

Compassionate and protective

THE cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad poses a serious challenge to freedom of speech as well as to Muslim sensitivity and the debate among Muslims. It also brings to the fore the question about how the Prophet would have reacted to him being caricatured. Would he have censored and muzzled the press, accused a whole nation, unleashed violence; blamed the Jews for everything and burnt the Israeli flag alongside the Danish one?

Cartoonists and Muslim protestors who have reacted violently need to reflect that “freedom is not the right

to do as you please but the liberty to do as you ought”. One cannot act recklessly; express hate speech in the name of freedom and then invoke “freedom of expression” to protect them. It is not only religious sentiments, history and civilization of a religion but also the centuries of struggle to realise freedom of expression (by Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Buddha for example) that is at the cross roads

of our lives. Sir Muhammad Iqbal a great thinker and critic of both the west and Muslims once said that in freedom of thought lies their destruction who do not possess discipline of mind, if the mind is immature, then freedom of thought becomes an instrument of making a beast of man.

The satire portrays the Prophet as a killer, who in reality from authentic sources and even western

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scholars represent s the greatest revolutionary. A great free thinker, the protector

of human rights who was often at odds with his own companions in defending women’s rights. He pursued relentlessly the emancipation of slaves and zealously guarded free expression. Was it not he who stopped his companions from causing any harm to a Bedouin who had desecrated the mosque by urinating inside then himself washed the spot. He was the man

who visited a woman who once felt ill and failed to show up as she usually did throwing filth on him when he walked through the arcade. It was he who with a handful of followers moved out of the city of Madinah where he was head of State, so that he faced the enemies away from the city to protect its inhabitants that included Christians and Jews from the impending war to wipe out the Muslims. It was he, who declared a general amnesty as he led one hundred thousand soldiers into Makkah. There among the forgiven was Hind who had chewed his uncle's liver in a previous battle.

Those who opposed him, reviled him, pelted him with stones, for them he prayed. He taught Muslims to revere Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the noble Mary, mother of Jesus; among others (may God bless and grant them peace). When cursed, he replied that he was sent to spread peace. He never charged anyone for blasphemy even though the Qur'anic revelation clearly outlines those who blaspheme God. There is an antithesis in all these between the Prophet and the actions of some Muslims.

Of the many famous sayings and practices of the Prophet are "the ink of a scholar is greater than the

blood of a martyr" or sometimes interpreted as "the pen is mightier than the sword." "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave; even to the farthest corners of the earth; let the poor and the rich be equal in the pursuit of knowledge". He was instructed by Revelation that there is no compulsion in the way of life / religion a person chooses and that his mission was to convey the message with beautiful exhortation and debates; that he was sent as a mercy unto all of humankind.

The cartoons are therefore a lie about the most progressive person. It was not a cartoon about Osama or the Pope who was opposed to condoms. It was an insult and an assault in the guise of freedom of speech not against a particular Muslim or viewpoint. A media is required to check its facts to avoid libellous action and go to great lengths to verify facts to avoid legal action. The cartoons were meant to insult, provoke and offend Muslims and is not only hate speech but defamatory. Both sides who have acted recklessly have demonised Prophet Muhammad.

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