love and peace rather than violence and terrorism. (*Akhbar al-Alam al-Islami*, Makkah, 22 May, 1989.)

The Ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, expressed that neither Salman Rushdie nor individuals like him from around the world can harm the true religion of Allah with their anti-Islam writings.

Dr. Sushil Kumar Srivastava, a Professor of History at Allahabad University, shared a similar sentiment: “Islam is not a weak religion. Countless books like ‘The Satanic Verses’ cannot shake it.” (*Akhbar e Nau*, 17-23 March 1989)

Islam possesses a rich and glorious history spanning over a thousand years, which has endowed it with such steadfastness that neither individuals nor large groups can inflict even the slightest damage to it through their writings. This perspective was echoed by Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who remarked: “Great religions should be strong enough to withstand such criticisms as presented in the book.” (*The Guardian*, London, March 4, 1989)

Benazir Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, expressed her confusion regarding the benefit Muslims would derive from prolonging the issue. She emphasized that repeating the words of blasphemy is as grave a sin as committing it oneself. Bhutto believed that the fundamentalists who publicized Rushdie’s novel and its objectionable content were committing the same crime as Rushdie himself.

## IBN TAYMIYYAH'S BOOK

My copy of the book *As-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatim ar-Rasul* by Allama Ibn Taymiyyah, consisting of 600 pages, was printed by 'Majlis Dairatul Maarif' (Hyderabad) in 1322 AH (1904 AD). It provides a comprehensive and detailed discussion of blasphemy, making it one of the most extensive works in the Islamic library.

Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), known for his photographic memory and exceptional knowledge, possessed a remarkable intellect. His disciple, Imam Dhahabi, an Islamic historian and Hadith expert, even remarked that any Hadith unknown to Ibn Taymiyyah could not be considered valid. Therefore, while Ibn Taymiyyah's books may not be of the highest standard regarding analysis and reasoning, they excel in the wealth of information they provide. This particular book is another example of this argument. However, the book does not offer a definitive work regarding analysis and reasoning. Some examples can be cited to demonstrate this point. Regarding the topic at hand, Ibn Taymiyyah holds the view that the punishment for insulting the Prophet must necessarily be death, according to Islam. However, his arguments supporting this view are insufficient to substantiate his standpoint fully.

1. In one of the chapters, Allama Ibn Taymiyyah recounts an incident where a nomadic Muslim accused the Prophet of being unjust in distributing war spoils. The man criticized the Prophet for not adhering to God's will in this matter. Upon hearing this, Hazrat Umar expressed his desire to kill

the hypocrite. However, the Prophet responded by seeking refuge with God and rejecting the notion that he would kill his Companions. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1063, *Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 14804)

Following this account, Ibn Taymiyyah states that the Prophet did not forbid Hazrat Umar from killing the man because he was innocent. Instead, the Prophet's concern was that if he allowed such a killing, people would falsely claim that Muhammad had killed his own Companions (p. 174).

Considering Ibn Taymiyyah's explanation, it can be observed that in his book, he advocates for the killing of anyone who insults the Prophet's honour under all circumstances. However, when confronted with incidents from the Prophet's life where individuals who displayed clear insolence were not killed, Ibn Taymiyyah should have revised his stance by acknowledging that the punishment for blasphemy is not absolute. However, he does not do so. Instead, he argues that the reason for not killing such individuals was not that they did not deserve to be killed but rather to prevent Islam from being defamed by the public.

The question then arises: what does Ibn Taymiyyah's explanation indeed prove? In terms of the actual issue at hand, it still contradicts his theory. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the only difference between the two situations is that in the earlier incident, "the Prophet did not kill the insolent individual to prevent Islam from receiving a negative perception." Therefore, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the

statement should be: “Even though the insolent man deserved to be killed, he was not killed to protect Islam from defamation.” Thus, in both cases, the message remains the same—that the blasphemer will not be killed.

2. Let us consider another example to explore this matter further. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet had the opportunity to execute the polytheists, who were the staunchest enemies of Islam. However, he decided to forgive them and set them free, contrary to the custom of the time when prisoners of war were eligible to be killed.

If someone argues that the Prophet forgave them not because they were innocent but to win them over through a concept known as *‘taalif-e-qalb’* (winning over hearts), it raises the question of how this explanation impacts the real issue. We can say that the previous statement has been rephrased. The initial statement said, “The Prophet forgave the polytheists of Makkah to win them over.” The revised statement would be: “Although the polytheists of Makkah were eligible to be killed as prisoners of war, the Prophet granted them general amnesty to win over their hearts.” Both statements convey the same message, which is that the blasphemers in Makkah were released without being killed.

It appears that Ibn Taymiyyah has taken the words “Muhammad kills his Companions” literally, and according to his perspective, since Muhammad and his Companions are no longer present in this world, the attitude of reconciliation should permanently cease. Therefore, he

argues that we must ensure that blasphemers are killed without hesitation.

However, it would be naive to interpret the Prophet's words literally. Instead, the phrase "Muhammad kills his Companions" symbolizes the idea that Islam harms its followers. In today's world, this concern exists with even greater intensity, emphasizing the continued relevance of this prophetic practice. The task at hand is to refrain from killing a person, even if they deserve it in a legal sense because their death could be exploited to discredit Islam and portray it as a barbaric religion. Such misrepresentation would deter people from engaging with the message of Islam, hindering them from receiving divine mercy.

This Sunnah of the Prophet highlights that maintaining a positive image of Islam takes precedence over all other considerations. The Prophet did not execute even the most wicked individuals, as doing so would have engendered hatred towards Islam among the masses.

In his book, Ibn Taymiyyah recounts this incident but fails to grasp that the Prophet's action contradicts his viewpoint. Ibn Taymiyyah argues that killing the blasphemer is an essential requirement of the religion. However, the Prophet's Sunnah demonstrates that there is a more significant concern to consider: safeguarding Islam from becoming a subject of ridicule rather than admiration. If there is a risk that the image of Islam may be tarnished, it is preferable to spare the blasphemer's life rather than bring infamy upon Islam.

Ibn Taymiyyah asserts in his book that the Quran commands

Muslims to engage in Jihad, both with their wealth and lives. He highlights that Jihad can be carried out not only through physical actions but also through the power of one's words. According to him, the Jihad of the tongue is even more potent than other forms. In support of this, Ibn Taymiyyah cites the Prophet's instruction to engage in Jihad against the polytheists using one's hands, tongues, and wealth.

3. He mentions an incident involving Hassan bin Thabit, whom the Prophet tasked to engage in Jihad against the polytheists through his poetry. A pulpit was set up for Hassan in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, where he defended the Prophet through his couplets, countering the insults of the polytheists. The Prophet prayed for Hassan's assistance with the Holy Spirit and declared that Gabriel was with him during his defence of the Messenger. Hassan's powerful verses acted as sharp arrows that subdued the polytheists and deterred them from harassing the Muslims. From this story, Ibn Taymiyyah concludes that verbal denigration is even more impactful than physical attacks. Therefore, according to his viewpoint, anyone who insults the Prophet with words should be executed, considering it akin to attacking him with arrows and swords.

However, a more appropriate interpretation of this story would be that the power of words can be a potent weapon in countering criticism and defending Islam. Rather than advocating for punishment, Ibn Taymiyyah should have emphasized the use of poetry and prose to subdue those who criticize Islam or the Prophet. Following the Prophet's



example, Muslims can respond to verbal attacks using the same medium of expression, comparable to journalism at that time.

Strangely, Ibn Taymiyyah deduces from this incident the idea that an attack on Islam with words is more severe than a physical attack. Consequently, he advocates for death as the only punishment for those who engage in such verbal attacks.

Ibn Taymiyyah's argument is indeed perplexing. The Sunnah of the Prophet clearly demonstrates that responding to the opponents of Islam should be done with words, as it is the most effective approach. However, Ibn Taymiyyah reaches the strange conclusion that the blasphemer must be killed because their attack on Islam is deemed more serious than a physical attack with a sword. If words are more potent than arrows and swords, it would be more practical to employ this powerful tool for defence rather than resorting to a relatively ineffective method.

4. Regarding Abdullah bin Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites in Madinah, who insulted and tormented the Prophet, the Prophet did not order his killing. Abdullah bin Ubayy died a natural death in Madinah. Ibn Taymiyyah explains this by suggesting that the Prophet refrained from killing him because he feared it would weaken Islam, which was considered fragile at that time.

However, Ibn Taymiyyah's explanation is illogical. If Islam were weak during the time of Abdullah bin Ubayy, it would have made more sense for the Prophet to take decisive

action against him to establish the authority and strength of Islam. The Prophet's restraint in not ordering his killing cannot be attributed solely to the perceived weakness of the religion.

It is essential to critically examine Ibn Taymiyyah's arguments and consider alternative interpretations that align with the principles of peaceful dialogue and intellectual engagement advocated by the Prophet in responding to criticism and defending Islam.

In the first year of the Hijrah, the Islamic Government was established in Madinah, marking a significant milestone in the history of Islam. This was followed by the conquest of Makkah in the eighth year of the Hijrah. By the ninth year, Islam had gained dominance throughout Arabia. During this time, a considerable force of at least 100,000 devoted companions had gathered to support Prophet Muhammad. It is crucial to note that the Prophet was physically present in the world, and the Quran affirms that he was destined to prevail over his opponents, with Allah as his Lord, Gabriel as a righteous ally among the believers, and the angels as helpers (66:4). These circumstances highlight the strength and divine assistance bestowed upon the Prophet and his mission.

The question that arises is: If during the early period of Islam, with all the favourable conditions and the presence of the Prophet, it was not possible to execute those who mocked or insulted Islam, how could it be possible to do so today? It is illogical to suggest that Islam, in the presence

of the Prophet, was in such a vulnerable state that it could not enforce punishment against blasphemers. By that reasoning, one could argue that Islam would be even weaker later. Therefore, a punishment that cannot be effectively implemented should be permanently abolished. Ibn Taymiyyah's argument, in this regard, is deemed irrational and misguided.

Based on such an unreasonable argument, some individuals today advocate for the killing of blasphemers, regardless of their religious affiliation, the government they live under, or the period they belong to.

### **Not a Matter of Individual Rights**

Many incidents in the available record of the Prophet's sayings demonstrate cases of blasphemy against him during his lifetime. However, he chose to forgive these individuals and did not pursue any legal actions against them.

These incidents contradict the viewpoint of Ibn Taymiyyah and like-minded people. Ibn Taymiyyah, along with others like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE), argued that blasphemy against the Prophet constitutes an attack on his honour, thereby falling under the category of "rights of people" (*Huququl Ibad*). However, it is essential to note that this perspective is merely an opinion without clear evidence from the Quran or Hadith to support it. Without explicit proof from these sources, it cannot be classified as a matter of human rights or individual rights (Ibn Taymiyyah, *As-Sarim al-Maslul*, p. 219).

The reality is that an attack on the Prophet of Islam extends beyond a personal affront to his character; it is a direct assault on Islam itself. Consequently, it becomes a matter of defence rather than one solely pertaining to human rights. When someone claims that the Prophet of Islam lacked justice, it is not merely a personal attack on him but a challenge to the credibility of the Quran and Islam as a whole. In such cases, the Prophet's forgiveness cannot be seen as condoning such a grave offence. Even after being forgiven by the Prophet, the underlying problem persists. The Prophet's approach was to challenge such individuals ideologically rather than resorting to physical violence. Physical death does not absolve the blasphemer of the false allegations made against Islam or the Prophet of Islam.

### **Ideological Response, Not Punishment**

The main error made by Ibn Taymiyyah and thinkers like him in this matter lies in their perception of '*shatm*' (blasphemy) solely as a matter of enforcing legal punishment. However, in reality, blasphemy is a matter of defence. When someone engages in '*shatm*,' they launch an ideological attack on the truth of Islam, and such an attack can only be effectively addressed through a counter-ideological response. Thus, killing the blasphemer is not a solution to this problem.

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote in his book that when the polytheists used to mock the Prophet of Islam, Hasan bin Thabit defended him by responding to these insults through his poetic compositions. This demonstrates

that blasphemy is indeed an ideological attack on Islam. Therefore, the correct and effective approach to counter it is by disproving and refuting it at the ideological level. This is a defensive measure rather than an imposition of Shariah punishment.

The reality is that blasphemy against Islam and the Prophet does not fit within the framework of a conventional legal crime. Only a counter-ideological response can effectively repel an ideological attack.

We cannot eliminate intellectual and ideological challenges by resorting to physical violence and killing the perpetrator. While killing a killer may resolve the problem, killing a '*shatim*' (blasphemer) does not eradicate the problem of blasphemy. Blasphemy is an issue that persists even after the death of the blasphemer. And when the real issue persists, what is achieved by killing the person?

Therefore, if the real problem continues, what purpose does killing the person serve? Instead, we must address the concerns and objections raised by the blasphemer to provide clarity and understanding to everyone involved. We can foster a more informed and enlightened society by engaging in open dialogue and addressing these issues.

## BASED ON AN ANALOGY

People commonly hold the belief that anyone engaging in blasphemy against the Prophet is subject to punishment under Shariah law, as repentance alone cannot undo the offence. However, this assumption lacks any basis in Shariah. Regardless of the widespread belief in this theory, it remains unsubstantiated. Therefore, in the following pages, we will carefully examine this issue from the perspectives of the Quran, Hadith, and Fiqh (jurisprudence).

As mentioned earlier, the most comprehensive book on this subject is authored by Ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 AH). During his time, there was an incident of blasphemy when Assaf Nasrani uttered derogatory words against the Prophet of Islam. This incident sparked a heated debate in Syria and Egypt regarding the appropriate punishment in Islamic law for those who insult the Prophet. Provoked by this event, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote a substantial book comprising 600 pages, which was later published under the title '*As-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatim ar-Rasul*,' meaning 'The Open Sword for the One Who Insulted the Prophet.'

### **Arguments from the Quran**

In one section of his book, Ibn Taymiyyah argues that numerous verses in the Quran support the killing of blasphemers. However, the verses he quotes in this context are unrelated to his position or opinion on killing blasphemers. Thus, let us translate some of the verses he has referred to in this discussion.

“Among them are those who vex the Prophet by saying, “He listens to everyone.” Say, “His listening to everyone is good for you; he believes in God, puts his trust in the faithful, and is a mercy to those of you who believe. Those who annoy God’s Messenger shall have a painful punishment.” They swear by God to please you [believers], but it would be more fitting for them to please God and His Messenger if they are believers. Do they not know that whoever opposes God and His Messenger shall abide forever in the fire of Hell? That is the supreme humiliation.” (Quran, 9:61-63)

These verses specifically address individuals who caused harm or annoyance to the Prophet. However, they do not contain any explicit or implied command to kill those individuals. Instead, they indicate the punishment that awaits them in the afterlife rather than in this world. The verses advise Muslims to adopt a policy of avoidance towards such individuals, as God will be the ultimate judge of their actions in the next world. The responsibility of Muslims in this world is solely to convey the divine message, and they will be held accountable for their deeds in the Hereafter. It is important to note that inferring a command for the death of blasphemers goes against the knowledge we gain from the grammar and the commentaries (*Tafsir*) of the Quran.

Another verse of the Quran states:

“You will not find believers in God and the Last Day aligning themselves with those who oppose God and His Messenger, even if they are their fathers, sons,

brothers, or close relatives. Their faith is deeply ingrained in their hearts, and God has fortified them with His spirit. They will be admitted to Gardens with flowing rivers, where they will dwell eternally. God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. They are the party of God and will surely attain a state of bliss.” (58:22)

Regarding the interpretation by Ibn Taymiyyah, he argues, based on this verse, that Abu Quhafa, who was Abu Bakr’s father, committed blasphemy against the Prophet. Consequently, Abu Bakr intended to punish his father for this offence. Similarly, Abdullah bin Ubayy insulted the Prophet, so his son sought permission from the Prophet to kill his father. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, such incidents demonstrate that anyone who opposes the Prophet is an infidel and, thus, deserving of the death penalty.

Ibn Taymiyyah’s statements lack evidence and rely on deceptive arguments. In the two mentioned incidents involving Abu Bakr Siddiq and Abdullah bin Ubayy’s son, Abdullah, they expressed their willingness to kill the blasphemers by seeking the Prophet’s permission. However, it is essential to consider the complete story. The subsequent part of these incidents reveals that the Prophet did not grant permission to kill the blasphemers. Consequently, both individuals, referred to as “shatim,” lived on and eventually died of natural deaths.

The guidance for Shariah law should be derived from the words of the Prophet rather than from the words of Muslims



who, in the heat of the moment, uttered statements that were not endorsed or approved by the Prophet.

In the case of Salman Rushdie, after it gained attention, those advocating for the death penalty published numerous articles and issued statements claiming that killing a blasphemer is supported by Quranic verses. However, all these arguments, similar to Ibn Taymiyyah's, are baseless. In an article written by Pakistani scholar Maulana Qazi Mazhar Husain, it is stated that the killing of a "shatim" can be proven through many verses of the Quran (*Haq Char Yar*, Monthly, Lahore, June 1989).

He refers to the Quranic verse: "God shall curse those who annoy God and His Messenger in this world and the Hereafter. God has prepared a humiliating punishment for them. Those who affront believing men and believing women without their having deserved it [done any wrong] shall bear the weight of slander and a flagrant sin." (33:57-58)

Indeed, these verses address those who cause harm to the Prophet. However, they do not directly or indirectly command the killing of the perpetrators. Nowhere is it stated that those who commit atrocities against the Prophet should be put to death. These verses focus on the punishment God will administer in the Hereafter; they do not mention any legal consequences or punishments in this world.

The writer has taken the word 'torment' from the Quran and added the word 'killing' on his own. If this method is considered valid for extracting meanings from the

Quran, then any interpretation can be derived by citing the Quran. Those who have attempted to prove the killing of blasphemers from the Quran have employed the same approach as the examples mentioned above.

No verse in the Quran commands the killing of a blasphemer. The truth is that this notion is fabricated and holds no connection to the divine scripture. It is unrelated to the Quran and has no bearing on its teachings.

### **Arguments from the Hadith**

There is no authentic narration in the entire collection of Hadith that commands the killing of a blasphemer. This ruling has been deduced from the Hadith and is not directly stated in the texts. The most common argument put forth in this regard is derived from a Hadith regarding apostasy that states that anyone who has abandoned their religion should be killed. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3027) People who support the killing of blasphemers believe that since blasphemy against the Prophet is viewed as a form of apostasy, engaging in it makes one an apostate and, thus, deserving of death. However, equating apostasy with blasphemy is an erroneous inference in itself.

An apostate chooses to renounce and distance himself from his religion, whereas blasphemy is an act that influences others. Apostasy is an individual action, so the problem is seen to be resolved by executing the apostate, just as the issue of murder is resolved by executing the murderer. On the other hand, blasphemy impacts others through its

defamation, raising objections and attempting to cast doubt on the faith that people follow. In other words, blasphemy criticizes the belief system, highlights unfounded flaws in religion, and raises objections against it. Therefore, while the punishment of the apostate may resolve the problem at hand, the impact of blasphemy cannot be eradicated merely by killing the blasphemer. The effects of blasphemy will persist until misconceptions are dispelled through rational arguments.

Let us consider an example from chapter 108 of the Quran. In Arabic, the word '*Abtar*' means to be cut off. Thus, if a person is without offspring, they are called '*Abtar*' in Arabic. Since Prophet Muhammad did not have male descendants, the people of Makkah derogatorily referred to him as '*Abtar*,' implying that his lineage would not continue after him.

There was a prominent polytheist named Al-'As bin Wa'il who, whenever the Prophet's name was mentioned in his presence, would dismissively say, "Leave him alone. He has no male child." This derogatory statement implied that the Prophet would have no heirs to carry on his message after his death. This was a clear instance of blasphemy. This misconception about the Prophet being '*Abtar*' (without descendants) was spreading among the people in Makkah. Influenced by this false propaganda, many individuals hesitated to believe in him.

The solution to this issue did not lie in killing individuals like Al-'As bin Wa'il and others who shared similar views.

Instead, the answer lay in refuting the propaganda they spread with a strong counter-argument. Consequently, the chapter called Al-Kausar was revealed. In this chapter, God Almighty declared that He had granted “*Kausar*” (abundance) to Muhammad. Thus, it was affirmed that the Prophet would indeed have a legacy, and those who opposed him would be left without any roots or continuity.

‘Kausar’ literally means ‘one of great abundance.’ The verse in the Quran states: “Indeed, We have granted you, [O Muhammad], abundance (*al-Kausar*).” (108:1)

Abdullah bin Abbas states that in the above verse, ‘Kausar’ refers to the blessings and goodness God has bestowed upon the Prophet of Islam. Ikrima, a disciple of Ibn Abbas, further elaborated on this by explaining that it signifies Prophethood and the Quran. This means that God has granted the Prophet something far more significant than having male children—He has bestowed upon him the true religion of God. Millions of people will come under the influence of the Prophet and become faithful followers of this religion. Instead of having just one male heir, Prophet Muhammad has been granted millions of ideological heirs. Even the children of his opponents will take pride in abandoning their own religion and embracing his teachings. Hence, in this situation, one can reflect and decide who lacks heirs—Prophet Muhammad or his adversaries.

This answer, given in the verse of the Quran, was undeniably more impactful than physically killing Al-‘As bin Wa’il. While killing him would have eliminated an individual, this

powerful declaration frustrated the plans of the individual and had a far-reaching effect.

Let us take an example to understand better the distinction between an ‘apostate’ and a ‘shatim.’ Ibn Taymiyyah writes that Hasan bin Thabit Ansari used to respond to the polytheists of Arabia who attacked the Prophet through poetry. These couplets appeared to the blasphemers even harsher than arrows.

To address the ‘shatim,’ a pulpit was arranged in the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah specifically for Hassan bin Thabit. From this elevated position, he would recite poetic couplets in defence of the Prophet, countering the blasphemous remarks made by people. This method effectively defended the Prophet against the perpetrators of ‘shatm.’ (*As-Sarim al-Maslul*, p. 200)

This approach appears appropriate when discussing individuals engaged in ‘shatm.’ Let us compare this with the matter of apostates by altering the narrative: “Hasan bin Thabit responded to those who abandoned the religion of the Prophet and became apostates through his poems. For this purpose, a pulpit was placed in Masjid Nabavi, and Hassan would sit upon it, defending the Prophet against these rebellious apostates.” The first method of responding to blasphemers seems meaningful, while the second method does not hold the same weight.

Abu Bakr Siddiq, the first caliph, exemplifies that true apostates are confronted through force, specifically the sword. In contrast, countering blasphemers effectively

involves responding to their words with more powerful words, as Hassan bin Thabit Ansari demonstrated. This example clarifies the distinction between an apostate and a ‘shatim.’

In addition to the mentioned inferences from the Hadith on apostasy, several other unfounded conclusions have been drawn.

For instance, based on the Hadith mentioned above, it is understood that the issue of apostasy pertains to a believer, explicitly addressing the ruling for someone who initially embraced Islam and later renounced it.

On the contrary, the matter of ‘shatm’ encompasses both believers and disbelievers. Generally, jurists assert that anyone who insults the Prophet Muhammad should be killed, regardless of whether they are believers or disbelievers. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, whoever insults God’s Messenger, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, is obligated to be killed. (p. 4)

Ibn Taymiyyah applies the Hadith mentioned above to both believers and disbelievers equally. Now, a question arises: How can a Hadith that specifically addresses Muslims and mentions the issue of the claimant’s faith be used as the basis for a general ruling that encompasses both believers and disbelievers?

Furthermore, there is no need to infer or deduce what actions should be taken in response to insults and mockery. The Quran and Sunnah provide clear and detailed guidance on this matter.

These texts distinguish between the case of a blasphemmer and an individual who becomes an apostate and abandons his religion. Hence, equating blasphemy and apostasy under a single ruling is incorrect.

Ibn Taymiyyah refers to incidents from the time of the Prophet of Islam as evidence of individuals being executed for blasphemy. However, there is no substantiated evidence from the Prophet's era in Islam that supports the claim of anyone being put to death for blasphemy.

For instance, Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that Ka'b bin al-Ashraf was executed for blasphemy (pp. 70-73). However, the truth is that Ka'b bin al-Ashraf was put to death due to his repeated acts of treason, not for blasphemy. While he, like other opponents, may have expressed contemptuous words, his execution was a result of his persistent violation of the covenant, not solely for blasphemy.

Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah claims that two Ansari youths killed Abu Jahl because of blasphemy (*As-Sarim al-Maslul*, p. 160-159). However, this claim is entirely unfounded. Abu Jahl was killed on the battlefield while fighting against the Prophet of Islam. He had joined the army of the Makkan opponents when they attacked Madinah. The Muslims engaged in defensive war when the Quraysh confronted them at Badr, where many of the disbelievers were killed, including Abu Jahl. Therefore, it is illogical to label this as a case of the death penalty for blasphemy.

Ibn Taymiyyah presents additional examples from the early period to support his argument that the Prophet of

Islam executed individuals for blasphemy. However, these incidents are unrelated, as none of the killings were solely based on blasphemy. There were other factors involved, such as the individuals being killed while fighting on the battlefield or due to acts of treason.

### **Arguments from Jurisprudence**

Jurists commonly assert that anyone who commits blasphemy against the Prophet of Islam or speaks derogatory words about him should be subject to capital punishment, regardless of their religious affiliation. Various books, such as '*Kitabul Umm*' by Al-Shafi'i; '*Sharhul Minhaj*,' *Al-Rawdah Al-Nadiyah*,' by Siddiq Hasan Khan ; '*Al-Raud Al-Basim*' by Al-Shaukani; '*Kashf al-Qina*' '*an Matn el 'Iqna*,' by Mansur bin Yunus Al-Buhuti; '*Fiqh as Sunnah*' by Sayyed Sabiq; and '*Al Fiqh 'ala al-Madhahib al-'Arba'ah*' by Al-Jazari, and '*At-Tashri' al-Jina'i al-Islami*' by Abdul Qadir Oudah, present this viewpoint.

In his extensive work, Allama Ibn Taymiyyah has tried to substantiate and support this perspective with evidence and arguments in his book. He claims that there is a consensus among most Islamic scholars regarding the punishment for blasphemy. (pp. 4-5)

Upon examining the books of jurisprudence, it becomes evident that jurists often rely on the opinions of early scholars when addressing these issues rather than presenting their arguments. If a renowned scholar from the early days has already issued a fatwa on a particular matter, subsequent scholars tend to follow suit without further investigation.



Consequently, they claim a consensus or ‘*ijma*’ among jurists and scholars. However, this consensus is often based on imitation rather than independent research and scholarly inquiry, contrary to the academic and Shariah definitions of ‘*ijma*.’

Consensus is widely regarded as one of the four sources of Shariah. However, it would be incorrect to state that scholars have reached a consensus on the matter of killing blasphemers. Instead, it is more accurate to say that most scholars have expressed a similar opinion.

One form of consensus is when scholars and jurists from different periods of history are unanimous on an issue. This is known as the consensus of the majority of scholars, meaning the opinion shared by the majority.

Another form of consensus, or ‘*ijma*,’ is described by Qadi Baydawi as the agreement among Muslim jurists on a particular issue. (*Minhaj-ul-Usool*, Vol 1, p. 37)

On the legitimacy of consensus, an argument is made from the commandment of consultation in Islam. For example, in this context, the following verse from the Quran is presented: “And consult them in the matter” (3:159) as a source of the principle of consensus. This indicates that consultation is an integral part of the consensus. Consensus is reached through mutual consultation among Muslim scholars. Therefore, consultation is necessary for consensus, and achieving consensus requires all relevant individuals to come together in one place and engage in detailed discussions to reach an agreement.

Throughout history, there has never been a gathering of scholars and jurists specifically focused on the issue of assassinating a blasphemer, where a unanimous decision was made after mutual consultation. Hence, it is incorrect to claim that scholars and jurists have reached a consensus on this matter. However, it would be accurate to say that the majority opinion supports the view of the killing of a blasphemer. If the prevalent viewpoint is referred to as consensus, it is only in a figurative sense rather than being an actual consensus.

Despite these arguments, two crucial factors challenge the notion of consensus on this matter. Firstly, there is no explicit command in the entire Quran or Hadith collection that specifically prescribes the killing of a blasphemer, regardless of whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. Neither the Quran nor the Hadith books contain such a command. Hence, the reality is that this issue, though widely known, is based on inference rather than direct textual evidence from the Quran or Hadith.

Secondly, the issue raised in relation to scholars and jurists is not limited solely to the Prophet of Islam. It applies equally to God, His angels, the Prophet of Islam, and all other prophets. Therefore, according to this juridical perspective, the comprehensive rule states that anyone, whether a believer or a non-believer, who utters insulting words about God, His angels, the Prophet of Islam, or any other prophet, or disparages the religion of God in any way, must

be subjected to the death penalty. The individual should not be allowed to live, even if he repents for his actions.

Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that it was the practice of the Prophet of Islam to order the execution of individuals who blasphemed against Allah, His Messenger, and ridiculed the religion of God. However, it should be noted that Ibn Taymiyyah's statement, "This was the Sunnah of God's Messenger," is not accurate. It is a generalization based on exceptional cases, such as acts of treason. Further clarification on this point is provided below.

Ibn Taymiyyah, after quoting the Hadith Qudsi, "*Yu'dhīnī ibn Adam, Yasubb al-Dahr wa ana al-Dahr*" (The son of Adam hurts Me by abusing Time, for I am Time), from *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4826, asserts that even a lesser degree of abusing God and His Messenger is punishable by death under all circumstances. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the Messenger of Allah unequivocally condemned blaspheming God and His Messenger, and the penalty for such an act is death. Furthermore, he states that if the perpetrator of blasphemy is a Muslim, killing him becomes an obligatory action (p. 550).

In a section of his book, Ibn Taymiyyah writes that anyone who humiliates the Prophet of Islam or any other Prophet is considered a '*kaafir*' (disbeliever). Therefore, the punishment for blasphemy against any prophet is akin to that of blasphemy against the Prophet of Islam. In other words, every blasphemer is deemed an infidel, and it is

permissible to shed their blood, meaning that such a person must be killed.

Abdul Qadir Oudah mentions that jurists hold two opinions regarding mocking prophets and angels. The first opinion states that such a person should be killed without accepting their repentance. The second opinion considers the individual as an apostate, and their repentance will be accepted, but if they commit the offence again, their repentance will not be recognized. (*al-Tashrī‘ al-Jinā’ī*, Vol. 2, pp. 726-727)

Considering the general nature of this command, only a few fortunate individuals in the human population would be exempt from its implications. The vast majority of human beings would fall under the scope of this general order in one way or another. Such a list could be extensive, encompassing almost all human beings, rendering the practicality of implementing this order nullified. If everyone is deserving of death, who would be left to carry out the killings?

On the one hand, jurists have declared blasphemy or ‘shatm’ punishable by death. However, on the other hand, ‘shatm’ is defined in a way that makes almost everyone qualify as a blasphemer in some manner or another.

According to this definition, various actions such as ridiculing, demeaning, taunting, insulting, humiliating, defaming, showing disrespect, offending, backbiting, making jokes, and playing with words are all considered blasphemy. The author suggests that it is not only abusive to utter blasphemous, offensive, and unjust words directly

but also regarded as abusive to insult the message conveyed by the Prophet of Islam indirectly. For instance, making a playful remark implies that the Prophet believed he could conquer the palaces and forts of Rome. (p. 33-34)

Here are a few examples to highlight the seriousness of the problem in the current context.

According to a Hadith Qudsi (Sacred Narration), God Almighty stated, “When a man accuses Time, he abuses Me for I am Time.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4826) Another Hadith mentions that believing in God having a son amounts to ridiculing God. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6099; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2804) Both polytheists who consider angels as sons of God and Christians who believe Jesus is the son of God fall under the category of *shatm* or blasphemy. These instances of ‘*shatm*’ are quite prevalent, implying that a significant number of people, including polytheists, Christians, and many educated individuals, can be found guilty of committing the crime of ‘*shatm*’ against God. Consequently, according to the juridical ruling, everyone would deserve to be killed.

Similar disrespect towards the Prophets is also noteworthy. For instance, Jews may derogatorily refer to Jesus as an illegitimate child, God forbid. Likewise, Christians, being the most prominent religious denomination globally, may label the final Prophet as a False Prophet. By the interpretation of this law, it would mean that all Jews and Christians worldwide should be killed.

The same applies to those who hold polytheistic beliefs, associating a non-God with any of the attributes of God. This group includes grave worshippers and saint worshipers (Akabir) among Muslims, in addition to well-known polytheists. They will all be considered guilty of blasphemy against God because they express words that can be seen as disrespectful to God. According to this viewpoint, all these individuals are considered deserving of death, and none of them should be spared.

It is essential to clarify that the above statement does not reflect the author's opinion. Instead, it represents the fundamental requirement of proponents of the ideology of "Killing the shatim."

As mentioned earlier, making allegations against religion or mocking it is considered a crime that warrants capital punishment, and in today's supposedly modern and educated world, nearly 99% of people would be found guilty of this offence.

Similarly, socialists and communists can be referred to as "criminals" since they perceive religion as a form of mental opium. While others may not use the same explicit language, they express similar ideas in more polite terms.

According to this belief, approximately 99% of modern educated individuals would be deemed deserving of death.

Moreover, proponents of this perspective argue that there is no requirement for a legal trial or a Government directive to execute those who commit blasphemy. They claim that "if the Islamic Government fails to impose this punishment,

any Muslim can take it upon themselves to enforce it and kill the offender.” This viewpoint is entirely absurd.

Contemporary Muslims face a peculiar contradiction when it comes to the issue of blasphemy. They assert that slandering any of the prophets of God is as grave an offence as speaking ill of the last Prophet. They proclaim that every such offender must be killed. However, in practical terms, their outrage is solely directed at insults targeting Prophet Muhammad. Regardless of the nature of insults aimed at other prophets, they remain unmoved.

There have been countless depictions of the Prophet Jesus, found in millions of books and homes, without eliciting any resentment among Muslims. However, if Muslims hear news of their Prophet’s images being published in a newspaper, even from a distance, they immediately become infuriated and often respond violently. Conversely, numerous blasphemous statements and publications about other prophets do not seem to bother Muslims. Their concern is solely provoked when negative news pertains to their own Prophet.

This situation has escalated to the extent that not only non-Muslims or disbelievers but even Muslims themselves show veneration for their Prophet while disrespecting other prophets. Several examples can be given to illustrate this point. For instance, if a Hindu, Christian, or Jew writes that “Prophet Muhammad fled from Makkah,” all Muslims will rise and proceed to burn the book in which the word “fled” is used instead of “migrated.” However, they remain

undisturbed when a Muslim writer states that “this is the same town from which Prophet Yunus fled” (*Tafheem-ul-Quran*, Volume 4, p. 309).

The truth is that the current mindset among Muslims involves discrimination between God’s Messengers. However, those who engage in such discrimination do not deserve reward but punishment in God’s eyes.

It is a fact that the concept of “killing the blasphemer” is unfounded. There is no authentic evidence for it in the Quran and Sunnah. Throughout the history of Islam, from its inception until now, this concept has never been put into practice, nor is it likely to be adopted in the future.

During the time of the Prophet, the Christians in Arabia used to label him a self-proclaimed prophet. The Jews were also guilty of disrespecting both the Prophet of Islam and Jesus Christ. Additionally, the polytheists residing in Makkah insulted the Prophet and referred to the angels as daughters of God. Hence, their level of guilt was even greater.

In this context, we can say that a significant portion, at least 95%, of the ancient Arabian population engaged in some form or the other of blasphemy. If Islamic Shariah had prescribed the killing of the blasphemers, these individuals would have been mercilessly killed, resulting in the elimination of a majority of the Arab population. And, if this punishment was a ‘*hadd*’ penalty (A punishment fixed in the Quran for crimes), the Prophet could not have pardoned the perpetrators according to the Shariah ruling.

However, Islamic history demonstrates that Prophet



Muhammad did not take such action; instead, he forgave them all. Had Shariah obligated him to impose the death penalty on blasphemers, he could not have granted them forgiveness.

It is stated that the Prophet's role was that of a bearer of Divine Religion. His purpose was not to punish the wrongdoers but to convey God's guidance to humanity. The Quran refers to him as "Rahmat ul lil Alamin," which means "Mercy to all mankind" (21:107), a title bestowed upon him by Almighty God. However, some Muslims desire for the Prophet of Islam to be remembered in history as a "killer of people."

It is widely known that punishment for blasphemy was never administered during the time of the Prophet of Islam, even after his passing. While some individuals were killed during the Prophet's era for reasons such as treason, rebellion, or in the context of warfare, no scholar of that time ever issued a fatwa calling for an execution solely based on verbal abuse. Furthermore, there is no historical record of any ruler carrying out such an execution.

The truth is that criticizing God, angels, or the prophets does not constitute blasphemy. It signifies raising objections, which is not a crime in its simplest form. Common social or moral offences can be deterred through corporal punishment, but objections and criticisms cannot be curbed similarly. The only viable action in such cases is to refute them with compelling arguments. Such objections or

criticisms should be disproven through more powerful and persuasive dialogue than those presented by the critic.

Based on these compelling reasons, the writer firmly believes that the doctrine held by the “majority of the jurists” regarding the killing of the blasphemer is either not understood in the same manner as Ibn Taymiyyah and like-minded individuals, or even if it is interpreted in that sense, it should not be considered valid as it is not prescribed in the Quran and Hadith.

There is no explicit command found in the Quran and Hadith and the Prophet’s actions that confirm that the blasphemer must be put to death. Furthermore, if we analyze this issue as explained by the jurists, it must be acknowledged that all scholars and rulers have consistently violated this rule of Shariah throughout Islamic history. Even the Companions of the Prophet would be included in this extensive list of violators.

The inconsistency of this popular view with the Quran and Sunnah clearly indicates that Ibn Taymiyyah was well aware of it. In his 600-page book, he attempts to explain why the Prophet did not enforce this supposed Shariah order on numerous occasions and allowed many disrespectful individuals to go unpunished. However, these so-called justifications can be seen as adding insult to injury.

For instance, in one section of the book, Ibn Taymiyyah mentions some of the hypocrites in Madinah who allegedly mocked and humiliated the Prophet. Yet, they were not subjected to capital punishment. In this context, Ibn

Taymiyyah writes that the sentence was not administered to them because jihad against the hypocrites was not obligatory then. Instead, the Prophet was commanded to endure their persecution and forgive anyone who insulted him.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah's statement, the Prophet was instructed to overlook the hypocrites' insults and humiliations and forgive them. Ibn Taymiyyah suggests that this command was temporary and later revoked. However, he does not specify when this revocation took place.

The Hadith and Sunnah provide evidence that the Prophet did not order the execution of hypocrites who had committed the offense of mockery and insolence against him. This demonstrates that, according to the revelations received by the Prophet and the example set by his actions, the command to forgive and avoid such cases persisted until the end and was never abrogated.

The question arises: If the Quran and Sunnah do not provide evidence of the abrogation of this command, then what other source did Ibn Taymiyyah rely on to make such a claim? Did another Prophet emerge after Muhammad bin Abdullah, who informed him that the ruling on amnesty had been revoked and that all blasphemers must now be killed?

If that is not the case, and indeed it is not, then Ibn Taymiyyah and those who share his views should adhere to the teachings of the Prophet on this matter. They should refrain from considering them abrogated through self-fashioned interpretations and advocating for actions not

based on the Quran or the words and actions of the Prophet. Ibn Taymiyyah's theory relies on conjecture and inference, which do not hold as valid arguments in such a case.

Scholars throughout different eras have disagreed with this viewpoint. Sufyan al-Thawri (97-161 AH), known as a leader in the field of religious sciences during his time, expressed that an apostate should always be asked to repent and should not be killed. He applies the same rule to a blasphemer, as the ruling for blasphemy is derived from the Hadith on apostasy.

## THOSE WHO RIDICULE THE PROPHET

History proves that the Prophet of Islam faced ridicule like other prophets before him. Numerous incidents highlighting this can be found in the books of Hadith and Seerah. Therefore, the Prophet serves as a role model for us in every aspect of life. In this case, we should follow the example set by the Prophet of Islam through his actions.

A thorough examination of these events in the books of Hadith and Seerah reveals that the Prophet viewed such incidents as challenges rather than mere insults. When we perceive an incident as challenging, our minds naturally seek solutions. Conversely, if we perceive it as insolence, it only fuels a desire for revenge.

The study of the Prophet's life demonstrates that he never regarded such incidents as acts of insolence or contempt.

He never sought revenge. Instead, he approached them as problems to be addressed, employing wisdom in his responses. This is why we find various approaches to dealing with such matters, as different situations require different methods.

1. One notable aspect to mention is that the Prophet never resorted to the method of protesting and holding public agitations against those who insulted him, a method that some Muslims adopt today in response to instances of 'insolence.' Despite facing repeated insults and humiliation during his lifetime, the Prophet did not protest publicly against those responsible.

The reason for this is quite evident. Making blasphemy a subject of public agitation would only serve to amplify the words of the abuser, bringing them to the attention of more people, especially in today's world where media can quickly spread such information. In such cases, public agitation proves to be counterproductive.

An example of this is the case of Salman Rushdie's book, 'The Satanic Verses.' Considered by many as an absurd book, it would have likely been read by only a few thousand people under normal circumstances. However, due to the misguided agitation caused by some Muslims, it gained significant attention and became a bestseller among English books. 'The Times of India' (March 17, 1989) and the New York Dateline reported that, according to a review in *The New York Times*, 'The Satanic Verses' had reached the top spot on The New York Times best-seller list for hardcover fiction.

*TIME* Magazine featured a report on Rushdie's book in its February 27, 1989 issue. Consequently, *TIME* received 240 letters, one of which was from Margareta du Rietz, stating, "Very few people took notice of this novel. Now, thanks to Khomeini, it has become world-famous."

Salman Rushdie expresses his controversial ideas solely in his book. However, due to the uproar caused by some Muslims, his ideas gained widespread coverage in newspapers and magazines worldwide. Consequently, many people became unnecessarily interested in reading his book. It has now been translated into more than 20 languages and was published in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and other countries, enabling non-English speakers to read this 'famous' book. Regrettably, the foolish actions of some Muslims led to chaos in the name of "Kill Salman Rushdie," resulting in the loss of Muslim lives and injuries numbering in the dozens and hundreds. Meanwhile, Salman Rushdie has become a literary figure and is currently under the protection of the British royal authorities.

2. Statements made by Muslim leaders regarding these incidents often mention that the book has offended the sentiments of millions of Muslims. This phrase, however, has no basis in Islamic teachings. The Prophet never used such words when faced with a similar situation. Additionally, there is no provision in the Islamic "Criminal Code" that declares hurting the feelings of Muslims as a criminal offence punishable by death. It is undoubtedly an innovation (*bid'aa*)

in Islamic law. Making such statements is a greater offence than the act of blasphemy committed by the offender.

3. As mentioned earlier, the Prophet of Islam's response in such cases was not to initiate a public outcry against the 'insolent' but to seek a resolution to the problem. Depending on the circumstances, he employed different approaches to address the issue.

A common solution to such situations was to ignore the offensive remarks. In this regard, the Quran commands believers:

“Do not yield to the unbelievers and the hypocrites: ignore their hurtful talk. Instead, put your trust in God; God is your all-sufficient guardian.” (33:48)

This verse is explained in *Al-Tafsir Al-Mazhari*, quoting Abdullah bin Abbas and Qatada, that God commands believers, particularly those addressing the Prophet, to exercise patience in the face of hurtful talk and to ignore the harm caused by it. Therefore, believers are advised not to be bothered or afraid of such remarks and (according to Abu Ishaq al-Zajjaj, a Commentator of the Quran) not to engage in arguments or debates with the offenders. Instead, they are encouraged to place their trust in God, who will surely suffice them. (Vol. 7, p. 355)

There is a prophetic tradition narrated by Umar Farooq, stating: “Solve the problem of falsehood by remaining silent about it.” (*Hilyatul Awliya wa Tabaqatul Asfiya*, Vol. 1, p. 55) This highlights the importance of

not engaging in unnecessary debates or discussions that may perpetuate falsehood.

By adopting such an approach, falsehood naturally loses its power. Therefore, there is no need to use force or aggression when dealing with something that can be effectively addressed without it.

4. One of the methods observed in the life of the Prophet is responding to opponents' words through logical arguments. In ancient times, poetry held a similar status to journalism in the present era. Journalism serves to spread information to a broader audience today, while poetry served that purpose in ancient times.

During the time of the Prophet, his opponents would express their condemnation through poetic verses. For example, Umm Jamil, the wife of Abu Lahab, a polytheist, would recite such poems against him. One such verse can be found in the Prophet's biography, where she expresses, "Muhammad is the condemned one, we reject him. We do not obey his orders. And we hate his religion." (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Volume 1, p. 379)

In the Makkan period, the Prophet Muhammad did not respond to such matters. Instead, he remarked to his companion, 'Are you not amazed at the persecution of the Quraysh? They insult and call me 'Mudhamman (the condemned one),' whereas I am Muhammad (the praised one).' (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 1, p. 356) However, in the Madinan period, he appointed Hassan bin Thabit to respond to them through poetry. This method was employed by the



Prophet, as recorded in the books of Seerah, which were written during the early period of Islam.

5. According to Ibn Ishaq, during the incident at Hunain, the Prophet gave some camels to Al-Abbas bin Mirdas. However, the number of camels was fewer than he expected. As a result, he became angry and expressed his frustration through a biting satire directed at the Prophet. In response, the Prophet said, "Go and cut off his tongue on my behalf." Eventually, more camels were given to Al-Abbas bin Mirdas until he agreed. The narrator explains that the Prophet's intention was the same when he asked the Companions to cut off his tongue. The Prophet meant to make him stop saying such a thing rather than physically cutting his tongue. That is why more camels were given to him until he agreed to give up his satire.

This example highlights that the Prophet's objective was to punish the critic and silence him. Depending on the circumstances, he would employ different strategies to achieve this. For instance, if it seemed that providing money or goods would silence a person and end their unjustified criticism, the Prophet would give them the necessary resources to achieve that silence.

6. When Makkah was conquered, the Prophet gathered the Makkan polytheists who had committed various forms of aggression against him. They had subjected him to verbal abuse and engaged in practical acts of aggression, doing everything in their power to harm him. According to ancient customs, all of them could have been subject to capital

punishment. However, the Prophet chose a different path. He unilaterally forgave them all, declaring, “Go, you are all free.” (*Sunan Al-Kubra* by Al-Baihaqi, Hadith No. 18276)

The narrator recounts how, when non-Muslims were brought before the Prophet at the Kabah, he chose not to take any action against them. Instead, he pardoned them all, declaring, ‘Go, you are all free.’ Hearing these words of general amnesty, they felt like they had been resurrected from their graves. This remarkable event led all these insolent Makkans to surrender and join the Prophet in his mission as his Companions. (*Sunan Al-Kubra* by Al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 18275)

The Sunnah of the Prophet teaches us that one way to respond to abuses is through forgiveness, even when one has complete control over the situation and even when the crime committed is so severe that capital punishment could be justified as per international law.

The conversion of these enemies to Islam after being granted general amnesty by the Prophet exemplifies the remarkable wisdom he demonstrated through his generous treatment. The Prophet displayed great wisdom by setting them free and winning their hearts. As a result, those who were once enemies of Islam became future friends and supporters of the faith.

The act of forgiving these individuals, who were confirmed criminals, essentially amounted to the psychological eradication of their prior rebellion and stubbornness. This special treatment served to undo the conditioning they had

undergone. Their fabricated personas gave way to their inherent nature, and they became the Prophet's followers.

### **The Bigger Culprit**

The movement among Muslims against Salman Rushdie was purportedly carried out in the name of protecting the honour of the Prophet of Islam. However, regarding its outcomes, this movement has only undermined the Prophet's honour. According to the Quran, the distinctive status of the Prophet of Islam is that of a Prophet of Mercy (21:107). Yet, this so-called movement centred around allegations of blasphemy has unfortunately portrayed him, God forbid, as a 'Prophet of violence.'

The agitations led by Muslims against Salman Rushdie escalated into acts of violence in various locations, resulting in loss of life and property. Such actions are unlawful and tarnish the reputation of the Prophet of Islam. For instance, it was reported by London News that on the morning of July 2, 1989, one of the largest bookstores in central London, 'Collet's,' was partially destroyed by a firebomb suspected to have been thrown by anti-Rushdie protesters (*The Times of India*, July 7, 1989, p.14).

This incident was reported by 'The Times of India' (July 7, 1989). 'Qaumi Awaaz' (July 7, 1989) also mentioned this news with this addition that no copies of "The Satanic Verses" had been sold from this London store since Christmas (p. 2).

Such incidents are seen as acts of barbarism in the modern world. If Muslims had engaged in such aggression in the name of their community, it would have been perceived as a communal issue. However, since they have carried out these actions in the name of the Prophet of Islam, naturally, it will be associated with the Prophet of Islam. As a result, people may assume that these actions reflect what the Prophet of Islam taught his followers. While Rushdie defamed himself through his writings in 'The Satanic Verses,' Muslims have inadvertently defamed the Prophet of Islam through their actions. It becomes clear who the bigger culprit is in this scenario.



SECTION  
FOUR

## PRACTICAL WISDOM

Abdullah bin Ubayy of Madinah was known as a hypocritical Muslim who harboured intense hostility towards the Prophet of Islam. He would make baseless and abusive remarks against the Prophet and level accusations against his wives. Even the Quran identifies him as the leader of the hypocrites (24:11).

Upon witnessing Abdullah bin Ubayy's criminal acts, Umar Farooq sought permission from the Prophet to kill this hypocrite. However, the Prophet responded by saying, "If I do that, people will say that Muhammad killed his Companions." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4905)

Undoubtedly, abusing the Prophet and engaging in character assassination of his wives are serious crimes. However, this tradition of the Prophet teaches us that there is something even more significant from an Islamic perspective: protecting the image of Islam. Therefore, it is crucial to refrain from actions that may allow people to distort the image of Islam. The primary focus of Islam is to call people to God. Thus, the goal of conveying the divine message should always take precedence, while other matters should be considered secondary.

Considering the primary focus of Islam, let us evaluate the strong reaction of contemporary Muslims toward Salman Rushdie's book. It was inevitable that if there were demands for his assassination or if a 'fatwa' was issued against him, the international press and non-Muslim journalism would

seize the opportunity to distort the image of Islam on a large scale.

In ancient times, the impact of defaming Islam by individuals like Abdullah bin Ubayy would have been limited to Madinah or perhaps the whole of Arabia. However, in the case of Salman Rushdie, there was a grave concern that issuing a 'fatwa' for his killing would trigger a global campaign to defame Islam, which indeed did occur.

This crucial aspect seems to have been overlooked by present-day Muslim leaders and those who follow them. In this matter, Muslims have followed their desires rather than adhering to the Sunnah of the Prophet. It is not easy to find a more extreme example in history of violating the Prophetic Sunnah in the name of the Prophet.

The *TIME* Magazine (March 20, 1989) published a letter from Abdul Hussein Majid Kafai of Ottawa, Canada, in which he referred to Salman Rushdie's book as reprehensible. Kafai expressed the view that it is better to let Rushdie live and be condemned by fanatical Muslims rather than have him killed and, as a result, the entire Muslim world be cursed. The author of the text agrees with this comment by Abdul Hussein Majid Kafai.

The Prophet of Islam holds the highest position of honour and glory, known as Mahmood, in this world and the Hereafter. (Quran, 17:79) His elevated personality remains untarnished by the writings of someone like Rushdie, even to the slightest degree.

However, the Muslim community created a stir by issuing



a fatwa against Rushdie, providing the opponents of Islam with an opportunity to defame the religion. People began associating Islam with bloodshed and violence, portraying it as a bloodthirsty religion. From this perspective, the violent campaigns launched against Salman Rushdie did not bring any benefit to Muslims but instead resulted in losing a crucial aspect of Islam: the opportunity to invite people to embrace the message of God.

In ancient Arabia, the disbelievers and Muslims had access to the same form of 'media.' However, the modern world operates quite differently. We now live in an era of global journalism, where Muslims do not have a single newspaper or magazine that reaches all nations worldwide. On the other hand, those opposing Islam and Muslims have extensive control over global journalism, with their publications reaching millions of readers worldwide.

This is a significant concern. The Muslim perspective often finds representation only in local or community press, while anti-Islam and anti-Muslim propaganda quickly finds its place in international newspapers and magazines as well as digital and social media. Their reports and articles swiftly circulate throughout the world.

In such a situation, it becomes the responsibility of Muslims to refrain from creating unnecessary uproar over sensitive issues. This is because, given the current scenario, such uproar will not bring any benefits to Muslims. Instead, non-Muslim international journalism will seize the opportunity to tarnish their image and discredit them on a global scale.

Muslims may find themselves helplessly witnessing their own disgrace, as well as that of Islam, without the ability to undo the damage caused by the international media.

## THE WAY OF THE PROPHET

The Quran portrays the mistreatment that the Prophet of Islam and other prophets faced from their contemporaries. These prophets were subjected to mockery, humiliation, and false accusations. However, the Quran does not declare these criminals as deserving to be killed. Instead, their charges were countered with sound arguments. An example of this can be seen in these verses of the Quran:

“They say, ‘He is certainly mad.’ Yet it is purely an admonition to mankind.” (68:51-52)

These verses highlight that the immediate response to those who labeled the Prophet as mad was not to call for their execution. Instead, their allegations were refuted through logical arguments. The verse essentially conveys the message: “You who accuse the Prophet of madness, look at his words. Are they the words of a madman? The Quran he presents to you is a complete reminder and an admonition, offering the best guidance for humanity. Can a person who is truly insane produce a book containing such noble teachings?”

This illustrates the approach of the Prophet, which involved responding to criticism through reasoned discourse rather than resorting to violence.

Prophet Muhammad consistently adhered to this approach throughout his life. He either patiently endured the mockery and ridicule directed towards him or responded to it through dialogue and reasoning.

Prophet Muhammad was not a prophet who resorted to violence or sought vengeance; instead, he embodied the qualities of mercy and compassion towards all of humanity (*Rahmatul lil alameen*). His forgiveness extended even to those who persecuted him. He remained a shining example of compassion, displaying a sublime character as affirmed by the Quranic verse: “For you are truly of a sublime character.” (68:4)

Islam is not solely concerned with implementing a system of legal punishments. Its core objective lies in guiding individuals to become devoted worshippers of God rather than merely designating them as criminals and subjecting them to physical punishments like flogging, shooting, or hanging.

Unlike a legal penal code that may not be concerned with public perception, a caller to God aims to bring people closer to God instead of eliminating them. Therefore, a caller to God (*dayee*) unilaterally adopts the approach of patience and avoidance. His focus is on individuals’ futures, emphasizing forgiveness to cultivate a receptive space in their minds for the message they convey.

The approach of one who calls to God is characterized by benevolence towards people, aiming to transform those who may currently mock or oppose them into future admirers

and supporters. The focus is not on seeking the destruction of others but rather on winning them over to the message of God. The goal of Islam is to create a positive impact and foster a change of heart and mind in individuals, leading them towards embracing the teachings and principles being conveyed to them.

### **Refraining from a Bad Reputation**

A factory's development relies heavily on maintaining a good reputation. Similarly, to effectively convey the message of Islam, upholding a positive image of the religion is vital. This holds true even in challenging situations, such as blasphemy.

To highlight this point, the example of Abdullah bin Ubayy is often cited. He was the leader of the Khazraj tribe in Madinah and was on the verge of being crowned as their king when the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madinah. The people of Madinah embraced the Prophet as their leader, which caused distress to Abdullah bin Ubayy. Despite outwardly accepting Islam under situational pressures, he harboured deep hatred and continued to humiliate the Prophet to seek revenge.

One day, as the Prophet passed by Abdullah bin Ubayy's fortified residence, known as Mazahim, he dismounted from his donkey upon seeing members of Abdullah's tribe gathered there. The Prophet approached Abdullah, greeted him, and sat among them while reciting a portion of the Quran.

According to the narration by Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha, Abdullah bin Ubayy responded to the Prophet's recitation with indifference. He remarked that if the Prophet's recitation was true, he should confine himself to his home and only share it with those seeking it. Abdullah bin Ubayy advised the Prophet not to trouble those not interested and to refrain from mentioning it in the presence of those who disliked it. The Prophet found Abdullah's statement offensive, but he remained silent and continued on his way.

This incident serves as an example of the Prophet's magnanimity and his commitment to preserving a positive image of Islam. Despite the ill-treatment he received from Abdullah, the Prophet maintained a peaceful and respectful approach, recognizing the importance of fostering goodwill and dispelling misconceptions about Islam.

In the Battle of Uhud, which took place in Shawwal in the third year after Hijrah (3 AH), the Quraysh army marched from Makkah towards Madinah. The Prophet consulted with the Muslims regarding what their strategy should be. Some suggested leaving the city to engage the enemy, while others recommended staying within the confines of Madinah to fight. Abdullah bin Ubayy advocated for the latter approach. Ultimately, however, the Prophet agreed with the former view and led a force of a thousand men out of Madinah.

During the Battle of Uhud, Abdullah bin Ubayy displayed disloyalty by separating himself from the Muslim army and his three hundred men. At a critical time, he insulted the

Prophet by making derogatory remarks, suggesting that the Prophet obeyed others and did not listen to him. He expressed his disbelief in why they should put themselves in danger. (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 2, p. 64) This incident demonstrated his severe disloyalty to the Muslim cause.

He continued to insult the Prophet by making derogatory remarks. The Prophet showed patience and resilience in the face of offensive remarks and made decisions based on what he believed to be in the best interest of the Muslims at the time.

In the expedition of Bani Al-Mustaliq, which took place in Shaban of the sixth year after Hijrah (6 AH), Abdullah bin Ubayy also accompanied the Prophet. On the return from the journey, the Prophet halted with his Companions at a certain place, and they departed from there in the darkness of the early morning. At that time, due to an accidental mistake, Hazrat Ayesha, who was travelling with them, was left behind from the caravan.

During journeys with the Prophet, it was the duty of Safwan bin Muattal al-Sulami, who was one of the Companions, to remain behind and retrieve any items that people might have inadvertently left. He came across Hazrat Ayesha and offered her a ride on his camel, safely bringing her back to the Prophet. Abdullah bin Ubayy took advantage of this incident and exploited it for character assassination and spreading rumours against the Prophet. He used this incident to discredit the Prophet and his message, causing

suspicion and rumours in Madinah. (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 2, p. 298)

Details of this incident can be found in the books of *Seerah* (Biography of the Prophet) and *Tafsirs* (Commentary of the Quran). Referring to this event, the Quran states:

“He who took the greater part in it shall have a terrible punishment.” (24:11)

The person referred to as deserving ‘the greatest punishment’ in this verse is Abdullah bin Ubayy. However, he did not receive punishment in this world. Instead, his case was left to be judged by God in the Hereafter. Eventually, he died a natural death in Madinah.

Another story goes like this: While returning from the battle of Bani Al-Mustaliq (5 AH), a group of Muslims gathered to get water from a single source. During that time, a Muhajir and an Ansar got into a fight. The Muhajir called his people, “O people of migrants!” and the Ansari called out, “O people of Ansar!” The situation escalated to the point where the two groups confronted each other. The Prophet of Islam had to intervene and end the conflict.

Abdullah bin Ubayy was already displeased with the arrival of the Muslims from Makkah and the Prophet seeking refuge in Madinah. He took advantage of the incident and delivered a speech to provoke his tribe’s people. In his remarks, he said, “Raise your dog and make it strong so that it will bite you. I swear by God if we return to Madinah,

the honourable ones will drive out the dishonourable ones.” (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 2, p. 291)

Upon hearing these words from Abdullah bin Ubayy, the Companions of the Prophet became angry. Umar Farooq said, “O Messenger of God, let me kill this hypocrite.” The Prophet responded, “Leave him be. I do not want people to say that Muhammad kills his own Companions.” (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4905)

### **More Examples**

Many such incidents are documented in the Books of Seerah. For instance, Laith bin Saeed narrated from Yahya bin Saeed that on one occasion, a man approached the Prophet in Je’rana while he was distributing charity to people. Upon witnessing this, the man exclaimed, “O Muhammad, be just!” In response, the Prophet said to him, “Woe unto you! If I do not uphold justice, then who else will?” Observing this conversation, Umar felt compelled to intervene and requested, “O Messenger of God, allow me to kill this hypocrite.” To which the Prophet replied, “God forbid that people should accuse me of killing my own Companions.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1063)

Upon his return from the battle of Tabuk, the Prophet of Islam was accompanied by some hypocritical Muslims. These individuals would separate themselves from the sincere Muslims and engage in discussions against the Prophet. Hudhayfah, a Companion of the Prophet, recounted an incident where the Prophet pointed out a group of



people at night and asked if they knew who they were. The people expressed their ignorance. The Prophet then revealed that those individuals were the ones who sat and spoke ill of them.

In response, the people asked the Prophet if they were permitted to kill those individuals. The Prophet replied, “I do not wish for people to say that Muhammad kills his own Companions.” (*Al-Mujam Al-Awsat*, Hadith No. 8100)

### **Practical Wisdom**

Incidents highlight that during the time of the Prophet, some individuals insulted and blasphemed him. Consequently, some of the Companions desired to kill these offenders and sought the permission of the Prophet to do so. However, the Prophet did not permit them. He reasoned that if he were to kill them, it would give people an opportunity to discredit Islam by claiming that Muhammad had killed his own Companions.

This prophetic example emphasizes that there is something more crucial than seeking retribution through “killing” those who insult or abuse the Prophet of Islam. It conveys the message that Islam is a religion of mercy. In other words, even in the face of blatant blasphemy and persecution of Muslims, if there is a concern that the image of Islam may be tarnished, people should not be killed.

Instead, the focus should be on prioritizing the opportunity to spread the message of Islam and convey its teachings. The hurt sentiments of Muslims are not as significant

in the eyes of God and the Prophet as safeguarding the interests of Islam. Therefore, if the feelings of Muslims are hurt, they should restrain themselves from unnecessary expressions of anger and frustration. This approach ensures that valuable opportunities to call people to God are not wasted. Following this practical wisdom, the Muslims will continue to focus on the primary aim of Islam—connecting people with their Creator and making them aware of God’s Creation Plan for humanity.

### **Do Not Give the Opponents a Chance**

The incidents mentioned in the previous sections involved individuals who were engaged in blasphemy against the Prophet and Islam, making them deserving of punishment, according to the perspective of the Companions. They were considered enemies of God and the Prophet, leading the Companions to seek permission from the Prophet to execute them.

However, in this world, where individuals are free to express their views, forcing others to speak only what we desire is impossible. It was inevitable that if the Prophet had focused solely on their abusive words without considering the consequences of their punishment, people would have indeed accused him, saying, “Muhammad kills his own Companions.” Therefore, although the Prophet would have been justified in punishing these individuals, given the circumstances, such action would have tarnished the reputation of Islam and the Prophet. Consequently, the

Prophet refrained from taking such measures, choosing to avoid anything that would create a negative perception of Islam among people.

This approach demonstrated the Prophet's wisdom in handling such situations. The same problem persists today, as exemplified by the case of Salman Rushdie. While Rushdie has undoubtedly expressed anti-Islamic sentiments, if Muslims were to attempt to punish him, people would not view it as the punishment of an enemy of Islam. Instead, they would criticize Muslims for suppressing freedom of thought and argue that Islam relies on the power of the sword rather than the strength of argumentation.

We must acknowledge that the current era places immense value on freedom of thought, considering it the highest ideal in modern times. It is perceived as the ultimate good. Consequently, any religion or system that does not uphold freedom of thought is seen as uncivilized and barbaric by contemporary society. In such a context, the greatest hostility towards Islam would be engaging in actions that would allow the world to claim that Islam suppresses freedom and is, therefore, a barbaric religion. In this scenario, the prophetic tradition demands that Islam be protected from this 'disgrace' at any cost.

The Prophet chose not to kill the enemies of Islam to keep the door open for calling people to God. On the other hand, some Muslims are more interested in destroying the enemies of Islam, thereby closing all avenues for spreading the message of God to people. Their actions have no

connection to the true essence of God's religion and the teachings of the Prophet.

## Two Quotes

The frenzied agitation displayed by Muslims against Salman Rushdie was ultimately futile and had severe consequences for Islam's reputation worldwide. Numerous examples of this negative impact emerged in the first half of 1989. The following instances serve as illustrations:

1. A British-born individual of a neo-Muslim English background, residing on the outskirts of London, had recently embraced Islam. He wrote to a friend in Lucknow expressing his love for his family, relatives, friends, and entire nation. However, he experienced a significant shift in attitudes. He was attacked from all sides, which was an unforeseen development. The intensity of the hatred towards Islam within British society was something he had never encountered during the few months he spent there after embracing Islam. (*Al-Furqan* Monthly, Lucknow, April 1989, pp. 5-4)

2. *Time* Magazine (April 17, 1989) featured a two-page illustrated report on Islam in Europe. Within that report, a paragraph stands out as follows:

“The incendiary furore over Salman Rushdie and his novel, ‘The Satanic Verses’, reinforced the longstanding Western stereotype of Islam as a religion of intolerance and violence. The clash in Europe was especially acute. Almost overnight, efforts to

dispel old perceptions were shattered,” says a French historian and Islamic scholar, Bruno Etienne. “Rather than the televised images of thousands of screaming Muslims, I would have preferred to witness the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who reflect and pray privately for an Islam that is integrated.” (*Time Magazine*, April 17, 1989, p. 40)

Based on these two references, we can conclude that the meaningless agitation carried out by Muslims against Rushdie did not yield any positive outcome but instead brought disrepute to Islam and the Prophet of Islam.

## EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST PERIOD

In present times, there is a common perception among Muslims that insulting or abusing the Prophet of Islam is a crime that warrants the death penalty. According to this view, as soon as someone utters words deemed insulting to the honour of the Prophet, they should be immediately killed. However, from a Shariah perspective, this concept is unfounded as there is no clear evidence for it in Islam.

The Quran indicates that mockery of the Prophet of Islam was not exceptional. This criminal activity has always been directed at all the prophets of God, without exception (Quran, 15:11, 43:7). The Quran mentions at least fifty instances where the prophets were taunted, mocked, ridiculed, and humiliated by their contemporaries, leading to dishonourable acts against them. However, nowhere in

the Quran have the prophets been commanded to kill those who mocked them.

While the Quran repeatedly condemns the crime of hurting the prophets, it does not prescribe the death penalty for the perpetrators. Instead, the Quran presents two types of responses to such mockery. One is to refute the argument logically, and the other is to warn the abusers of God's punishment in the Hereafter.

These mockers consisted of both non-Muslims (Quran, 36:30) and hypocritical Muslims (Quran, 2:14, 9:65). The Prophet faced these incidents in their most severe forms from both groups. However, the Quran does not prescribe the death penalty as a legal punishment for either non-Muslims or hypocritical Muslims based on their abuse of the Prophet.

If insulting the Prophet had been declared a crime punishable by death in an absolute sense, it would have caused irreparable damage to Islam, surpassing the harm caused by the culprits themselves. This is because many revered figures of Islam, known as the '*Sahaba*' (Companions of the Prophet) were initially involved in the very same crime of attacking the honour of the Prophet. If they had been killed as soon as they committed this offence, it would have meant not just the elimination of the culprits but the eradication of historical personalities. Consequently, the history of Islam, which holds great pride for Muslims today, would not have come into existence. All those valuable lives would have ended before they accepted Islam and could play their

destined roles in shaping the history of the world according to the divine plan.

To illustrate this point, some incidents from the time of the Prophet are shared in the coming sections. These events, involving Muslims and non-Muslims, are not exhaustive but merely serve as examples.

### **Looking to the Future**

Suhail bin Amr, a prominent figure in ancient Makkah, is now recognized as one of the Companions of the Prophet. However, before that, he was an enemy of the Prophet of Islam and participated in the Battle of Badr on the side of the Makkan opponents. In this battle, the Muslims emerged victorious, and seventy Makkans, including Suhail bin Amr, were captured and brought to Madinah.

Suhail bin Amr possessed exceptional oratory skills and held the position of orator for the Quraysh. He utilized his eloquence to the fullest extent, using poetry and rhetoric to mock the Prophet and incite people against Islam. When he was captured and brought to Madinah, the Muslims had complete control over him. Umar Farooq, one of the Companions, proposed to the Prophet: "O Messenger of God, allow me to break the front teeth of Suhail. This will make his tongue stick out, distort his voice, and render him incapable of standing up against you as an orator."

This solution presented by Umar was legitimate, but the Prophet declined to accept it. He responded, "I will not disfigure him. If I were to do so, God would do the same

to me, despite being a messenger of God.” The Prophet then offered Umar a valuable lesson. He said, “Perhaps Suhail bin Amr will stand in a position where you cannot condemn him.” (*Al-Waqidi, Kitab al-Maghazi*, Vol. 1, p. 107) As a result, Suhail bin Amr was allowed to return to his homeland unharmed.

In an extraordinary display of generosity, the Prophet released Suhail bin Amr despite having complete control over him as a prisoner of war from the Battle of Badr (2 AH). However, Suhail bin Amr did not cease his anti-Islamic activities. He continued to incite the people of Makkah and launched an attack on Madinah with an army of three thousand, resulting in the devastating Battle of Uhud (3 AH).

During the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah (6 AH) signing, Suhail bin Amr compelled the Prophet to erase the word “Prophet of God” from the written agreement and imposed unilateral terms dictated by the Quraysh.

Then, with the help of God, Makkah was conquered in 8 AH, and Suhail bin Amr was among those who were in a state of disbelief. However, despite his proven crimes, the Prophet did not inflict any punishment upon him. On the contrary, he instructed his Companions to treat him with gentleness. The Prophet said, “Anyone encountering Suhail bin Amr should not glare at him with sharp eyes. In my experience, Suhail is undoubtedly a man of intellect and honour. And a man like Suhail cannot remain ignorant of Islam.” (*Al-Sirah Al-Halabiyyah*, Vol. 2, p. 226)



The Prophet continued to extend concessions to Suhail bin Amr. After the Battle of Hawazin, the Prophet gave him one hundred camels to soften his heart. As a result of this gesture, Suhail bin Amr completely surrendered, embraced Islam, and became a Companion of the Prophet.

After the passing of the Prophet, a perception started to emerge among the Arab tribes that the one who had received divine assistance had passed away. Consequently, a majority of the Arab tribes began to apostatize. Ibn Ishaq reports that when the Prophet died, most of the people of Makkah also wanted to renounce Islam. The atmosphere in Makkah became so tense that Attab bin Usayd, the Governor of Makkah, had to go into hiding.

By this time, Suhail bin Amr had become integral to the Islamic community. He possessed remarkable oratory skills and had an impressive personality. Upon witnessing the state of Makkah, he stood among the people and delivered a compelling speech, utilizing his excellent oratory abilities. He proclaimed, "Listen, the death of the Prophet has only strengthened Islam." He further declared, "Whoever opposes us, we will confront them with the sword."

Upon hearing the powerful speech of Suhail bin Amr, the people's perspective shifted, and even Attab bin Usayd emerged from hiding. It is said that this was the essence of what the Prophet had foreseen when he remarked, "Perhaps one day he will stand in a position where you will not find fault in him but rather commend him." (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 4, p. 346)

The Sunnah of the Prophet teaches us that his vision extended beyond the present. He looked beyond current circumstances and anticipated future opportunities. Despite witnessing the rebellious stance of individuals at that time, he remained focused on the potential future loyalty they might develop towards him. He recognized that their God-given abilities could eventually be utilized to support Islam. History has repeatedly demonstrated that this foresight of the Prophet proved accurate.

### **Waiting for the Next Generation**

In Islamic history, the 10th year of the Prophet's mission is known as the Year of Sorrow (*Aam-ul-Huzn*) due to the passing of Abu Talib and Hazrat Khadijah in the same year. As a result, the conditions in Makkah became highly unfavourable to the Prophet. In search of a more receptive environment for his mission, he embarked on a journey from Makkah to Taif that year.

However, the outcome was quite the opposite of what he had hoped for. The chiefs of Taif, namely Abd Yalayl, Mas'ud, and Habib, treated him with arrogance and disdain. Furthermore, they incited the street urchins of the city to chase him, mock him, and pelt him with stones. When he returned from Taif, his entire body was covered in blood. Reflecting on this experience, the Prophet once confided to Ayesha, "The most difficult day of my life was the one I encountered on the journey to Taif."

In the chapter on Angels, Sahih al-Bukhari records that while he was returning from Taif, distressed and wounded, the angel Gabriel appeared to him at Qarn al-Tha'alib. Gabriel informed him, "God has witnessed these people's actions and sent the angel of the mountains to you. Therefore, command him to do whatever you wish with the people of Taif."

Then, the angel of the mountains appeared before the Prophet, offering his greetings and saying, "O Muhammad, God has sent me to you. He has heard the words of your people against you. I am the angel of the mountains. If you command, I will join these two mountains and crush the people of Taif between them." However, the Prophet responded, "No. I hope that from their descendants, there will emerge a people who worship Allah alone and do not associate partners with Him." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3231)

This incident illustrates that even if the current generation does not believe, the Prophet was willing to wait for the next generation. Despite experiencing humiliation and arrogance from the people of his time, he did not desire to harm or kill them, hoping that future generations among their offspring would come to believe in God and submit to Him.

Historical records demonstrate that after the conquest of Makkah, all the inhabitants of Taif eventually embraced Islam. Subsequently, they made significant contributions to the path of Islam. For instance, Abu 'Ubayd bin Masud al-

Thaqafi, a descendant of the people of Taif, led the Muslim army during the campaign in Iran under the Caliphate of Hazrat Umar Farooq. He displayed extraordinary bravery against the Iranian forces, even though the enemy lost their will to fight due to his valour.

Similarly, Muhammad bin al-Qasim al-Thaqafi entered India through Sindh in 711 AD (95 AH). He was a just and capable leader who swiftly gained control over the regions of Sindh and Punjab within two years, profoundly impacting the region's history.

Muhammad bin al-Qasim was such an esteemed ruler that upon his return from India to Damascus, the people of India wept for him and erected a statue in his honour as a sign of reverence and admiration. (*Futuh al-Buldan* by Al-Baladhuri, p. 424) This remarkable figure of Islam belonged to the same tribe, the Thaqif tribe of Taif, who had previously displayed the utmost insolence and persecution towards the Prophet. Despite having the power to punish them, the Prophet exercised patience and waited for future generations from their lineage to embrace Islam and contribute to Islamic history.

The tribe of Thaqif (people of Taif) committed the worst act of blasphemy and persecution against the Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, the matter of punishing them was entirely under the Prophet's control because the angel of the mountains had come to execute his command. However, instead of punishing them, he chose to prefer that individuals from their future generations emerge who

would become supporters of Islam and make history by contributing to its cause.

### **Today's Enemy is Tomorrow's Friend**

Amr bin Hisham, famously known as Abu Jahl, played one of the most antagonistic roles among the early opponents of the Prophet. Before the conquest of Makkah, his son, Ikrima, followed in his father's footsteps as a staunch adversary of the Prophet, engaging in various forms of abuse against him. Even after Abu Jahl's death, his son continued to conspire against the Prophet. For instance, Khalid bin Walid led the Makkan army in the Battle of Uhud, and Ikrima commanded the left wing.

Ikrima's hostility towards the Prophet was evident to the extent that, following the conquest of Makkah, he fled to Yemen out of fear of being held accountable for his actions. However, his wife, who had embraced Islam, travelled to Yemen to convince him to return. Upon his return, he approached the Prophet, humbled and remorseful, seeking refuge. In response, the Prophet reassured him, saying, "Yes, you are safe." (Al-Waqidi, *Kitab Maghazi*, Vol. 2, p. 852) Detailed accounts of these incidents can be found in the books of Seerah, but the essence of the story is that Ikrima eventually accepted Islam by professing the declaration of faith.

When Ikrima returned from Yemen to meet the Prophet, the Prophet addressed his Companions, saying, "Ikrima is coming to us. Do not speak ill of his father, Abu Jahl.

Criticizing the deceased does not reach them but hurts the living.” When Ikrima arrived, the Prophet was delighted and hurriedly approached him, causing his shawl to slip from his shoulders in eagerness.

After embracing Islam, Ikrima expressed a request to the Prophet, saying, “I have something to ask of you.” The Prophet responded, “Ask, and I will grant it to you.” Ikrima said, “I beseech you to forgive the enmity I held against you, the obstacles I placed in your path, the battles I fought against you, and the slanders I spread about you, whether in your presence or behind your back. Please seek God’s forgiveness for all of these actions.” Immediately, the Prophet prayed for him, saying, “O God, forgive every hostility that Ikrima directed towards me, every effort he made to dim the light of divine guidance, and everything he did to dishonour me, whether in my presence or absence.”

Ikrima further declared, “O Messenger of Allah, I swear by God that whatever wealth I previously spent to obstruct the path of God, I will now spend twice as much in the way of God. And the wars I fought to hinder and create obstacles in the way of God, I will now engage in twice as many battles in the way of God.”

After he accepted Islam, Ikrima devoted himself to jihad for the cause of God, using his wealth and risking his life. He remained actively engaged in this pursuit until his last breath. Eventually, he met martyrdom, displaying remarkable bravery during the Battle of Yarmouk. (*Al-Isti’ab* by Ibn Abd al-Barr, Vol. 3, p. 1085)

Ikrima had committed various crimes against the Prophet, ranging from verbal abuse to physical aggression. By all accounts, he deserved punishment. However, the Prophet of Islam was not driven by a desire for revenge or violence; he was a caller to the truth. He possessed a vision that looked beyond the present, foreseeing the potential transformation of Ikrima. This vision led him to forgive Ikrima unilaterally. Subsequent events proved the accuracy of the Prophet's judgment. The 'enemy,' Ikrima, eventually became a 'friend.' The man who once embodied disbelief in his early life later became a steadfast pillar of Islam.

### **Case of Muslims Showing Disrespect to the Prophet**

According to Ibn Ishaq, Abu Ubaydah bin Muhammad narrated with reference to Miqdam Abu al-Qasim, "I and Talid bin Kilaab al-Laythi came to 'Abdullah bin 'Amr bin al-'As when he was circumambulating the Kabah. We asked him if he was present when a man from Banu Tamim named Dhul-Khuwaysirah approached the Prophet on the day of Hunain. Abdullah bin 'Amr confirmed that he was there. Dhul-Khuwaysirah stood beside the Prophet while he was distributing the spoils of war. Dhul-Khuwaysirah then said to the Prophet, "O Muhammad, I have observed your actions today." The Prophet responded by asking him what he had seen. Dhul-Khuwaysirah replied, "I did not witness justice from you."

Despite this insult and accusation, the Prophet did not sentence Dhul-Khuwaysirah to death or any severe punishment. The incident serves as an example of how even those who insulted and humiliated the Prophet after accepting Islam were not subjected to the death penalty.

Abdullah bin ‘Amr bin al-‘As recounted that the Prophet became greatly angered upon hearing the insults made by Dhul-Khuwaysirah. In response, the Prophet declared, “Woe to you! If I do not establish justice, then who will?”

Following this incident, Umar bin al-Khattab expressed his desire to kill Dhul-Khuwaysirah, to which the Prophet responded, “No, leave him be. In the future, a group of people will emerge who will delve into religious matters until they deviate from the faith like an arrow leaving its target.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 7038)

Understanding the severity of Dhul-Khuwaysirah’s insults towards the Prophet is essential. They went beyond mere verbal abuse, as they undermined the very foundation of prophethood itself. According to his perception, Dhul-Khuwaysirah cast doubt on the Prophet’s sense of justice. This is an exceedingly grave matter because the Prophet’s position entails being the conveyer of the Quran. The Prophet declared, “I have received the divine words through Gabriel, and I am presenting them to you.” By believing in the Prophet’s message, we affirm the Quran as the word of God.

In cases where the credibility of a narrator is doubted, their narration is not accepted. A narrator needs to be trustworthy



and without blemish. Therefore, calling the Prophet unjust is akin to questioning his position as a trustworthy conveyer of the Quran. Such an allegation against the Prophet is a serious one. Despite this, the person who made such a grave accusation was not punished or killed.

This incident highlights that blasphemy is not necessarily a crime deserving the death penalty. Other factors, such as rebellion against the state, are required for someone to be sentenced to death. In the time of the Prophet, those who were killed were often involved in rebellion against the state and were not solely guilty of the crime of blasphemy against the Prophet.

Another example is the Battle of Bani Al-Mustaliq, which took place in Sha'ban in the 6th year after the Hijrah. Abdullah bin Ubayy, along with many other hypocritical Muslims, participated in this battle. These individuals, due to their insensitivity, exaggerated a minor issue and spread accusations of sedition against the Prophet.

Ayesha bint Abu Bakr, the wife of the Prophet, was also part of the journey. During their return, the army halted at a location, and in the last part of the night, Ayesha went a little further to attend to nature's call. She was wearing a small necklace which accidentally broke, causing the beads to scatter. Ayesha started searching for the beads in the darkness, which took some time.

Meanwhile, the caravan began its journey without realizing that Ayesha had not yet returned. According to the caravan's protocol, Ayesha would sit in her palanquin, covered on all

sides, and four men would carry it on a camel. However, since Ayesha had not returned, the people assumed she was already inside the palanquin. Unaware of her absence, they placed the empty palanquin on the camel and continued on their way.

When Ayesha returned and found that the caravan had already departed, she covered herself with a sheet and waited. In the morning, Safwan bin Muattal Sulami, assigned to follow the caravan, arrived. Recognizing Ayesha as the Prophet's wife, he said, "To Allah, we belong, and to Him, we shall return," and said nothing further. He brought his camel and placed it next to Ayesha. Understanding his gesture, she mounted the camel, and Safwan took hold of the reins and hurried forward on foot.

Around noon, they met the Muslim caravan at their resting point. Among the people present were a group of hypocrites led by Abdullah bin Ubayy. When they saw Ayesha, Abdullah bin Ubayy made a derogatory comment, suggesting that she had spent the night with a stranger and that they were not safe from each other. (*Tafsir al-Baghawi*, Vol. 6, p. 23)

After the caravan arrived in Madinah, Abdullah bin Ubayy and his group seized the opportunity and spread propaganda about the incident, exaggerating it greatly. This led to an emergency in the city, with everyone talking about it and becoming involved. The Prophet endured immense mental anguish, and Ayesha cried incessantly. The details of this story can be found in the books of Hadith and Seerah.

This problematic situation persisted for about a month until verses 11-21 of Chapter 24 were revealed. Through these verses, God declared Ayesha wholly innocent and free from blame. The blame was placed solely on Abdullah bin Ubayy and his associates. Thus, this grave matter came to an end through direct divine intervention.

It is noteworthy that Abdullah bin Ubayy had embraced Islam under the guidance of the Prophet and used to pray alongside the Muslims. However, according to the testimony of the Quran (24: 11), he played a significant role in this incident. The Quran exposed his sinful actions, but no specific legal punishment was prescribed for him. The matter of his punishment was left to the Hereafter. Therefore, he lived in Madinah until his natural death, to be held accountable to God for his deeds.

In this situation, those who argue for a death sentence as punishment for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad base their claims on unfounded evidence, lacking support from the Quran, Hadith, or the Prophet's practices.

## GOD'S GUARANTEE

The distortion of the Prophet's character and teachings was initially started by contemporary Jews residing in Arabia. Subsequently, during the Crusades, Christian scholars and Orientalists in Europe continued these efforts for centuries. Individuals like Salman Rushdie from India and others follow the same path and utilize the available resources.

The question arises: what should Muslims do in response to such incidents? Typically, Muslims react with anger and frustration, engaging in protests against these books. This has been the prevalent response from Muslim writers and speakers thus far. However, there is another crucial aspect to consider, one that, unfortunately, many Muslims have failed to comprehend due to their adverse reactions.

History demonstrates that throughout the centuries, numerous individuals have persistently attempted to tarnish the image of Prophet Muhammad, ranging from Ka'b bin al-Ashraf in the 7th century AD to Salman Rushdie in the 20th century. However, their efforts have proven futile, achieving minimal, if any, success in their objectives.

Contrastingly, similar malicious attempts were made against the prophets who preceded Muhammad, but with vastly different outcomes. In the cases of the former prophets, their adversaries succeeded in distorting their character and teachings. From Noah to Jesus, those who opposed these prophets sought to distort their image, and unfortunately, they were successful.

Notably, the records of human history do not mention the previous prophets. For instance, while ancient Egyptian history documents the Pharaoh, there is no mention of Prophet Moses. Similarly, the history of Palestine omits Christ while highlighting his contemporaneous Roman rulers. Besides the Quran, the Bible serves as the only source of information about the previous prophets, but it presents a distorted portrayal of their lives since it has

not been preserved in its original form as revealed to the Prophet Jesus.

The Bible includes certain accounts and incidents involving the prophets that may seem irrelevant or inappropriate when considering their mission of calling people to God. For example, the story of Prophet Noah in the Bible states that Noah began farming, planted a vineyard, drank its wine, and became intoxicated (Genesis, 9:20-21).

Similarly, the story of Prophet Lot in the Bible includes the account of his daughters giving him wine to drink and engaging in incestuous relationships with him (Genesis 19:33).

In contrast, the Quran focuses on the message and mission of the Prophets, emphasizing their role in guiding people towards God. For instance, in the case of Prophet Moses, the Quran highlights the divine sign of the radiance of his hand (20:22; 27:12). This differs from the account in the Bible, which describes Moses placing his hand on his chest and revealing it to be leprous as a sign (Exodus, 4:6).

The example of Prophet Solomon in the Bible highlights a situation where he fell in love with many foreign women despite God's warning not to intermarry with them as they would turn his heart away to their gods (1 Kings, 11:1-2). The Bible states that Solomon's heart was not entirely devoted to God, and he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, unlike his father, David, who followed the Lord faithfully.

These are just a few references cited here as examples, not

as an exhaustive list. Those seeking further detail can study the Bible to understand it better.

However, there have been no attempts to tarnish the image of Prophet Muhammad in recorded history. The preservation of his life and teachings in the form of the Quran and Hadith literature has played a significant role in maintaining the integrity of his character. The records of his life provide a comprehensive understanding of his mission and teachings, offering a reliable source of information for those who wish to study it.

This is not merely a coincidence or the result of the efforts of Muslims; instead, it is a direct intervention by God Himself. The obstacles and aggressive actions of those who oppose Islam have been thwarted by divine intervention. In essence, this means that the anti-Islam books and materials aimed at tarnishing the image of the Prophet and his mission have been rendered useless and ineffective on a larger scale by the Creator. While individuals are granted freedom of speech and expression as part of their test in this world, God has ensured that the impact and influence of such speeches and writings are prevented from achieving their desired effects. Despite the opponents' relentless efforts, they have not succeeded in tarnishing the image of the Prophet as they did in the case of the previous Prophets.

The Quran repeatedly acknowledges the ridicule and mockery faced by the Prophet of Islam from his opponents. However, it does not command immediate seizure and execution of those who mock and hurt him. Instead, the

Quran emphasizes the importance of calling people to God and leaving the punishment of mockers to Himself.

The Quran states, “Proclaim openly what you are commanded and turn away from the polytheists. We will surely suffice you against the mockers, those who associate others with God. They will soon know. We know indeed that your heart is distressed at what they say. But glorify the praises of your Lord, and be of those who prostrate themselves, and worship your Lord until the certainty [of death] comes to you.” (15:94-99)

According to Ibn Kathir’s interpretation, the Commentators explain that the Prophet of Islam is commanded to convey the revelations from his Lord to the people and to avoid those polytheists who aim to hinder his communication. God reassures the Prophet, saying, “Do not be afraid of them. God is sufficient for you, and He will protect you from them” (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 4, p. 473).

In summary, the Quran encourages the Prophet and his followers to continue conveying the message of Islam despite the mockery and opposition they face, trusting in God’s sufficiency and protection. The focus should be on worshipping and glorifying God, leaving the punishment of mockers to God’s wisdom and judgment.

The Quran makes it clear that in such situations, the method of the caller to God (dayee) should be one of avoidance rather than responding similarly. The caller should focus solely on conveying the message, and if the invitee reacts negatively or mocks, the dayee should not engage in

retaliatory behaviour. It is the responsibility of the dayee to leave the matter of such individuals to God alone.

In the mentioned Quranic verse, God assures His messenger that He is sufficient to deal with the ridiculers. Since the Prophet of Islam is a Prophet for all times, this guarantee from God is also eternal. It applies not only to the early period during the Prophet's life but also to later times when the Prophet is present through his message, which his followers continuously convey to people worldwide.

Now, let us address the question: Why does a mocker engage in mockery? The purpose of mockery is to discredit the person being ridiculed. This was the intention behind the mockery of the Prophet during ancient times, and the same remains the purpose of mockery today.

Remembering this, the most effective way to respond to ridicule is not by eliminating the insult itself but rather by elevating the stature of the person being ridiculed and making their arguments so compelling that the ridicule loses its impact.

If someone were to mock the Himalayas by calling it a small mound, such mockery would hold no weight because the grandeur of the Himalayas itself disproves such a mockery. Similarly, if someone were to mock an elephant by calling it an ant, the mockery would be rendered meaningless by the sheer physical presence of the elephant. Such ridicule becomes so absurd that it does not require a direct rebuttal—it is a self-refutation.



The same principle applies to the Prophet of Islam on a grander scale. The abundance of extraordinary historical evidence has established his noble character as a factual reality. He is no longer a subject of controversy but rather a historical figure whose greatness is universally recognized, regardless of one's personal beliefs.

Therefore, in modern times, numerous non-Muslim authors have written books acknowledging the Prophet's exceptional greatness. For instance, Thomas Carlyle referred to him as "the diamond of all the prophets," while Michael Hart ranked him as the most outstanding individual in his list of the 100 most influential people in the world. Through such recognition, God Almighty has elevated the Prophet of Islam to a position where the mockery of a mocker holds no significance and becomes meaningless in the eyes of the people. The insults directed at him do not diminish his stature in any way. The Prophet had foretold his ummah about this divine decree in advance.

In the tradition, it is mentioned that the Quraysh of Makkah used to insult the Prophet by calling him "*Mudhammam*" (condemned, rebuked). However, the Prophet did not retaliate against them. Instead, he expressed his surprise at their persecution, stating, "Are you not amazed at the persecution of the Quraysh. They insult and call me 'Mudhamman,' whereas I am Muhammad (praised one)." (Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah*, Vol. 1, p. 356) In this tradition, the Prophet conveyed that the Lord of the universe has destined him to have a place in world history as *Muhammad* (praised one), rendering their insults baseless and meaningless.

The miracle of this divine guarantee is evident in the fact that despite the high-quality printing and extensive publicity of Salman Rushdie's book, there is not a single individual in the world who has been influenced by reading this nonsensical book or whose perception of the Prophet of Islam has been negatively affected. Since the publication of this book, numerous letters from readers have been published in international newspapers, and none of them stated that the book succeeded in tarnishing the image of Islam or the Prophet of Islam in their eyes. In reality, this book has only tarnished the author's image rather than that of the Prophet of Islam.

### **Negligence Towards the Real Responsibility**

Numerous Quranic verses emphasize the primary responsibility of Muslims to convey the teachings of the Prophet to the people rather than engaging in confrontations with those who insult him. God Almighty has entrusted the task of inviting people to God to the Muslims while taking it upon Himself to deal with the mockers. However, the current state of Muslims reflects a negligence towards their true responsibility. They have taken it upon themselves to react fervently to any insult or antagonistic publication against the Prophet of Islam while showing little enthusiasm for the task assigned to them by God, which is to convey the divine message to people. This lack of inclination and motivation to fulfil their entrusted duty is a form of rebellion against God rather than obedience to His command.

Present-day Muslims often neglect their responsibility of conveying the divine message brought by the Prophet of Islam and instead, focus their energy on creating an uproar and agitation in response to absurd statements or antagonistic articles. This signifies a significant dereliction of duty on the part of Muslims. In other words, they exhibit restlessness in carrying out the task that God has taken upon Himself, but they lack the urge to actively engage in the work they are required to do through their own efforts, as guided by Shariah.

According to the Quran, Muslims are duty-bound to support their Prophet, but this support entails calling people to God and not engaging in a negative campaign against those who criticize him. Muslims need to understand that they cannot earn merit for assisting the final Prophet by launching campaigns against his critics. The credit will be given to them when they effectively communicate the message of the final Prophet to all nations through love, goodwill, and well-wishing, using appropriate etiquette.

There is a significant psychological factor behind the current attitude of Muslims. For various reasons, present-day Muslims have developed a mindset of hatred towards other nations, lacking feelings of goodwill towards them. Consequently, they react with anger and violence whenever there is an opportunity to become enraged against other nations. Conversely, they show little interest in demonstrating love, goodwill, and well-wishing towards others.

The presence of hate alone is sufficient to ignite their response to an “insulting attitude towards the Prophet.” Hatred is prevalent among Muslims, but spreading the message of the Prophet requires a spirit of love and goodwill toward humanity, which is lacking in today’s Muslims. As a result, they are active in addressing the issue of blasphemy while remaining inactive in spreading the message of the Prophet, regardless of the latter’s importance. This situation is deeply concerning, and Muslims must reconsider their approach and align it with God’s plan.

### **The Primary Task: Conclusive Communication of the Truth**

The Prophet of Islam, along with his Companions, administered punishment to only a few individuals, and in all those cases, the reason for the punishment was rebellion against the state. The Prophet and his Companions never executed anyone solely for blasphemy.

The primary responsibility of Muslims is not to punish others but rather to invite people to the truth and diligently carry out this task while fulfilling all its requirements. A crucial aspect of this responsibility is to endure any excesses or insolence from those being addressed unconditionally. Muslims of present times must understand this and focus on their primary task of communicating the Truth to all humanity. God will judge us based on our carrying out this responsibility.



SECTION  
FIVE

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Quran states: “Surely with every hardship there is ease; surely, with every hardship there is ease.” (94:5-6)

According to the above verses, the Quran teaches that there is also relief and ease in the world alongside every difficulty. God has created the world, so unfavourable events cannot eliminate favourable circumstances. This principle applies to various situations, including the case of Salman Rushdie.

In history, a person with a bad character named Abdullah bin Ubayy bin Salul existed in ancient Madinah. He once exaggerated a minor incident and falsely accused Hazrat Ayesha of adultery. This false story spread rapidly in Madinah, causing a state of emergency for a month. However, the Quran refuted these accusations in Chapter 24, verses 11-20.

One of the messages conveyed in these verses is: “(O Muslims,) do not perceive this storm brought upon you as detrimental, but rather consider it beneficial.” (24:11) The favourable conditions mentioned in the verse are called “yusr.” One manifestation of these conditions occurs when false propaganda is disseminated about the believer, causing discussions among the people and sparking curiosity. This enables the believer to refute the false claims and clarify the situation, presenting the truth more clearly.

On the one hand, it becomes evident to people that the opponents are deceptive, while on the other hand, it becomes apparent that the caller upholds the truth. Consequently,

new individuals become acquainted with the divine message through the ensuing discussions. Throughout this process, those who were initially sceptical became companions of the caller after attaining a level of certainty. People can witness firsthand that the proponent of truth stands firmly on solid ground, whereas the opponents have nothing but false and unfounded accusations to offer. This serves as an illustration of finding ease amidst hardship.

### **The Real Problem**

Upon closer examination, we discover that the real issue lies not in the existence of individuals like Rushdie, who write and speak against Islam. Instead, the genuine concern we should focus on is the underlying situation that permits them to express their views against Islam.

To illustrate this point, let us consider an example. In Britain, there has been a law in place since the 17th century that criminalizes blasphemy against Christianity, specifically the Anglican Church. However, despite the existence of this legal code, a film titled 'The Last Temptation of Christ' has been produced in the UK, which directly contradicts the provisions of this law. This movie portrays explicit scenes involving the sexual life of Jesus Christ and depicts him and his mother, Mary, engaging in acts that desecrate their revered status. Remarkably, this film continues to be openly screened in the UK, and neither the film itself nor its creators have faced any legal repercussions despite the existence of the law.



Now, let us consider another example from the same country. Peter Wright, an Englishman who retired and now resides in Australia, held a high-ranking position in the British Intelligence Service. Following his retirement, he authored a book recounting his experiences titled 'Spy Catcher.' This memoir unveils numerous secrets pertaining to the British Intelligence Service.

Peter Wright sold the rights to his book to a publisher in London; however, the British Government became aware of its content before its publication. Consequently, they swiftly banned the book, citing its contradiction with government policies. Despite the author's and publisher's efforts, the book could not be published in London. Eventually, in 1988, it was published in a foreign country. However, its entry into the UK remains strictly prohibited.

This incident highlights a case of "blasphemy against prophets," where despite the presence of a law, the film was not banned. Conversely, in another incident categorized as "blasphemy against the state," the government promptly took action, and the entire country refused to allow the book within its borders. What accounts for this disparity? There is only one explanation for this distinction. Britain recognizes the significance of treason against the state but does not exhibit the same level of sensitivity towards blasphemy against prophets.

From this, it becomes evident what the underlying issue for Islam is in contemporary times. The actual problem faced by Islam today is the diminishing perception of its greatness

and significance in the minds of modern individuals. Islam is increasingly viewed as something devoid of value and unnecessary in the context of today's world. These circumstances have emboldened people to criticize Islam openly. This phenomenon is not limited to non-Muslims alone but also extends to the educated, modern generation of Muslims. Many individuals harbour these misconceptions and persist in writing and speaking against Islam.

The primary objective at this juncture is to dispel the misconceptions held by modern individuals about Islam and establish its importance as a recognized reality in their eyes. The image of Islam must be elevated to such a degree that no one would dare speak ill of it. If such a positive environment is cultivated, and if someone does commit an offence against Islam, their words will carry no weight. For example, in the current atmosphere, if someone speaks against democracy, their words automatically lose credibility.

### **Islamic Literature to Address Modern Minds**

In the present day, when individuals like Salman Rushdie propagate evil, it remains solely as such, without any good arising from it. The primary reason for this lies in the negative response of Muslim writers. Consequently, readers find no appeal in an Islam based on hatred and vengeance. However, such challenges also present an opportunity, as people naturally become curious about Islam during such occasions, creating a favourable atmosphere for studying it. Unfortunately, the existing libraries lack literature

presenting Islam's noble teachings in a language accessible and understandable to readers, addressing their intellects. While anti-Islamic literature is abundant today, there is a lack of Islamic literature that resonates logically and relates to the lives of modern individuals.

Recognizing this need decades ago, the writer embarked on a detailed study of Islam while simultaneously delving into various aspects of modern sciences. Subsequently, the writer began producing Islamic literature that meets contemporary requirements, aiming to establish the ideological superiority of Islam and engage with modern minds. Devoting his life to this endeavour to the best of his abilities, the writer responded to this specific need by compiling a book titled "Islam: Daur e Jadid Ka Khaliq" (Urdu: 1989), which was translated into English under the title "Islam: Creator of the Modern Age" (published in 1993). This book, published by the Islamic Center, New Delhi, spans over one hundred pages. Grounded in actual events and facts, it illustrates how modern science and the advancements of the present age are gifts bestowed by Islam through the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. The Islamic revolution marked the first transformative change in human history, laying the foundation for all the progress witnessed in the modern era.

## THE POWER OF SILENCE

There is a profound saying by Umar Farooq: “Kill falsehood by remaining silent about it.” (Abu Nu’aym al-Asfahani, *Hilyat al-Awliya*, Vol. 1, p. 55) It is a fact that sometimes, remaining silent about evil and falsehood and refraining from acting against it is enough to end it.

There are various forms of this silence. One pertains to individuals who spread lies out of personal animosity or publish nonsensical articles. Responding to such propaganda would only be a waste of time. Therefore, the best answer to such provocations is not to respond and abide by the saying: “Dogs keep barking, elephants keep walking.” By disregarding it, the harm caused by malicious individuals becomes meaningless.

Imagine someone throwing garbage into your home, and you become angry and start fighting with them. In doing so, you inadvertently assist them in achieving their goals because your reactionary approach provides them with more opportunities to harm you. However, if their provocation fails to provoke a reaction from you, it is as if you have neutralized their strategies. This wisdom has been expressed in the Quran as “avoidance.” Avoidance is not a passive action but a proactive and potent one. It serves as a silent response, superior to a verbal retort.

The truth is that the power of silence surpasses the power of speech. That is why there are numerous instances where ignoring the situation is the most effective means of repelling evil, and taking no action becomes the most significant.

Suppose an individual fabricates a groundless lie against someone and publishes it as a book. The wise approach would be to ensure that this book remains unpopular, eliminating the need for anyone to read it.

The most effective way to achieve this goal is through silence. If you create a commotion about the book, it will receive publicity, attracting unnecessary attention. However, the book will lose popularity if you remain silent, eventually fading naturally.

This is a recurring reality of life observed and documented throughout history. An English writer described this phenomenon succinctly: “Scandal ever improves by the opposition.”

If someone accuses you falsely, maintaining silence is the key. Speaking out against the accusation only serves to give it publicity. On the other hand, remaining quiet about it confines the falsehood to its initial fabrication.

## THE REAL WORK TO BE DONE

Salman Rushdie authored a book called ‘Midnight’s Children,’ in which he states, “I am hanging between belief and disbelief.”

Rushdie’s statement, expressing his struggle between belief and uncertainty in religion, extends beyond his personal experience to encompass an entire generation. What Salman Rushdie has articulated about himself resonates with millions of Muslims. Roughly 75% of the modern

educated Muslim youth grapple with this uncertainty. The only distinction is that Rushdie, a professional writer, chose to pour the darkness of his heart and mind onto paper for temporary gain. Others, engaged in different professions, earn their livelihood without dedicating time to produce an absurd book like Rushdie did.

During my visit to the United States in December 1988, I had the opportunity to visit an Islamic Centre. Situated in an area inhabited by approximately one hundred thousand Muslims, I inquired about the number of individuals associated with the Islamic Center. One organizer stated that around ten per cent of those Muslims were connected to the Center. However, another attendee expressed scepticism, suggesting that the figure was an exaggeration and that barely 5% of Muslims were affiliated with the Center.

I have been informed that a significant portion of the new generation of Muslims residing in the United States lacks knowledge about Islam. They exhibit indifference towards prayer and fasting, and their lifestyle choices concerning sex, alcohol, and food mirror those of liberal Americans. This can be attributed to their identity as Muslims merely by birth.

This revelation did not come as a surprise to me. Anyone acquainted with the modern educated Muslim generation is well aware of this reality. Hence, it becomes evident that “Rushdie” is not an isolated case but representative of millions of individuals worldwide. The only difference is

that Rushdie's "Rushdism" has been exposed, while others may keep similar inclinations hidden.

Muslims refer to this as "mental apostasy." However, according to the writer, it is not true apostasy but a manifestation of intellectual dissatisfaction. The present situation of Muslims, characterized by intellectual dissatisfaction, presents a challenge for contemporary religious leaders. It necessitates the creation of standard Islamic literature in a modern scientific style and their publication in major languages. There is an urgent need to develop such literature that dispels doubts and confusion. Only through this can the doubts, uncertainties, or disbelief of countless Muslims who grapple with intellectual dissatisfaction be transformed into belief. This would rescue them from the abyss of faithlessness and restore them to a solid foundation of faith.

However, modern Muslim leaders and Islamic scholars have not effectively fulfilled this task according to the required standard. Despite their claims, many books have been published purporting to cater to the modern individual, but these so-called modern books fail to serve their intended purpose. They do not resonate with modern minds.

In an article titled "Movements of the Modern Era," published in *Al-Risala* in July 1987, the author of the present book emphasized the significance of such literature, highlighting that literature meeting the academic requirements of the modern individual is a fundamental necessity for the revival of Islam. However, despite the abundance of books available,

this need remains unfulfilled. People are often unaware of the need for such literature.

The author, who has dedicated forty years to studying books in Urdu, Arabic, Persian, and English, has found no valuable book written by a Muslim religious scholar in a scientific style and at the intellectual level of the time.

The primary and essential task of religious leaders in the present era should have been to study modern sciences, acquire proficiency in the languages of the time, comprehend contemporary methods of reasoning and scientific style, and subsequently present the timeless teachings of Islam effectively and powerfully. This approach would have helped modern Muslims rediscover their lost faith. Unfortunately, Muslim leaders have not succeeded in creating such influential literature in a contemporary idiom.

In such a situation, the uproar raised by Muslim leaders against Salman Rushdie is equivalent to hiding their incompetence. It is an attempt to claim credit for something they have not accomplished. According to the Quran, those who seek recognition for what they have not done deserve punishment from God, not reward. (3:188)

The Islamic books written by our authors in modern times may be beneficial for individuals with traditional mindsets. However, for intellectually dissatisfied individuals, these books hold no value. They fail to meet the requirements of a discerning mind.

These books reveal that their authors do not even comprehend the distinction between traditional and rational



methods of argumentation. Those who fail to recognize this difference can never provide Islamic literature that caters to the needs of the modern generation.

Almost all of these books rely on a traditional argument rooted in faith, which proves effective only when both parties adhere to those specific beliefs and principles. However, when there is a divergence of perspectives, the traditional method of reasoning based on conventional principles becomes ineffective and lacks value.

Influenced by contemporary ideas, the modern generation no longer embraces preconceived axioms or traditional logic. Instead, they seek claims substantiated by known scientific and historical facts. While the traditional method of reasoning is rooted in doctrinal faith, the modern approach is grounded in rational arguments. Unfortunately, in the present era, among the books written by various authors in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and English, no single book presents Islam based on rational arguments in its truest sense.

Another shared flaw among all these books is that they are written with the intention, either directly or indirectly, to prove the supremacy of Islam or the superiority of Muslims. While this type of literature may please certain Muslims, the modern mind fails to find any attraction to such works. Only literature that presents Islamic teachings in alignment with the modern mindset can genuinely resonate with the modern individual. It is a reality that Islam and human nature are interconnected. Therefore, literature that is in

sync with human nature will effectively address the minds of the modern generation.

The third prevalent flaw in the literature produced on Islam in contemporary times is the mindset that perceives the world as an adversary of Islam, attributing all conspiracies against Islam to these nations. Such books propagate the idea that these nations are determined to suppress Islam. The literature produced under this mindset becomes literature of hatred rather than literature that appeals to the modern mind.

A person who harbours hatred towards the intended audience has already demonstrated incompetence for this task. The creation of useful Islamic literature necessitates a psychology rooted in love for the recipient rather than one driven by hate. Therefore, our writers must rid their hearts and minds of such negative sentiments. Otherwise, their efforts to produce Islamic literature aimed at addressing the modern individual will prove futile instead of being a service to Islam.

When confronted with incidents such as that of Salman Rushdie, it is not the responsibility of Muslim leaders to declare him an apostate and impose Islamic punishment upon him. On the contrary, their primary duty is to understand the existence of intellectual dissatisfaction. They must delve into the mindset of such individuals, familiarize themselves with their thoughts and ideas, and, after a thorough study, produce books on Islam that can answer their questions and awaken their dormant nature, drawing them closer to their Creator.

There are many individuals with such mindsets who are eager to explore Islam, perceiving it as the voice of their nature and the yearning of their soul. However, this can only transpire when the religion of truth is presented to them in a manner that addresses their minds and, therefore, is familiar and acceptable to them.

A thirsty person will grasp a glass of water only when he is sure, that it contains water. Similarly, every individual is undeniably a seeker of truth. However, when we present them with this gift, they must first be convinced that it is what their nature has been searching for.

When we present Islam supported by rational arguments and in alignment with the fundamental nature of humanity, individuals will realize that this is precisely what they have been yearning for all along.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The articles included in this book were written shortly after the emergence of Salman Rushdie's controversy. Some of them were also published in the monthly *Al-Risala*. The entire collection was compiled into a book in 1989 and was ready for publication. However, unforeseen circumstances prevented it from being published on time. Eventually, after a significant delay, it was published in late 1996.

As a result of this delay, it became possible to include this concluding chapter at the end of the book, which was written much later in June 1996. If this book had been published in 1989, it would have lacked this important chapter.

## Support of Islam by the West

Muslim writers and speakers often perceive Salman Rushdie as a part of the conspiracy orchestrated by the “enemies of Islam.” They believe it to be a plot hatched by Western powers against Islam, with Salman Rushdie’s book serving as its manifestation. However, the author holds the view that such allegations are entirely unfounded. The fact is that Salman Rushdie’s book is an individual act by the author and not the result of a collective plan devised by Western nations.

The so-called modern Muslim press has been publishing articles that claim the United States (and the West) has designated Islam as its new enemy since the end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. They argue that just as the West targeted Communism before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has now turned its focus on Islam. In essence, they propose that the West needed a new enemy for its survival and discovered Islam as their enemy to fulfill that role. This theory suggests that Western civilization thrives on competition and requires a rival to sustain it.

However, these assumptions are unfounded. One evidence against the validity of this theory is that even today, thousands of people in Western countries are willingly embracing Islam. Furthermore, individuals from the West have authored outstanding books highlighting Islam’s greatness in modern times. (Refer to the author’s book ‘*Fikr-e-Islami*,’ pp. 70-72)

It is a fact that certain Western groups have engaged in propaganda against Islam, using print and electronic media to distort its image. It is also a fact that some Western thinkers and writers have provided the most compelling response to these attempts to tarnish Islam's image. One noteworthy book, spanning 280 pages, titled "Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam" by Karen Armstrong, was first published in 1991 in London by Victor Gollancz Ltd.

Another recent publication in London aims to dispel the myth that the West began presenting Islam as its enemy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Interestingly, this myth is more prevalent in the Muslim world than in the West. The book, titled "Islam and the Myth of Confrontation" by Fred Halliday, initially published in 1995, offers valuable insights and is highly recommended for those interested in understanding the history of enmity. The book has also been translated and published in Arabic.

### **The Retraction of the Fatwa by Muslim Scholars**

The incident surrounding Salman Rushdie exposed a grave weakness among Muslim scholars and intellectuals. Their immediate and uninvestigated reaction to such news often leads to humiliation. This impulsive response is unquestionably unIslamic. The Quran and Hadith explicitly forbid believers from hastily responding to reports without verifying their accuracy, as it may unwittingly harm others, leading to subsequent regret (Quran, 49:6).

Engaging in hasty actions against evil goes against God's plan and ultimately results in remorse. Unfortunately, in the case of Salman Rushdie, the majority of the Muslim world fell prey to this ignorance. Upon hearing news of the controversy through the media, without conducting proper research or seeking consultation, many individuals engaged in verbal jihad. However, in the end, they had to retreat in regret and repentance.

1. Indian scholars, such as Maulana Syed Abu Al Hasan Ali Nadvi (former Rector, Nadwatul Ulema Lucknow) and Maulana Abul Lais Islahi (former Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami, India), initially issued statements in support of the fatwa. However, subsequent developments revealed that their initial support was incorrect. As a result, both scholars revised their previous statements and published a second statement in the newspaper (refer to page 76-77 of the book under review).

2. In the early stages of this incident, a meeting of Muslim leaders took place in Makkah under the auspices of the Muslim World League (*Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami*). During this meeting, these officials proclaimed Salman Rushdie as an apostate, and according to Islamic law, the punishment for apostasy was death (refer to page 47 of the book under review).

Following this, a meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference was held in Riyadh, attended by high-ranking officials from 46 Muslim countries. During this

Conference, the initial statement was corrected, and a unanimous opposite statement was released, rejecting Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa (refer to page 49 of the book under review).

3. Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, a prominent Muslim scholar from Saudi Arabia, initially supported the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini, which called for Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie. However, he later reconsidered his extremist stance. In early 1993, Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef visited Rome, Italy, where he met with Pope John Paul II. During his visit, he granted an interview to World News Link, a global agency. In that interview, one of the questions posed to him was regarding his opinion on the death penalty imposed on Salman Rushdie by Iran's religious leaders. His response, as reported, was as follows:

“Q. What is your opinion on the death penalty imposed on the British author Salman Rushdie by Iran's religious leaders?

A. Some people, in emotion, pass these resolutions. I think that today, we must promote human rights. The death penalty should be only for criminals who commit the crime of killing people. Otherwise, human rights should be given to everybody.” (*Newstime*, Hyderabad, 17 February 1993)

4. In a similar vein, the Iranian leaders initially proclaimed the death sentence for Salman Rushdie with much fanfare. However, due to the global backlash against the fatwa, they could not take any practical steps to execute it. Subsequently,

there were reports that the Iranian leaders were retracting the fatwa, calling for the assassination of Salman Rushdie.

Finally, on March 12, 1996, the headline in the 'Abu Dhabi Dateline' read: "Iran drops death sentence on Rushdie."

The following day, newspapers published editorial notes stating Iran had withdrawn the "uncivilized" fatwa a year later. *The Hindustan Times* (March 13, 1996), in its editorial note titled "End of a fatwa," concluded with the following words:

"The Iranian decision must be welcomed with the hope that the twentieth-century world will turn a leaf on the medieval practices of burning books and sending their authors to the stake." (*Hindustan Times*, March 13, 1996)

## THE AUTHOR'S ADVICE

On a broader scale, the Muslim community experienced a similar shift. Initially, after Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the Muslim press worldwide stood in support. However, today, all these writers and speakers remain entirely silent.

If the previous stance of Muslim leaders that Salman Rushdie should be killed for writing his book was indeed correct, then according to Shariah, it is not permissible for them to allow Salman Rushdie to remain alive while they remain silent on the matter. They are obligated to write, speak, and even put their lives at risk to enforce the fatwa.



However, if they have come to realize their mistake, it is incumbent upon them to openly acknowledge their error and wrongdoing, just as they had emphatically declared that Rushdie should be beheaded. They should convey their current stance to the people with the same enthusiasm and fervour they exhibited.

Instead of choosing either of the options mentioned above, Muslim leaders have chosen a third path: to remain silent without openly acknowledging their mistakes. In the current situation, this silence can be seen as a transgression. They should be aware that God may hold them accountable for their actions.

Modern Muslim leaders have repeatedly demonstrated a tendency to hastily take revolutionary steps without conducting thorough research. Subsequently, they realized the wrongness of their actions. However, they have only maintained silence in response without openly acknowledging their mistake.

I do not believe that such a position is justified for any leader. By remaining silent and avoiding responsibility, the leaders may think they have escaped blame but leave people trapped in a cycle of destruction. Ordinary individuals, lacking a deep understanding of matters, continue to follow the guidance of their leaders. Therefore, it is the duty of the leaders who led the masses astray in the first place to acknowledge their mistakes openly. This will enable their followers to comprehend the true nature of the matter and prevent the recurrence of such blunders in the future.

Everyone is susceptible to making mistakes in this world of trials and tests. Making a mistake is not a crime. The actual wrongdoing lies in not openly admitting one's mistakes after realizing them. Only when Muslim leaders openly acknowledge their mistakes will Muslims be able to grasp the underlying issues and avoid repeating them in the future.

## A CONVERSATION

*The New York Times*, January 27, 2012

This interview, originally featured in *The New York Times*, has been published on their website along with the following note: "Following the controversy surrounding author Salman Rushdie's appearance at the Jaipur Literature Festival (Jan 20-24, 2012), which culminated in the cancellation of even a planned video conference with Mr. Rushdie, India Ink spoke with Muslim leaders to discuss the situation. They shared their thoughts on Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' and explored whether political factors were involved. Malavika Vyawahare interviewed Maulana Wahiduddin Khan at his residence in New Delhi to gather his opinion on the matter." Excerpts from the interview are presented below:

Q. What is your reaction to the protests against Salman Rushdie's participation in the Jaipur Literature Festival?

A. These protests were by a tiny minority, who are not representative of the Muslim community.

The protesters were utterly wrong in doing what they did. Salman Rushdie has every right to come to this country.

I heard his interview after the video conference was cancelled, and I agreed with him when he said that all other freedoms rest on freedom of expression. If you abolish the freedom of expression, all other liberties will cease.

According to Islam, you have to counter a book with a book and a statement with a statement. Countering a statement with violence is not correct. It is un-Islamic. Protest and argument are two different kinds of reactions. The Prophet of Islam faced many negative situations and abuses, but he never protested. The Prophet's life is a model for Muslims; thus, violent protest of this nature is against the spirit of Islam.

Q. What is it about Mr. Rushdie's work that has offended you personally and is offensive to the Muslim community?

A. I have read the 'Satanic Verses.' The book is not based on historical facts. This author quoted an event that did not happen and was fabricated. He has misconstrued the events described in Chapter 53, Verse 19 of the Quran. He has relied on those words as being part of the Quran, which are, in fact, not; some non-believers misreport them.

Also, he has referred to the existence of harems and the Prophet having many wives as the existence of brothels. In Islam, it is an accepted practice to have more than one wife; he could have referred to the fact as polygamy or even harems, but to call them brothel is wrong and offensive. It has a negative connotation, which the other words do not have.

Q. Do you think that it was right for Muslims to take issue with Mr. Rushdie's appearance, even via video conference?

A. Islamic law does not recognize violent protest; the word itself does not exist. In terms of democracy, the protesters may have been right, but not in terms of Islam. I do think Salman Rushdie abused his right to expression in the book, but Islam recognizes the right to disseminate your ideas if one expresses one's ideas in an entirely peaceful manner.

Islam does not require that the author should take into consideration the sentiments of his audience, but Salman Rushdie has misquoted history, which he has no right to do. Muslims could protest peacefully and counter an argument with an argument.

Q. How did the government handle the issue? Do you think the Muslim community has been given a fair hearing in all this?

A. I do not blame the government of India. Those who say that there was discrimination against how Muslim protests are dealt with and how protests by other communities are dealt with are wrong. There is no discrimination against Muslims.

## LAST WORD

Dr. Muzaffar Shaheen from Rajouri (Jammu and Kashmir) expressed his thoughts in a lengthy letter: “Since the publication of Salman Rushdie’s book, it has garnered significant attention from newspapers and magazines. The entire Muslim world has reacted to it, and the leaders’ protests have led to riots in Islamabad, Srinagar, and Bombay. However, no Muslim scholar has made an effort to respond to this book with rational and scholarly arguments. Is this book not a challenge for our scholars rather than a general humiliation of Islam? Thus far, no reasoned refutation of this book has been presented by any Muslim scholar. Can our agitations rectify the erroneous impressions received by those who have read Rushdie’s book and been influenced by its statements?”

I fully agree with Dr. Shaheen that each of these incidents should be taken as a challenge rather than an act of dishonouring Islam. This is the way prescribed by Islam. With the grace of God, I have always sought to respond in this Islamically appropriate way to events that I have been confronted with. And so, when I read the news about Salman Rushdie’s ‘Satanic Verses,’ the first thing I did was to procure a copy of the book. Then, I read the entire book, which is 546 pages long. After that, I studied the issue in the light of Shariah rules. Only after this did I begin writing my views on the controversy. The present book is a compilation of my writings on the issue.

In contrast, Khomeini reacted to the issue without properly examining Shariah laws, and prescribed capital punishment for a person who indulges in blasphemy, that is, using profane language against the Prophet of Islam. Other Shia and Sunni Muslim leaders either supported Khomeini or remained silent on the issue. According to my study, this kind of blasphemy law is completely alien to the original teachings of Islam. Before the coming of Islam in the period of ignorance (Jahiliya), difference of belief was a punishable act. People were prosecuted on account of their faith. Referring to this, the Quran states: “They ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in God, the Almighty, the Praiseworthy.” (85:8)

This practice is called religious persecution. Islam abolished religious persecution in history when the Prophet of Islam declared that personal belief is a subject of discussion and persuasion rather than legal punishment. This can be seen in the life of Prophet Muhammad himself.

During the life of the Prophet of Islam, Ka’b bin al-Ashraf (d. 624 A.D.), a poet and orator of Madinah, started defaming the Prophet and his followers, satirizing them in his poems and speeches. When he started doing this, the only action taken by the Prophet of Islam was to ask Hassan bin Thabit, one of the Companions who was a poet, to counter his false allegations. On the Prophet’s advice, Hassan bin Thabit, then composed verses in which he refuted the false propaganda directed against the Prophet

by Ka'b bin al-Ashraf (*Al-Bidayah wa'l Nihayah* by Ibn Kathir, Vol. 5, pp. 326-336)

According to this teaching of the Prophet of Islam, if anyone abuses the Prophet, Muslims are directed not to react. They have one of these two options: either to simply ignore it or to respond on an equal basis, that is, issuing a statement in return for a statement as the Quran says: "The recompense of an ill-deed is an ill the like thereof (42:40)." According to this, reaction must be on an equal basis, that is, word in return for word, statement in return for statement, book in return for book.

It appears to me that by not reacting in the manner that the Quran teaches us to (as explained above), these Muslim leaders violated the divine commandments. Millions of Muslims around the world began angrily protesting against Rushdie. Their agitation proved that Muslims seem so eager to 'dispatch others to hell' that they have quite forgotten that they should first think of how to make themselves fit 'to enter Heaven.' They should remember that not a single person in this world is guaranteed a reserved place in Paradise.

It must also be understood that to use abusive language against the Prophet of Islam or to praise him are a matter of one's own choice. Whatever the choice, it is in God's domain to pass judgment on it. According to this Islamic injunction, if there is a person who commits blasphemy, then the responsibility of Muslims is to meet him and persuade him and to remove his misunderstanding by peaceful means

and if he fails to understand then Muslims are left only with one option, that is, to pray for him.

Further, Muslims must take it as a case of misunderstanding, and then try to remove this misunderstanding. They must engage in discussion or provide the blasphemer with Islamic literature that gives the true image of the Prophet of Islam.

The whole scheme of Islam is based on the process of peaceful dialogue. In a verse of the Quran, God Almighty gives this injunction to the Prophet: "So, [O Prophet] exhort them: your task is only to exhort, you are not their keeper." (88:21-22) This is the standard Islamic response to problems, and the case of blasphemy is certainly no exception. Muslims must, therefore, exhort people in a friendly manner. They must try to change their hearts and minds. It must be borne in mind that the Quran is not a criminal code; it is a book of persuasion. So Muslims must deal with such cases by reasoning and not by meting out punishment. It is tantamount to defamation of Islam to say that Islam cannot give a reason-based response, and that is why it endeavours to inflict physical punishment on those who make any kind of negative remark against the Prophet of Islam.

The fact of the matter is that had not Muslims reacted so angrily all over the world to it, the book would have died a natural death. It was only the mindless agitation that Muslims launched that gave it life, and which made vast numbers of people, who may otherwise have not cared to read it, purchase the book, although I doubt many



of them would have been able to stand reading it from cover to cover.

Writing in the *Time* magazine, Margareta du Rietz very rightly pointed out, 'Very few took note of the novel. Now, thanks to Khomeini, it is world-famous.' It was Khomeini's fatwa calling for the death of Rushdie and the violent reaction of Muslims the world over calling for Rushdie's murder that made this thoroughly unreadable book the number one bestseller in America. The publisher of the book even thanked Khomeini for being 'its biggest salesman.' In a letter to 'The Times of India', a certain W.M. Shaikh rightly pointed out that while Rushdie's novel was indeed insulting, Muslims should have ignored the book and let it die a natural death, rather than violently agitate against it and its author because this would only give it added publicity.

I read Salman Rushdie's book entitled 'Midnight's Children,' in which he states, "I am hanging between belief and disbelief." I felt that this statement in which Rushdie expressed his struggle between belief and uncertainty in religion extends beyond his personal experience to encompass an entire generation. What Salman Rushdie has articulated about himself resonates with millions of Muslims. Roughly 75% of the modern educated Muslim youth grapple with this uncertainty. The only distinction is that Rushdie, being a professional writer, chose to pour the darkness of his heart and mind onto paper for temporary gain. Others, engaged in different professions, earn their

livelihood without dedicating time to produce an absurd book like Rushdie did.

I realized that “Rushdie” is not an isolated case but representative of millions of individuals worldwide. The only difference is that Rushdie’s “Rushdism” has been exposed, while others may keep their similar inclinations hidden.

Muslims refer to this as “mental apostasy.” However, according to my study, it is not true apostasy but rather a manifestation of intellectual dissatisfaction. The present situation of Muslims, characterized by intellectual dissatisfaction, presents a challenge for contemporary Muslim leaders and Islamic scholars. It necessitates the creation of standard Islamic literature in a modern scientific style, available in major languages that can address their minds. There is an urgent need to develop such literature that dispels doubts and confusion. Only through this can the doubts, uncertainties, or disbelief of countless Muslims who grapple with intellectual dissatisfaction be transformed into belief. This would rescue them from the abyss of faithlessness and restore them to a solid foundation of faith.

Having understood this, I embarked on a study of the available Islamic literature written by various authors in modern times. I realized that this literature may be beneficial for individuals with traditional mindsets. However, for intellectually dissatisfied individuals, these books fail to meet the requirements of their discerning minds. The modern generation, influenced by contemporary ideas, no

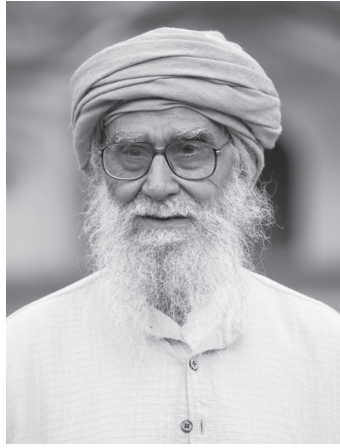
longer embraces preconceived axioms or traditional logic. Instead, they accept claims that are substantiated by known scientific and historical facts. While the traditional method of reasoning is rooted in doctrinal faith, the modern approach is grounded in rational arguments.

Only literature that presents Islamic teachings in alignment with the modern mindset can genuinely resonate with the modern individual. It is a reality that Islam and human nature are interconnected. Therefore, literature that is in sync with human nature will effectively address the minds of the modern generation.

There are many individuals with such mindsets who are eager to explore Islam, perceiving it as the voice of their nature and the yearning of their soul. However, this can only transpire when the religion of truth is presented to them in a manner that addresses their minds and, therefore, is familiar and acceptable to them.

Recognizing this need, decades ago, I embarked on a detailed study of Islam while simultaneously delving into various aspects of modernity. Thereafter, I devoted my life to writing books presenting various aspects of Islam in light of Islam's original sources—the Quran and Sunnah, and in keeping with the modern age. I have prepared a corpus of literature and recorded hundreds of lectures in both Urdu and English that present Islam supported by rational arguments and in alignment with the nature of humanity, individuals will realize that this is precisely what they have been yearning for all along.

This material presents Islam as the voice of human nature, and being in a contemporary style, it addresses modern minds. This material dispels misconceptions about Islam to reveal its true face, which is entirely consistent with modernity and based on peace, spirituality, and mutual coexistence. It presents Islam in a way that is entirely consistent with the times. It addresses the intellectual dissatisfaction of young minds. Reading this material, thousands of people perceive it as the voice of their nature and discover Islam as the yearning of their soul.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021), an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader, and peace activist, was internationally recognized for his seminal contributions to world peace. The Government of India posthumously honored him with the Padma Vibhushan Award in 2021 for his contributions to spirituality. Maulana authored over 200 books that delve into Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, its relationship with modernity, and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran and Quran Commentary are widely appreciated for their simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. In 2001, he founded the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International to promote a culture of peace and convey the spiritual message of Islam at a global level. CPS International Network is taking the legacy forward.

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Protesting or demanding the death penalty for blasphemy against the Prophet contradicts the core principles of Islam. Islam advocates responding to ideas with ideas, encouraging Muslims to either ignore blasphemous statements or respond in kind—for instance, by issuing a statement in response to a statement, or a book in response to a book.

As the Quran states, 'Let harm be requited by an equal harm. But whoever pardons and amends will find his reward with God' (42:40). The book clarifies that blasphemy should be a subject of intellectual discussions, not condemnation, protest, or retaliation. In light of the Quran and traditions, it aims to address and correct misconceptions, particularly for those seeking deeper understanding.

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