

Taliban's actions not a true reflection of Islam

Muslims cannot maintain an “embarrassed” silence to the introduction of draconian measures by the Taliban. They must strive to maintain the values of Islam and reclaim the status of women as free, equal and vital contributors to society and also protect the rights of all people, writes Sayed-Iqbal Mohamed

While the Taliban in Afghanistan must be commended for their fight against drug trafficking, its religious reform poses serious problems (Religious police crack the whip, June 26 2001). There is no compulsion in Islam to wear a beard and, while praying five times a day is compulsory, there is no enforcement of this decree or prescribed penalties.

In keeping with its mindset of excessive “force”, the Taliban’s *diktat* of labelling human beings into religious compartments is therefore another mind-boggling version of its own brand of Islam.

Expecting Hindu’s and people of other faiths to wear religious labels is not only provocative, but also dehumanising and un-Islamic. So too was its wanton destruction of two ancient statues of

Buddha. While most Muslim scholars and countries condemn the Taliban, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have maintained a “dignified” silence. Ironically, these countries have a poor track record regarding human rights, particularly regarding women, who are stripped of their basic human rights, such as the right to their bodies, the right to speak, to give and receive health care and education and the right to work and to walk down the street.

Authoritarian methods used by these governments continue to oppress women-politically and otherwise.

Islam is synonymous with peace and spreading the message of peace, as are the teachings of Buddha. Buddha said: “Hate is not conquered by hate. Hate is

conquered by love. This is law eternal” (the Dhammapada, 1:5). Recent attempts to undo centuries of misunderstanding of Islam and to appreciate its contribution to, for example, the sciences and human development, is being undermined by the likes of the Taliban.

THE PROBLEM, of course, is that the Western and Muslim governments are not in a position to successfully challenge the Taliban when violence in so many countries is handled selectively and, in some instances, on a partisan basis. When these governments provide political and military support to one faction or another, they cannot hold the moral high ground.

A glance at history will show that before the two world wars and before the colonial powers carved up the world to satisfy their agendas, Muslim rule in Spain and India over several centuries generally produced peace and harmony. Christian, Jewish and Hindu scholars emerged during these periods. The Fatimid dynasty that ruled Egypt and the Turkish Empire introduced legislation that allowed people of other faiths to have matters heard in their own courts and protected the rights of all people to worship.

IN INDIA, some Muslim scholars declared the Vedas as one of the revealed scriptures and thereby considered Hindus as the “People of the Book”, together with Christians and Jews. This may have been done for political expediency, or to promote harmony or perhaps out of genuine attempts to understand that

Hindus, too, believe in the oneness of God. This does not mean that during the Muslim reign there was heaven on earth, because certain Muslim rulers were most repressive and tyrannical. Some left a wounded civilisation in India, like Afghanistan’s 12th century Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi, who rampaged through northern India destroying many idols.

However, Muslim rule, taken as a whole, did not adopt an approach similar to the Taliban’s. Had it done so, there would have been no places of worship for Jews, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. Muslims cannot maintain an “embarrassed” silence to the introduction of draconian measures by the Taliban. Muslims must strive to maintain the values of Islam and reclaim the status of women as free, equal and vital contributors to society, as well as protect the rights of all people.

Women were given rights in the Qur’an and by the Prophet Muhammad (God’s peace and blessing be upon him) 1400 years ago to contribute to the economy for example, by owning and selling property. On the other hand, the Taliban is not the only group resorting to extreme measures. There are extremist Hindus who bombed mosques, ultra-orthodox Jews who pelt women with stones when they walk through their neighbourhood wearing trousers or short-sleeved clothes, and American Christians who bomb abortion clinics

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