

## A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

It is not for a Muslim individual or group to declare war or engage in combative jihad.

PROMINENT MUSLIM SCHOLARS

## Back To The Present

Muslim scholars discredit idea of war on infidels

A group of leading Muslim scholars has put its weight behind the increasing chorus of voices demanding that those who use Islam to justify terror be isolated. Islamic scholars, who had gathered in Turkey, have disputed a 14th century fatwa that divides the world into the abode of Islam (dar-ul-Islam) and abode of war (dar-ul-harb) and is a favourite of Osama bin Laden. Instead they demanded that the entire world be declared a place of tolerance and coexistence. They also discredited the notion of waging jihad against non-believers. This is a welcome move to distance mainstream Islam from radical groups such as al-Qaeda that have used religion to justify terrorist acts.

In India, too, we have seen a vigorous condemnation of groups that use Islam to justify terror. In 2008, the influential Darul Uloom Deoband had declared that Islam teaches its followers to treat all mankind with tolerance and condemns all kinds of violence. Later in 2009, Deoband declared India as dar-ul-aman or abode of peace. The statements by Indian clerics and international Islamic scholars are not academic exercises. By identifying terror attacks as "un-Islamic", the religious legitimacy that the terrorists seek to bring to their violent acts is undermined.

The proclamations by the multinational group of Islamic scholars gathered in Turkey or the clerics of the Deoband school are very much a part of the process of interpretation of Islamic law, which has been going on over a long time. It's a common error to regard Islamic law as unchanging. Though the Quran and the practice and sayings of the Prophet are the primary sources of Islamic law, there is also a place for ijma (consensus), qiyas (analogical thinking) and ijihad (systematic original thinking). These traditions must be revived if Islam is to be forward-looking and progressive. It is the only way fatwas given several centuries earlier can be overturned and discredited.

At a time when al-Qaeda and its hate-filled agenda are increasingly losing popularity, interpretations of Islam that are in tune with contemporary reality must be encouraged and taken forward. That is precisely what the scholars at the Turkish conclave have done. It is appropriate that the declaration was made in Turkey since it is one Islamic country where Islam and secularism coexist. There are examples of revisionist thinking in other parts of the Islamic world too. These interpretations could very well have no impact on terror groups, but at least they would provide the ideological firepower to ordinary Muslims to counter radical and medievalist strains of Islam.



# Keeping The Poor Alive

India needs a radical rethink on its existing system of healthcare for the needy

Dipankar Gupta

Poverty attracts two kinds of policy interventions. The first hopes to eradicate it and the second wants to keep the poor alive. In India, our prime effort has always been, right from the days of antodaya, to somehow keep the poor ticking, even at the lowest levels of subsistence. The NREGA scheme saves the impoverished from starvation on a six-monthly basis. We see the same mindset at work in the way the national health insurance policy, the Rashtra Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), has been devised. Here again the target group is below poverty line (BPL) families and the relief given is inadequate.

To make sense of RSBY's drawbacks, we need to compare it with the health insurance Bill that Obama recently introduced in America. Of course, the easy way out is to say India is not America and can you compare apples with oranges, or an Apollo with an orangutan? But in both instances, we are talking about human beings and, in both continents, the aim is to help the poor. The trick lies here: do we want to eliminate poverty, or just alleviate it?

The American health policy exemplifies the drive to eradicate poverty. It gives comprehensive coverage to all, thus allowing the poor equal access as the rich to medical facilities. There is no upper limit in terms of health expenses for

claiming insurance benefits in America.

In India, on the contrary, as RSBY is designed only to keep the very poor alive, its cap is at Rs 30,000 per annum for a family of five. You have a sixth member, say, your aged parent, and you wish he were dead. Also, can one legislate that the poor should only have ailments that cost no more than Rs 30,000 a year? In other words, are there diseases of the rich and those of the poor? Can we categorise heart and cancer as status markers that separate the

Do we want to eliminate poverty, or just alleviate it? Can one legislate the poor should only have ailments that cost no more than Rs 30,000 a year? Are there diseases of the rich and those of the poor?

well-to-do from the rest?

This is not a tactic in scare-mongering but national figures suggest that, in the realm of non-communicable diseases, after heart ailments, most adults die of cancer. So if a BPL family member gets any of these two illnesses, will RSBY shut its door on that person? Or take a simpler case. If there are complications arising out of child delivery, what



Will health be wealth across the social board?

happens then? Interestingly, the American health Bill will cover maternity and new-born cases by 2014, maybe earlier. It already takes care of preventive health, for which there are no deductibles, no co-payment.

Incidentally, in India, all expenses arising out of OPD consultations are not covered by RSBY. OPD consultations are free, but a cancer patient's pathology tests and blood work have to be done frequently. They alone add up to thousands of rupees and we have not come to the medicines yet. Further, our RSBY only allows for hospital procedure "which can be provided on a day care basis". What then happens to those who need prolonged hospitalisation? Once Rs 30,000 is up, the meter stops and out they go.

The American health Bill

does not limit itself to the very poor, or near-starvation families. The governing assumption of the Obama plan is that the rich and the poor suffer similar ailments requiring more or less identical treatments. Its scope is truly universal for it plans to assist families who earn up to \$88,000 per annum with their insurance premiums. To get a perspective: most university professors in the US would be happy if they got \$88,000 as their yearly pay packet.

In India, it is just the six crore BPL families that are eligible for RSBY. Is this category a satisfying one? If one exceeds the BPL line by a few rupees, does that make the person "not poor"? The Arjun Sengupta-headed National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector argues that 44 per cent of the

country is poor and about 77 per cent are vulnerable.

Before somebody raises objections to these numbers, note that this commission used National Sample Survey figures which are uniformly accorded academic and state respect. RSBY's rationale then is to help those in extreme poverty, eliminating millions of others who fall outside the BPL net even by a whisker. This is truly frightening given the fact that after agricultural inputs the next major reason for rural indebtedness is health.

If RSBY is a stop-gap measure, pending a more comprehensive policy, one could find excuses for its inadequacies. But there is very little chance that it will grow up to look like Obama's health plan one day. With RSBY, India could have deviated from its past approaches towards poverty, but our administrators are not even aware of this need. As long as the poor are alive and can drag themselves to the voting booth periodically, all is well with the state.

Had RSBY made the rich and the poor indistinguishable, at least in the field of health, that would have amounted to a policy breakthrough. In the same vein, the right to education should eliminate the distinction, at least the egregious ones, between schools facilities for the rich and the poor. Can we look that far ahead?

The writer is a former professor, JNU.

## Don't Just Legislate

Follow-up is needed on education

Governments, both present and past, have excelled at privileging symbol over substance. We sincerely hope the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which came into force yesterday, contravenes this spirit. That the prime minister used the occasion to make a special address to the nation indicates that the government gives high priority to education. But the government's commitment will be tested in implementation. Its record of delivery, as opposed to the expression of good intentions, is shoddy. The Act makes the right to education a fundamental right. The government is legally bound to provide free education to children between the age of six and 14. But the challenges are enormous. Over 1.7 lakh crore rupees are needed in the next five years to make this possible. Thousands of qualified teachers need to be recruited across the country. Many of the available teachers have to be trained or retrained. The Union government has prepared guidelines for the implementation of the RTE and has promised to meet 65 per cent of the cost.

However, state governments will be responsible for the work on the ground. They must come on board now. State governments have to build effective mechanisms to ensure that the RTE budget is put to good use. Panchayati Raj institutions could be entrusted with the task of tackling last mile problems. The RTE's suggestion to include parents in the running of schools must be taken seriously. Grave issues like lack of teachers, books and buildings, and teacher absenteeism could be tackled better if all the stakeholders are involved in school management. The real work begins now.

## 'Flamenco is necessary to express the sufferings of gypsies'

Flamenco is a popular form of music and dance performed primarily by gypsies of the Andalusian region of Spain. One of its finest practitioners, Antonio Carmona, the former lead singer of Spanish flamenco music group Ketama, broke away from tradition in the early 1980s to create an entirely new flamenco upsetting followers of the genre and his own family. Carmona, who calls himself a 'gypsy from Granada', tells Faizal Khan after a recent concert tour of India that flamenco music is needed today to express the 'hard life and happiness' of the gypsies:

■ What is new flamenco?

Flamenco is deep-rooted in tradition. It is not easy to come out of it. Twenty-five years ago, we started a band called 'Ketama' and mixed flamenco with music from Africa, India

and Latin America along with pop and jazz. It was like opening up a new road in music. It was also a way to make flamenco popular in Spain. We were the first to introduce other instruments like violin, cajon, flute and drums to flamenco, which only had guitar until then. Cajon, a percussion instrument from Peru, later became the best instrument to be adapted for flamenco.

■ What was the influence behind creation of new flamenco?

In my home in Granada, I used to hear a lot of music from other countries along with gypsy music. My father, a famous flamenco musician, would bring home music from different parts of the world after his visits abroad. Once he came back with music composed by Ravi Shankar. When I



heard the tabla, I knew it was my culture, because I knew that my ancestors were from Rajasthan. When you hear different kinds of music, you start to open up.

■ Did the audience accept

your fusion music?

No. In the beginning the audiences were hostile. We couldn't perform even in our native town. It took us a decade to get recognition from the traditionalists. The people who didn't like us then are proud of us today. Later, flamenco came to be heard more on radio and TV and went to the rest of Europe and the US. We brought flamenco to the mainstream.

■ Is flamenco popular in Spain today?

There is no platform for flamenco in Spain today. It is more a music for export than for performances inside Spain. The new generation is interested in styles like gypsy rap. Flamenco is appreciated more outside Spain. It is also a huge success in Latin America.

■ What kind of flamenco

would you prefer yourself?

I would like to keep flamenco in the purest state. There is more merit in what my father, a traditional musician, does. Pure flamenco singers can take a piece of music, which is a century old, and make it relevant even today. But there should also be space for new styles. Both have to exist together.

■ What is the future of flamenco?

It is necessary to express what the gypsies had suffered in Spain - xenophobia and dictatorship. Gypsies were persecuted and killed. But they never turned to violence. We need flamenco to express that hard life of the gypsies. We also need flamenco to express the happiness the gypsies are naturally endowed with. It's what makes us gypsies - hard life and happiness.

## Baigun days

Preparing ourselves for the Bt brinjal

Jug Suraiya

The Bt brinjal has been put into cold storage, and I have mixed feelings about this. Food prices being as high as they are, anything that promised an increase in the supply of foodstuffs - as the Bt brinjal did - might be deemed to be no bad thing. On the hand, however, why a Bt brinjal? Why not a Bt potato, or a Bt onion, or almost any other veggie?

On my list of most hated veggies, brinjal ranks third. The first is karela. With its thick, scaly, warty skin it looks and tastes like the Great Horned Toad, found in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. No, I've never been to the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. Nor have I ever seen a Great Horned Toad, much less eaten one. But the karela looks, and tastes like what I think a Great Horned Toad should look and taste like, were you to eat one in preference to the karela. Toss a coin. Heads toad, tails karela. Second on my list of villainous vegetables is the tinda. I have never eaten a tinda in my life. The sight of it is enough. Lightly sauteed, with a touch of haldi and dhania, it exudes the gelatinous squidginess of partly congealed phlegm. Yuck time.

Third comes the brinjal. Bulbous and purple black - the colour of midnight conspiracy and brooding stratagems - there is something profoundly sinister about the brinjal. Its aspect is that of a vegetable with a deep and dire secret, a vegetable whose malevolent visage might well adorn Wanted posters. For one thing there's the spooky business of its many aliases. Why does a vegetable have to have so many names? It's like those terrorist bods who call themselves al-Qaeda one day, LeT the next, and IM the third day, to keep one step ahead of not only the long arm of the law, but the even longer arm of their moms who don't know who or what the heck they are any more.

The brinjal is like that, boasting more names than the Yellow Pages does under the listing for 'Groups, Jehadi'. In English the brinjal is also known as aubergine. In Hindi it is baigun. In Bengali, baigoun. In Kutchi and Gujarati it is ringro. In its albino avatar, when it is white and elongated, it becomes an eggplant. Why would anyone in their right minds trust a vegetable with so many different identities? What's the damn thing trying to hide anyway?

Despite these many question marks that loom over it, our genetic scientists for some strange reason chose the brinjal as the subject of their experimentation, like latter-day Dr Frankenstein trying to create a monstrous baigun to end all baiguns. The unleashing of the Bt brinjal on the baigun-eating citizenry has been deferred, perhaps wisely. But before the Bt brinjal is let loose on us it is best to give a thought as to what we are going to do with it. In what form are people going to eat it? This could have many social and cultural ramifications. For instance, the Bengalis eat baigun as baigoun bhaja, deep fried in mustard oil. There is a theory that it is the repeated ingestion of baigoun bhaja which gave birth to the dyspeptic melancholy of Rabindra sangeet, one of whose famous songs is called 'Baigounair Parosmoni' and goes 'Ai baigoun purno koro, ai baigoun purno koro' (finish this baigun, finish this baigun).

But perhaps the most acceptable form of the vegetable is in that of the Punjabi baigun bharta. A baigun is smoked on a fire. Chopped onion and spices added, the baigun has the living bejesus beaten out of it. This is ostensibly to soften it, but the real reason is to make sure it knows who's boss. Whipped into submission, the baigun is made to know its place in the order of things.

So roll on the Bt brinjal revolution, whenever it comes. India that is Bharta will be ready for it.

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http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/jugglebandhi/



This loss was due to toss. The last hitch because of pitch. Time for excuses is over. Either we play better or keep being deserving losers.

SHAH RUKH KHAN,  
Kolkata Knight Riders franchise owner,  
March 29th



Lots of talented writers live fine and contented lives. They get the horror out of their system onto the paper.

NEIL GAIMAN,  
author,  
March 29th



## SACRED SPACE

Good Friday

The cross was two pieces of dead wood; and a helpless, unresisting Man was nailed to it; yet it was mightier than the world, and triumphed, and will ever triumph over it. Augustus W Hare

The essence of that by which Jesus overcame the world was not suffering, but obedience. Yes, men may puzzle themselves and their hearers over the question where the power of the life of Jesus and the death of Jesus lay; but the soul of the Christian always knows that it lay in the obedience of Christ. He was determined at every sacrifice to do His Father's will. Let us remember that; and the power of Christ's sacrifice may enter into us, and some little share of the redemption of the world may come through us, as the great work came through Him. Phillips Brooks

## Power To Heal And Renew

Christopher Mendonca

The Sacred Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter has its roots in the celebration of the Passover by the Israelites 12 centuries before Christ. Memorial for the Hebrew means making present in the "now" the event that took place years ago, not merely in the sense of remembering it, but believing that what happened then happens even now, in our very midst with the same intensity with which it first occurred. The 'symbols' of yesteryear become the 'reality' of today, albeit in a different setting.

Deliverance from slavery, passing over from one form of existence to another, crossing over and making it to the other side against all odds, are all a reminder of the presence of the same power that allows the event to be repeated. For Christians, these days are a celebration of deliverance from enslavement to the ego, passing over from the 'death of the self' to the new life of the True Self. The journey to the Promised Land that took 40 years is a symbol of the lifelong resistance we face as we make the journey in our own lives. But Easter is the assurance that we will make it to the other side.

In Hebrew thought and culture the individual and nature are meant to be in harmony in the Original Plan of God. Easter comes to us as God's gift in the person of Jesus who exercises the fullness of Divine Power by healing at all levels - cosmic, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Christians believe that Resurrection of Jesus makes us partakers of that very power. We are called to share this gift with each other to participate actively in this process of

renewal and recreation, first of all by healing ourselves and then making this the starting point of healing all around us.

We do not ourselves heal others. Rather we allow ourselves to become channels of the healing power of God with us and in us, enabling it to be effective at all levels. But it is given to us in freedom. The power of the Risen Lord, real as it is, does not take away our freedom to reject it.

Why are we so often unable to heal our sicknesses? Why are we so often incapable of healing broken relationships? Why does peace so often elude us? All our efforts at building a better world, of establishing a society free of violence and war, of living together in peace and justice and love will come to naught if they are not at the same time linked to our own progressive "Passing Over" from the Ego to the True Self.

The celebration of Easter is more than a Christian Festival; the Passover goes beyond the boundaries of Judaism. It is an invitation to every individual to delve deep into his own contemplative tradition and encounter there the power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power within us that is the source of healing and renewal. Precisely because of Easter, together with us 'the whole of creation still retains the hope of being freed like us from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God'.

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## EDIT PAGE MAILBOX

MY TIMES MY VOICE

### Judgement against khap panchayat is welcome

With reference to the editorial 'Stamp Them Out' (Apr 1), the ruling against the khap panchayat is welcome. It sends a strong message to communities still living in the dark ages of gotra-based traditions. It has taken a woman judge to open the eyes of not only the guilty but also of colluding politicians and law enforcement personnel.

These people are as responsible as the actual murderers of the young couple and should not be allowed to go scot-free. We can only hope that this courageous judgement will be followed by others and suitable amendments to the law be made so that there are no loopholes that allow the guilty to escape punishment. L Manoharan, VIA E-MAIL

The editorial exposes just how unethical and unlawful some of our traditional practices can be. It is high time the government enforced the law in letter and spirit, irrespective of caste or religious considerations. Looking beyond votes, all political parties ought to play a constructive role towards uplifting society. PP Sethumadhavan, VIA E-MAIL

### Hold them accountable

With reference to the Second Opinion 'Public & private' (Mar 31) by Jug Suraiya, the writer has made it easy for the layman to understand economic jargon. It is an interesting idea that disinvestment in a PSU is not privatisation but actually opens it to the public, thus making it a truly public sector undertaking.

As it stands now, 'sarkari' undertakings have to answer to no one for perpetual losses. In the private sector, rogues like Ramalinga Raju can be hauled over the coals, but bureaucrats and administrators who have ruined our national airlines and wasted taxpayers' money continue to be accountable to none. AM Kumar, MUMBAI

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