

Islam Holds Position of Pride in India

Al-Issa Leads Jummah Prayer in Jama Masjid of Delhi

'Misconceptions can be checked only through interfaith dialogue'

The Role of Religions in World Peace



Al-Issa in India
Brotherly Dialogue to
Promote Cooperation

رَابِطَةُ الْعَالَمِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ
MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE



Contents

EDITORIAL

Brotherly visit 4

VISIT TO INDIA

Al-Issa heads MWL delegation to India 6

Islam holds 'position of pride in India': Ajit Doval..... 12

Al-Issa leads Jummah prayer at New Delhi's historic mosque 13

INTERVIEW

'Misconceptions can be checked only through interfaith dialogue' 16

BOOK REVIEW

The role of religions in world peace 22

HISTORY

Glimpses of early Islamic coinage 26

CULTURE

The Mahdara:A beacon of knowledge in Mauritania 30



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Brotherly visit

The historic visit of the Muslim World League delegation to India, headed by its Secretary General Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, came in line with the MWL's principles, and reflected its continuous strive to serve Muslims and build bridges of understanding and humanitarian cooperation with all. The Secretary General met with political leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu, religious

leaders and diplomats.

He delivered a lecture at the Islamic Cultural Center on the features of Islamic civilization and its call for coexistence, and then spoke at the International Vivekananda Foundation, where he discussed the Islamic values that call for the good of humanity, and the importance of a civilizational alliance to preserve world peace. Religious leaders and a galaxy of intellectuals and parliamentarians attended these discussions.

Dr. Al-Issa ascended the pulpit of the historical Great Mosque in Delhi and gave the Friday Sermon. “Islam, with its sublime ethics and comprehensive, conscious and wise outlook, is an example of optimal coexistence with everybody,” he said during the sermon.

At the end of the visit, an open dialogue was held with politicians and diplomats, who emphasized the need to teach future generations the civilized principles of coexistence.

Dr. Al-Issa called for respecting religious specificities and stressed that religious aware-

ness can be a tool to promote mutual understanding and appreciation.

Historically, the Islamic civilization has always embraced human exchange under the Islamic principles of cooperation and justice. Allah Almighty says: “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”





Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, speaks to the audience at India Islamic Cultural Center in New Delhi, in the presence of Indian National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval.

Al-Issa heads MWL delegation to India

By Syed Abdulaziz Shamshoddin

HE. Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the

Muslim World League, met with the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, during the former's six-day visit to India from the 10th



Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa meets Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India.

to the 15th of July. The meeting discussed interfaith harmony and peace while highlighting India's rich cultural diversity.

Dr. Al-Issa also met with President Droupadi Murmu and members of the civil society. He delivered a speech in New Delhi addressing diversity, pluralism, and societal harmony.



Dr. Al-Issa met with President Droupadi Murmu and members of the civil society. He delivered a speech in New Delhi addressing diversity, pluralism, and societal harmony.



Dr. Al-Issa was presented with a shield by Ajit Doval, National Security Advisor, on the right, and Sirajuddin Qureshi, President of India Islamic Culture, on the left, during his visit to India.

President Murmu extended a warm welcome and expressed India's appreciation for the Muslim World League's efforts in promoting tolerant values, fostering moderation, and encouraging interfaith dialogue. President Murmu emphasized that India, as a diverse nation with multiple cultures, languages, ethnicities, and religions, values unity. She further highlighted the significant contribution of India's over 200 million

Muslim population, which has positioned the country as the second-largest Muslim population in the world.

Dr. Al-Issa's meetings with religious leaders in New Delhi focused on brotherhood, dialogue, cooperation and peaceful coexistence of civilizations and cultures. He asserted that interfaith dialogue is the only path for the future as it could help deal with the



Dr. Al-Issa delivers a speech at the New Delhi's India Islamic Cultural Centre.

challenges of the time.

He stressed that a Muslim's faith leads him to comprehend the wisdom of God in human diversity and to the realization that this diversity does not mean fear of the other, distance from him, or hatred of him, let alone insulting him, as these attitudes are the "theories and concepts of



President Murmu highlighted the significant contribution of India's over 200 million Muslim population, which has positioned the country as the second-largest Muslim population in the world.



Dr. Al-Issa addresses a gathering of well-wishers at the Khusro Foundation in New Delhi.

ignorance, pessimism and extremism.” Religious awareness must be a tool for promoting understanding, coexistence and cooperation, with mutual appreciation and love, he said.

“To prevent a civilizational clash, we need to protect and guide the

next generation from childhood. Misconceptions, hate theories and wrong perceptions have expedited the journey from radicalization to terrorism. We need to stand against narratives about the clash of civilizations and religious hatred,” he said, adding that the most recent contribution of the MWL in





Dr. Al-Issa addresses the audience at the Vivekananda International Foundation's headquarters in New Delhi.

this regard was the initiative Building Bridges between the East and the West, which was launched at the United Nations. "But we need everyone's participation and partnership," he said.



To prevent a civilizational clash, we need to protect and guide the next generation from childhood. We need to stand against narratives about the clash of civilizations and religious hatred.





Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, and Ajit Doval, India's National Security Advisor at the India Islamic Cultural Centre in New Delhi.

Islam holds 'position of pride in India': Ajit Doval

Ajit Doval, National Security Advisor, said India has been a melting pot of cultures and religions that have co-existed in harmony for centuries, and Islam occupies a unique and significant "position of pride" amongst the religious groups in the country.

Doval's remarks came as he shared the stage with Dr. Al-Issa at an event at the India Islamic cultural centre in New Delhi, where he praised the importance of Islam and highlighted the strong ties between India and Saudi Arabia. He lauded Al-Issa as a respected global voice of moderate Islam, recognizing his profound scholarly knowledge and under-

standing of the religion.

Doval praised Islam for its values and its positive role in society. As he put it, "Islam occupies a significant position of pride in India with the country being home to the second-largest Muslim population in the world. It was only by being open to accommodating various world views and ideas, interactions and assimilations of various cultures, beliefs and practices, that India emerged as a sanctuary for people of all faiths from all across the world."

The event was attended by hundreds of people including Muslim religious leaders.



Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Al-Issa delivers "Khutbah" at Jama Masjid in Delhi, India.

Al-Issa leads Jummah prayer at New Delhi's historic mosque

MWL-New Delhi

Dr. Al-Issa delivered the Friday sermon at the historic Mughal-era Jama Masjid in Delhi's old quarters at the invitation of the imam, becoming the first religious figure from outside India to ascend the mosque's pulpit in nearly 400 years. Thousands of worshippers filled the outer courtyards of the mosque.

In the sermon, Dr. Al-Issa pointed out that the

Qur'an repeatedly urges people to "purify their souls." Allah says: "Successful indeed is the one who purifies his soul, and doomed is the one who corrupts it." The Prophet, peace be upon him, whose behavior reflected his great morals and manners, was reported to say: "A believer will attain by his good behavior the rank of one who prays during the night and observes fasting during the day."



Upon arrival at the historic mosque, Dr. Al-Issa was accorded a rousing welcome by Muslims of all schools of thought.

He emphasized that the Islamic civilization is an ethical one that introduced to humanity wonderful models of human integration, honesty, trustworthiness, fulfilment of covenants and promises, forbearance, forgiveness and grace, cheerfulness of face and good speech. The Muslim, equipped with high morals and comprehensive, conscious and wise view, is an example of optimal coexistence with everyone.

Dr. Al-Issa stressed that the texts of Islamic law have great objectives meant to achieve people's religious and worldly interests. Such objectives look from all angles to fully see the picture. Islamic jurists have made it clear that Fatwas (legal opinions) and rulings may differ according to time, place and circumstances.

"Hence emerged the Charter of Makkah, which was signed by the muftis and scholars of the Islamic nation and approved by Islamic countries, prohibiting the issuance of fatwas outside their spatial circumstance, conditions and private customs."

He stressed that a true Muslim's life should reflect high morals and values that confirm the majesty and beauty of Islam.

"On the contrary, any shameful act testifies, with regret, against our religion in the view of those who do not know the true image of Islam. They may judge Islam through the acts of those belonging to it, whose misdeeds avert people from the Way of Allah."



Thousands of worshippers attended the prayers.



Texts of Islamic law have great objectives meant to achieve people's religious and worldly interests.



He said that the real believer highlights the truth of his religion through his lofty values and venerable deeds, in terms of the moderation and mildness of Islam, and through the rejection of all forms of extremism and violence,

whatever the causes and pretexts.

The Jama Masjid in Delhi is the second largest mosque on the Indian subcontinent with the capacity to accommodate 25,000 worshippers. It was built between 1650 and 1651 by Mughal emperor Shah Jahān, who had thousands of workers constructing the mosque using predominantly red sandstone with some usage of white marble. The name Jama Masjid is Arabic for "Friday Mosque." The building has a vast, open courtyard to its main eastern gateway and smaller gateways at its north and south sides with two 40-meter-high minarets marking its northeast and southeast corners and three large domes adorned with red sandstone and marble patterns.



Maulana Mahmood As'ad Madani, President of Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind.

‘Misconceptions can be checked only through interfaith dialogue’

Interview by Aftab Kola

Maulana Mahmood As'ad Madani, President of Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind, opens up about the challenges in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation between different communities in India. Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind, or the association of Muslim religious schol-

ars in India, is one of the most popular and influential organizations representing the community in the country. It has played a key role in the freedom movement and advocated communal harmony. It argued that there's no reason why Muslims and Hindus cannot

coexist peacefully and work together for the betterment of the country.

Mahmood Madani is the grandson of Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani, one of the stalwarts of the Jamiat. He is a graduate of Darul Uloom Deoband and has been a member of the Rajya Sabha from the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). He is one of the influential voices of the Muslim community in India.

In an interview with the MWL Journal, Madani talked about the Jamiat's history, its policies and its role in bridging the divide between different communities in India during these turbulent times.

Who is Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind and what are its aims and objectives?

Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind was founded in 1919. It is the largest and most influential Muslim organization in India. It has played a key role in the social and political life of the Muslim community in India with its members actively participating in the freedom struggle and championing composite nationalism. It has been actively involved in securing the religious and social rights of Indian Muslims through peaceful and democratic means. It has more than 10 million members and 1,700 branch offices across the entire length and breadth of India. The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind aims to protect Islamic virtues, symbols and places of worship, secure and safeguard the religious, educational, cultural and civil rights of Indian Muslims, work on religious, educational and social reform of Muslims, establish institutions as may be necessary for the educational, cultural and social progress and stability of Muslims, foster and strengthen amity among different communities of India in the light of Islamic teachings, revive Islamic and Arabic studies and promote a system of education that is in tune with the needs of the modern age, promote the teachings of Islam and protect Muslim Awqaf.



Through its unit **Sadbhavna Manch**, the Jamiat carries out interfaith activities in a focused manner throughout India. The results we have achieved speak for themselves and encourage us to continue them with greater vigor.



An average Indian has many misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. What is the Jamiat doing to debunk them?

Clearing the misconceptions about Islam and Muslims is a big challenge, and the Jamiat recognizes how important it is. We are of the firm belief that these misconceptions can be debunked only through interfaith engagement and dialogue. Our approach is focused on fostering honest and constructive conversations with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Through various outreach programs, community events, seminars, and media engagements, we actively encourage dialogue that promotes understanding and gives an accurate picture of Islam and Muslims. We have established 'Jamiat Sadbhavna Manch' to promote mutual understanding. It not only helps clear misunderstandings but also strengthens the bonds of tolerance, acceptance, and unity among communities. The Jamiat last year decided to conduct 1,000 such interfaith conferences and has hosted 200 so far. Our eventual goal is to facilitate an environment where all Indians can engage in informed discussions about Islam and Muslims, leading to greater harmony



Dr. Al-Issa meets with members of the Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind during his visit to India.



It is important that all sections of society, including leaders in politics, media, and civil society, take a stand against hate speech and divisive rhetoric.



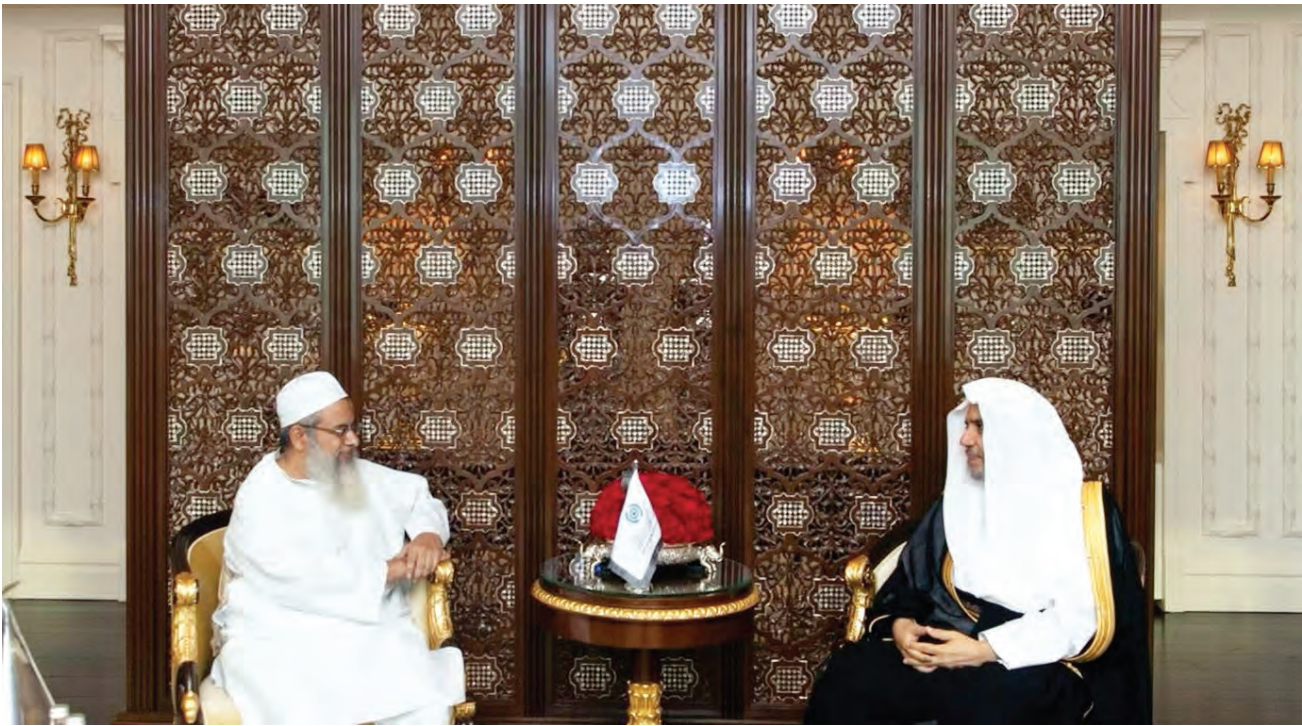
and understanding within our diverse society.

Muslims face hate on social media, in political circles, as well as in real life daily. How can this be countered?

One of the best ways to counter this barrage of hate-mongering on social media and elsewhere is to promote Constitutional values and the Gandhian ideals of tolerance and

coexistence. Engagement and dialogue can play a pivotal role in changing this climate of hate. We encourage open, respectful conversations that foster understanding. Through these dialogues, we can build bridges of empathy, break down stereotypes, and work towards establishing a society that values inclusivity and harmony. That's not all. It is important that all sections of society, including leaders in politics, media, and civil society, take a stand against hate speech and divisive rhetoric. There is also a need to document these cases of hate speech and hate crimes that are amplified on social media platforms. In August 2021, the Jamiat launched a new initiative called Justice and Empowerment of Minorities (JEM) to collect, collate, verify, and document these vile activities.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has passed a unanimous resolution declaring March 15 the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia'. Islamophobia connotes fear or prejudice, discrimination, and



Mahmood As'ad Madani, President of Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind, receives Dr. Al-Issa at his office in New Delhi.

hate speech against Islam. Is the Jamiat planning any programs to mark this day in 2024?

Certainly. The Jamiat has taken several proactive steps to raise awareness about and combat Islamophobia in 2024. It plans to launch a social media campaign and continue its efforts to highlight the significance of this day. We will use various platforms to spread awareness about Islamophobia, its impact, and the importance of combating it. This campaign will include informative posts, infographics, and personal stories to engage a wider audience.

The Jamiat also plans to organize programs in various cities across India in the days leading up to March 15. These events will provide platforms for discussions, seminars, and workshops on the harmful effects of Islamophobia and ways to combat it. These gatherings aim to bring together people from different backgrounds and faiths to foster understanding and unity. We will also collaborate with



We encourage open, respectful conversations that foster understanding. Through these dialogues, we can build bridges of empathy and break down stereotypes.



educational institutions to conduct special programs and awareness sessions on school and college campuses. These programs will help students understand the root causes of Islamophobia, and encourage tolerance, empathy, and respect for all religions. In terms of community outreach, the Jamiat will carry out outreach activities to connect with local communities, emphasizing the need to combat



Our approach is focused on fostering honest and constructive conversations with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Through various outreach programs, community events, seminars, and media engagements, we actively encourage dialogue that promotes understanding and gives an accurate picture of Islam and Muslims.



Islamophobia. Activities that may be part of this outreach will include distributing informational pamphlets, organizing neighborhood discussions, or conducting awareness campaigns within Muslim communities. The Jamiat also plans to work with organizations and civil society groups that share the goal of combating Islamophobia. Collaborative efforts can be more impactful and reach a larger audience.

What should be the basis for interfaith dialogue in your opinion?

The basis for interfaith dialogue should be the principle of *Lakum dinukum wa liya deen*, which translates to “To you, your religion, and to me, mine.” This principle emphasizes mutual respect for each other’s religious beliefs and practices. This should be the foundation for dialogue and we must strive to promote understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among different faiths. Nothing is more pow-

erful than trying to understand each other in order to prevent and resolve disputes and differences.

Could you share some of your experiences with interfaith dialogue? Does it really make an impact?

Through its unit *Sadbhavna Manch* (good-will platform, the Jamiat carries out interfaith activities in a focused manner throughout India. The results we have achieved speak for themselves and encourage us to continue them with greater vigor. Not only do we need to continue such efforts in these times but also ramp them up.

Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, visited India in July 2023. He met you, too. What did the two of you discuss?

We conveyed to him our appreciation and support for Saudi Arabia’s current initiatives, concern for humanitarian values and rejection of all forms of extremist ideologies. We also explained our clear stand about terrorism. We conveyed to His Excellency the Jamiat’s continuous efforts to create bonds of amity and friendship with various communities, especially Hindus. He gave us a patient hearing and provided us with valuable suggestions on how we can achieve our objectives and respectful status by following the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH.) We also made a brief presentation on our social and educational projects to combat illiteracy and poverty, the biggest challenges faced by the Muslim community in India. Dr. Al-Issa was kind enough to ask me to regularly follow up with him about various developments and initiatives.

Will the Jamiat work with the MWL in strengthening relations between different communities? Are any initiatives being taken forward?

The Jamiat has been working on its own to strengthen the relations between different communities. While there has been no collaboration with MWL so far, we would certainly welcome it. We are certain that any

cooperation with the MWL and its expertise will be of great help in achieving our common objectives of promoting friendship and universal brotherhood in the true spirit of Islam.

Maulana Mahmood As'ad Madani President, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind

Maulana Mahmood Madani, President of Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, is a prominent figure within the Indian Muslim community. A graduate of the reputed Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband, he carries on the legacy of his grandfather, Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani, one of the great Islamic scholars in the Indian Subcontinent. He is recognized for his firm dedication to various social causes and the advocacy of rights for Indian Muslims.

Promoting unity in diversity and fostering harmonious relationships among different faiths in India, Maulana Mahmood Madani has organized over 200 interfaith conferences, known as 'Sadhbhavna Sansad'. These platforms facilitate dialogues on peaceful coexistence, reflecting his commitment to his grandfather's ideals.

Beyond his advocacy work, Maulana Madani is actively involved in humanitarian efforts, welfare initiatives, and educational activities. His contributions include providing relief during



calamities, overseeing the education of more than a million children in madrasas with an upgraded curriculum, and ensuring the certification of madrasa students at the Secondary School level. Under his guidance, the Jamiat Youth Club (JYC) has been instrumental in training young individuals across various skill sets.



The role of religions in world peace

Dr. Hassan Abdul Razak Al-Naqar

Despite the plethora of books and academic papers discussing peace issues, the book "The Role of Religions in World Peace" stands out for its unique approach. It brings together perspectives from both the East and the West through the works of two esteemed scholars: The Syrian Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Said Ramadan Al-Bouti

(1929-2013,) renowned for his contributions to Islamic legal studies, and Hans Křng (1928-2021,) a celebrated Swiss theologian. Published by Dar Al-Fikr in Damascus, the book is part of their "Dialogue with the West" series.

The publisher opens with a quote from the En-

glish poet Rudyard Kipling: “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” He then offers a perspective that challenges this notion, suggesting that the East can no longer be considered purely Eastern, nor the West completely Western. Civilization is a collective cultural achievement, shaped by the contributions of many nations. With the world undergoing profound changes, everyone is called to shoulder their responsibilities and engage in dialogue and mutual recognition. The goal is to foster a spirit of cooperation and find commonalities that lead to peaceful coexistence.

Peace as Religious Value

Dr. Bouti begins his exploration titled “Islam’s Perspective on World Peace” by suggesting that “The Role of Religion” might be a more fitting title for his discourse than “The Role of Religions.” He argues that religious doctrines serve to convey messages about God Almighty, and thus cannot be inherently contradictory or diverse across prophets or holy texts. Each prophet is seen as affirming the teachings of his predecessors while heralding the arrival of those to come.

Yet, this stance invites further debate, particularly as Dr. Bouti himself cites from the Constitution of Madina, “To the Muslims their religion, and to the Jews their religion,” and echoes a Quranic verse that proclaims, “For you your religion, and for me mine” (Surah Al-Kafirun, 6).

Islam is presented as a faithful custodian of all divine messages delivered by God Almighty through His messengers and prophets. Peace is upheld as a core religious principle universally advocated by all prophets, emphasizing the sanctity of human life and the imperative to safeguard it. The narrative acknowledges, however, the perpetual existence of those who seek to violate this sanctity through conflict and strife, driven by greed, a lust for power, or the exploitation of the vulnerable.

It is in this context that the Muslim’s creed of combat, which is essentially defensive in nature, can be understood. As articulated in the Qur’an:



Peace is upheld as a core religious principle universally advocated by all prophets, emphasizing the sanctity of human life and the imperative to safeguard it. The narrative acknowledges, however, the perpetual existence of those who seek to violate this sanctity through conflict and strife, driven by greed, a lust for power, or the exploitation of the vulnerable.



“And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not commit aggression; indeed, Allah does not like aggressors” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 190). This verse encapsulates the Islamic principle that while self-defense is permitted, transgression is not, anchoring the Muslim martial ethos in a broader commitment to peace and justice.

Dr. Bouti points out that the word “Ghazwa,” historically used to describe the battles during the Prophet Muhammad’s time, conveys more than the notion of launching surprise assaults on a secure and unsuspecting foe. Rather, the Prophet’s military engagements were uniformly in self-defense. In the well-known confrontations at Badr, Uhud, and the Trench, it was always the adversaries who commenced hostilities. Take, for example, Abu Jahl’s defiant words at Badr. When advised to withdraw, he boasted, “We will certainly not turn back until we reach Badr. There, we’ll make a camp for three days, slaughter our camels, feast, indulge in wine, and enjoy the music of entertainers. Our exploits and our gathering will



Dr. Al-Issa speaks at the Forum on Improving Muslim Unity and Global Coexistence in Washington, D.C.

be renowned among the Arabs, instilling awe in them forever.”

Tolerance or Kindness and Justice?

Sheikh Al-Bouti delves into the nature of the relationship between Muslims and the People of the Book under Islamic law. He discusses the benevolent and just principles that unite both communities under a single banner of a shared word, a cornerstone of Islamic civilization’s ethos. God Almighty commands, “God does not prevent you from those who do not fight you for your faith nor drive you from your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. Indeed, God loves those who are just.” (Al-Mumtahina: 8).

The author articulates a nuanced understanding of this interfaith relationship. He underscores that the term “tolerance” doesn’t adequately capture the essence of Muslim conduct towards others, especially the People of the Book. The expected behavior is rooted in ‘birr’ (kindness,) reflecting noble character, and ‘qist’ (justice,) ensuring fair and just dealings while shunning

injustice. If tolerance were the optimal term to describe this relationship, it would have been the chosen descriptor.

Tolerance, according to the author, falls short of representing Islam and Muslims and does not sufficiently respect the People of the Book. It suggests a patronizing forgiveness or overlooking of faults, not a foundation of justice upon which Islamic law builds the rights and duties of people to one another. Tolerance is more relevant in personal and individual contexts, where people might choose to overlook each other’s faults.

The author also points out that he couldn’t find the term ‘tolerance’ used in this sense in the key texts of Islamic jurisprudence and fundamentals. When it does appear, it pertains to personal ethics and the amicable treatment of people towards one another as reflected in the saying, “May God have mercy on a man who is lenient when he sells...” (Sahih al-Bukhari).

He then questions what guarantees there are

for transforming the ideal of peace into a tangible reality in daily life. The primary assurance is the genuine belief of people in their faith and their efforts to ensure that politics serves religion, not the other way around. He points out the historic pitfalls of using religion for political gain, which ultimately harms the religion, its followers, peace, and human rights.

Ultimately, what's needed is the actualization of these ideals on the ground, turning broad principles into specific, actionable programs.

The image of Islam in the West

Dr. Hans K ng's section in the second part of the book is titled "The Three Abrahamic Religions: Historical Shifts and Current Challenges."

He opens the discussion by addressing why some in the West might see Islam as a foe or adversary, noting a stark contrast to their often-neutral views of Chinese or Indian-originated religions. He suggests that this could be due to the physical distance and lack of historical conflict between the latter religions and the Christian or Western world, which hasn't allowed for the same kind of adversarial history to take root.

K ng points out that enemy images are less about actual events and more about the preconceived notions and biases that people hold. Media plays a crucial role here. It tends to present Muslims in extremes, which can cement Islam as a religion synonymous with zealotry, intolerance, and aggression, seemingly predisposed to conflict.

K ng emphasizes that those who subscribe to this selective perception of Islam are detached from its true essence. They hold onto a caricature that's out of step with Islam's actual nature and teachings.

Is dialogue possible?

Hans K ng raises a poignant question: In light of these circumstances, is a dialogue with Muslims feasible? Yet, he quickly poses another, more

pointed query: Which Muslims do you wish to have a dialogue with?

According to K ng, dialogue is not only possible, but based on personal experience, it is evident that there are many within the Muslim community who are eager for engagement. Among them are Sharia scholars, intellectuals, university professors, and professionals spread across cities such as Riyadh, Karachi, Cairo, and Dar-es-Salaam. These individuals understand the nuanced interplay between the East and the West and don't subscribe to a simplistic, binary view of the differences between the Western world and the Islamic one.

Interestingly, dialogue has been possible even during periods of intense conflict between the two sides, like the Crusades, when many in the West formed an admirable view of Islam and its leaders, such as Saladin.

K ng reflects on several historical instances where positive interactions between Islam and the West were evident.

Emphasizing a culture of peace

The book's value lies in its call to attention to a culture of peace. It upholds the belief that peace is the natural state that suits humanity, and is conducive to the well-being of all, fostering their welfare and serving their collective interests.

Promoting this culture of peace is crucial, starting with school curriculums that inculcate these values in children before they are exposed to the culture of violence, and then broadening that dissemination to adults through media, literature, and art. This creates a societal fabric that resists extremism and violence, fosters tolerance among individuals, respects the rights of others, and embraces the fundamental belief in the equality of all humans based on their shared origins.



797 AD gold dinar in Saudi Arabia reflects Umayyad coinage heritage.

Glimpses of early Islamic coinage

Dr. By Fatima Taneem

Having been used as money for thousands of years in many ancient and medieval societies, coins constitute a major historical source that documents political and economic changes over time.

Islamic history, for example, can be chronologically traced through the study of coins. Islamic

coins were mainly of three types: Dinar (gold), Dirham (silver), and Fils (usually copper). During the Medieval period, the Dinar and Dirham were amongst the most powerful currencies, widely circulated throughout all parts of the known world. Some of the biggest hoards of Islamic coins were discovered in faraway lands such as Sweden and Finland. Some European

Kings copied the Islamic coins' designs in their coinage; as highlighted by the coin 'Gold Mancus' of King Offa of Mercia (d. 796 CE) which was a copy of the gold dinar dated 774 CE, issued by Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur.

The surviving coins from the early Islamic periods are amongst the most prized coin collections of the world; eagerly sought by both Arab and international collectors. These rare artifacts are housed in several acclaimed museums of the world and in private collections as well. In recent months, a cache of Islamic gold coins has been discovered in areas around Jerusalem. In Saudi Arabia, a 1200-year-old gold dinar was discovered in the ancient town of Fayd in the region of Hail. Specialists date it back to 797 AD when it was issued during the era of the Abbasid Caliph Harun Al Rashid (reigned between 786 - 809 AD). The coin showed the continuity of the general pattern from the Umayyad coinage of Caliph Abdul Malik Bin Marwan.

Islamic coinage has evolved over time. During Caliph Abdul Malik's reign between 685 to 705 CE, a series of coinage were issued and culminated in a standardization that became the model for Islamic coinage for centuries thereafter.

Early Islamic Coinage History

The Early Islamic coins portray the remarkable evolution from the initial hybrid coins, based on the existing Roman and Persian prototypes, to a series of experimental coinage during Caliph Abdul Malik's reign and the issue of the first purely epigraphical Islamic coin. That first coin became a standard model upon which most Islamic coinage was based and which also had a profound influence on subsequent coinage for the next thousand years.

By the mid-7th century CE, the Muslims had united lands from the Roman Empire in the west with the former Persian Empire in the



During the Medieval period, the Dinar and Dirham were amongst the most powerful currencies, widely circulated throughout all parts of the known world. Some of the biggest hoard of Islamic coins were discovered in faraway lands such as Sweden and Finland.

East; yet both these inherently different areas were governed with their existing systems with few modifications. Thus, the Muslims adopted the existing monetary systems of their Persian and Roman predecessors.

The Romans used mainly copper coins and gold coins (solidi) while the Persians used largely silver coins (drachm.) The Muslims readily adapted to striking the Roman coins in Syria, Palestine and Egypt, while the Persian silver coins were struck in Iraq and Iran. In both cases, their coins bore an image of the ruler and an indication of religion: Crosses for the Roman Christians and the fire altars for the Persian Zoroastrians. Therefore, the coins that were struck in different mints imitated the respective Roman or Persian prototypes. Gradually, features were incorporated into the coinage to indicate the Muslims' dominance. Initially, these changes were minor with the addition of short phrases in Arabic and/or the addition of Hijra dates.

In the Persian lands, the silver coins struck conformed closely to existing standards and were minted with minor changes such as the addition of Arabic phrases like, 'Bismillah' (In the name of Allah) on the reverse, with the



Islamic coins were mainly of three types: Dinar (gold), Dirham (silver), and Fals (copper.)

Pahlavi (Middle Persian Script) writings and the crowned Persian King remaining intact on the obverse.

However, in the Roman lands, varied forms of imitation coins were struck; some very crude and others carefully designed with some coins having Greek, Arabic or both inscriptions. Any overt Christian symbols, such as the cross, were removed or modified as seen in the 'modified cross' solidi - the first ever gold coins struck by the Muslims, which served as precursors for the later Islamic Coinage.

Islamic Coinage of Caliph Abdul Malik

After three decades of varying forms of hybrid coins in the Umayyad Caliphate, the fifth Caliph Abdul Malik Bin Marwan (705 CE) decided to unify all the Muslims with one currency and to keep his rule independent from the Romans.

In 691 CE, Caliph Abdul Malik introduced a new gold dinar coin that was based on the

Roman currency 'solidus' in size and weight. However, the coin had the three Roman imperial figures given a decidedly Arab makeover on its obverse; while a staff with a globe replaced the cross on its reverse. In the margins surrounding the design, the testimony of Islam - the 'Shahada' - is inscribed in Arabic. This is generally regarded as the first official instance of the complete shahada in any Islamic artifact, followed by its inscription in the Dome of Rock in 692 CE.

Around the same time, the Caliph's brother, Bishr Bin Marwan, the Governor of Basra, issued the Persian-styled Silver dirham, with the three-figure motif replacing the fire altars and attendants and the complete 'Shahada' inscribed.

Another remarkable series of coins minted during the period were the so-called 'Mihrab and Anza' Silver dirhams, which had the Persian Emperor's portrait on the obverse modified

to suggest an image of the Caliph holding a sword with the Shahada inscribed around it. On its reverse, the fire altar motif was replaced by an arch supported on columns (Mihrab) with a spear staff in the center.

Around 694 CE, a series of gold and copper coins, known as the 'Standing Caliph' series, were issued. They showed an upright figure of the Caliph wearing an Arab headdress and holding a sword; with the complete 'Shahada' and the declaration of the Islamic year in which the coins were minted. Both these features became permanent on all subsequent gold and silver coinage. But, the copper coinage with the 'Standing Caliph' motif was more varied. However, this series was stopped after being minted for a few years only before they were replaced by a purely epigraphic and religious Islamic coinage. Thus, the 'Standing Caliph' series are some of the rarest and most prized of Islamic coinage.

Around 696-697 AD, Caliph Abdul Malik implemented sweeping reforms of all coinage - abandoning all traces of iconography and non-Arabic scripts and introducing new, purely aniconic designs with Arabic inscriptions. These coins asserted the Oneness of Allah and Muhammad (peace be upon him) as His last Messenger.

The first purely Islamic gold dinar was issued in 696 CE; On the obverse, it held the central inscriptions of the first part of the 'shahada', while the second part of the shahada and a Quranic verse were inscribed along its margins. On the reverse, a central Quranic inscription of part of Surah Al-Ikhlās (chapter 112) with an inscription around the circumference stating the mint and the Islamic year.

This new reformed gold dinar weighed a bit less than the 'solidus' (3.64 gm) as per the Quranic precepts and is considered a landmark in the early history of Islam.



The Early Islamic coins portray the remarkable evolution from the initial hybrid coins, based on the existing Roman and Persian prototypes, to a series of experimental coinage during Caliph Abdul Malik's reign and the issue of the first purely epigraphical Islamic coin.

The Silver Coinage, issued a year later, followed exactly the same pattern with minor additions of Quranic quotes. On the smaller-sized copper coinage, only the 'shahada' was inscribed.

Within a short period of time, these reformed Islamic coins replaced all Persian and Roman coins in the Muslim lands; becoming the single Islamic currency of the Islamic Empire.

This standard pattern of gold and silver coinage of Caliph Abdul Malik was followed without any change until the end of Umayyad Dynasty and continued with minor changes in the first two centuries of the Abbasid Dynasty. However, as a lasting tribute to Caliph Abdul Malik's coinage, three of the four inscriptions used in his first purely Islamic dinar were also found in the last coins of the Abbasids issued nearly 600 years later.

With the further spread of the Islamic world, under different dynasties, the use of the dinar spread from Islamic Spain to Central Asia and India, with each sultan or ruler issuing his own coins; they were broadly similar in design with textual and stylistic variations.



Mauritania has nominated the Mahadras in Mauritania for the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Mahdara: A beacon of knowledge in Mauritania

By Professor Mohamed Enab

Mahdaras in Mauritania are desert-based, free-of-charge learning institutions that adapted their educational system to the requirements of the Bedouin life of con-

stant movement. Renowned as some of the Islamic World's oldest and most esteemed institutions in the history of Islamic education, they have endured the

test of time, adapting to historical changes, while maintaining a prominent role in the evolution of religious education in the region. They have played a pivotal role in shaping Mauritania's cultural and political history, producing judges, imams and renowned religious scholars. Mahdaras are independent and community-based and are not affiliated with the government or any official body. They welcome students from all backgrounds and do not discriminate based on social status. They are nomadic, moving from place to place depending on rainfall and pasture. The teaching takes place in a tent that moves between locations in different seasons.

Young children start at the primary level in the Mahdara by learning the alphabet using wooden boards and ink made from water mixed with charcoal and gum. Once students master the letters, they begin with shorter chapters of the Qur'an. In some Mahdaras, students start with grammar and poetry before moving on to Quranic studies, ensuring their reading skills are well-developed before reading the Qur'an. After a student successfully memorizes the entire Qur'an, they receive special congratulations, and their hands are decorated with henna as a mark of honor.

The curriculum then expands to cover other sciences and knowledge areas, including belief systems, jurisprudence, grammar, linguistics, rhetoric, and the principles of arithmetic. Students also study various other sciences and fields.

Mahdara can be divided into two main types. The first is the comprehensive Mahdara, where all religious, literary, and linguistic sciences are taught. The second focuses on specific sciences, such as Quranic studies, where students learn writing, reading, and memorization of the Quranic text. This type is the most widespread.



A Mahdara has cultural, educational, and social functions, overseen by a knowledgeable scholar who educates students academically and spiritually for the sake of God. Its primary goal is to educate the youth and establish Islamic values and ethics.

Definition

The term "Mahdara" refers to a shelter that typically surrounds the Sheikh's (teacher) tent and is used as accommodation for students. Some suggest that the term came from the word "Hadhr," an Arabic word that translates to "restriction," signifying the restrictions imposed by the teacher on students, requiring them to stay in students' tents and focus on their studies. Others say it is derived from the Arabic word "Hudhoor," which means presence, referring to the students being present for education by the teacher.

Mahdara refers to educational and academic institutions that flourished in Mauritania's desert, disseminating knowledge across and throughout Africa, including countries like Senegal, Mali, and beyond. Remarkably, these institutions continue to fulfill their role even in the era of modern education.

This type of educational entity is known by different names in different countries. In Morocco, it is known as "Kuttaab," which originates from the Arabic verb "Katab," signifying a place where young students are taught reading, writing, and the Qur'an. In Yemen, it is called "Mu'allamah," derived from the verb



Mahdara plays a vital role in educating children in Mauritania.

“A’lem,” a local term for “scholar.” However, the “Mahdara” in Mauritania possesses unique characteristics that earned it historians’ admiration.

Origins

Historians agree that the term Mahdara only came into use in the 6th century of the Hijri calendar, corresponding to the 12th century CE. Its history traces back to the Bedouin state of the Almoravids, specifically to the reformist movement initiated by Sheikh Abdullah bin Yasin in 1039 CE. In its early days, the movement encountered resistance from the prominent Sanhaja tribe; consequently, Sheikh bin Yasin sought refuge in the desert near the Senegal River, where he established a religious retreat, gathering his disciples and

students in a place called “Tidra.”

This marked the humble beginnings of the Mahdara, which initially emerged in the desert but later transitioned to urban centers. This transition can be considered the actual appearance of urban institutions that have characterized Mauritanian history throughout the ages. This educational system quickly spread to the desert cities under the rule of the Almoravids, and cities like Oudghast, Ouzkif, and Chinguetti became major centers for the Mahadir (plural for Mahdara.)

Purpose

A Mahdara has cultural, educational, and social functions, overseen by a knowledgeable scholar who educates students



The traditional education system of Mahdara uses methods and tools adapted to the lifestyle of the nomadic populations in Mauritania.

academically and spiritually for the sake of God. Its primary goal is to educate the youth and establish Islamic values and ethics. It revolves around a Sheikh who gathers students around him, providing them with education and social care until they acquire all the knowledge they need to master Islamic sciences.

The Sheikh's responsibilities extend beyond teaching to include spiritual guidance and resolving disputes among students and the nearby Bedouin communities. Some Sheikhs also take on political roles, serving as advisors to regional leaders and acting as mediators in tribal conflicts and wars.



The Mahdara distinguished the intellectual environment of Mauritanian society from other Arab societies. Mauritians continued to excel in Arabic language and religious sciences, earning them a reputation as the "Land of a Million Poets."

Unique Features

These institutions operate on a voluntary basis. The instructor does not receive any



These institutions operate on a voluntary basis. The instructor does not receive any financial compensation for teaching.

Students are to choose the specific Mahdara they want to join, select their sheikh, determine the texts they wish to study, and decide the duration of their studies.

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Self-monitoring is a fundamental principle. Students are responsible for their own progress. The system is based on self-motivation, driving students to seek knowledge in remote desert areas. Another notable characteristic is equality, transcending social, racial, and economic distinctions. There is no differentiation between rich and poor, and all students are treated with the same respect and opportunity for learning.

Cultural and Political Role

Mahdara played a significant cultural and civilizational role, serving as a symbol of Arab-Islamic culture and a means of defending and preserving identity and heritage, especially during the colonial period. It managed to withstand the cultural

invasion of foreign powers, with even the French themselves acknowledging its role by stating that “the Mahdara represented a formidable fortress of cultural resistance and immunity” during the colonial era.

Mahdara continued to carry the torch of Arab-Islamic culture in Mauritania, promoting and defending it. As one French observer noted, “They faced an ancient and formidable enemy - the education provided by the Mahdara - which required a wise educational policy and significant efforts.” Thanks to the Mahdara, Mauritians retained a strong attachment to their religious values, cultural heritage, pride in their history, and a distinctive identity. They excelled in eloquence, memorization of texts, and poetry, which influenced their daily language and popular proverbs.

The Mahdara distinguished the intellectual environment of Mauritanian society from other Arab societies. Mauritians continued to excel in Arabic language and religious sciences, earning them a reputation as the “Land of a Million Poets.” Despite their economic challenges and the difficult living conditions of their students, the Mahdara institutions became a destination for many students from the Islamic world who sought knowledge.

The Mahdara has served as an institution through which religious knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next. To this day, it continues to fulfill its role in various Mauritanian cities, reflecting Mauritania’s cultural and civilizational significance throughout the ages. Recognizing its immense importance, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) has included the Mahdara on the list of Islamic heritage sites.



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