

J i h a d

What non-Muslims should know

Since the nineties terrorism in independent India has become progressively more intense although the world has woken up to this ugly reality only after the spectacular 9/11 incident in September 2001. Whenever these terrorists are questioned they say that they are only carrying out jihad which is an essential obligation of their faith.

Since jihad and Islam appear to be so closely linked we should first know the basics of Islam before we find out what Jihad is. This faith was founded by Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century in Arabia. He was born in 570 AD in the city of Mecca in the Kuraish tribe. The Kuraish managed the famous Kaba shrine in Mecca and also traded on a large scale. The Prophet's father died before his birth and he lost his mother when he was still a child. He was subsequently brought up under the loving care of his paternal uncle. But due to lack of parental affection he became an introvert. Very often he used to spend his days in the caves in the nearby hills surrounding Mecca and meditate on various issues of life.

In the year 610, one day tiring himself with all such thoughts he sat frozen with fatigue. Suddenly the angel Gabriel materialised before him and ordered, '*Read: in the name of thy Lord*'. Terrified he ran home and complained to his wife that he has been stricken by a ghost. But she assured him that he has received a revelation and been made a prophet. Since then he continued to receive messages from Gabriel from time to time as and when the situation warranted. All these were compiled into Koran after his death. Until 613 AD he carried out his mission secretly and later on he was directed to preach publicly. Obviously his totally different religious views invited strong opposition from others and ultimately in 622 he shifted to Medina. Here he managed to establish his supremacy and captured neighbouring territories. Finally in the year 630 he successfully conquered Mecca with a huge army. He became the master of Arabia and Islamised the country.

He died in 632 AD. After his death his followers conquered several countries and forced their citizens to embrace Islam. Today the Muslims number over 1.2 billions and form the predominant faith in the vast region from north Africa to Indonesia with the main exception of our country. Their proportion of the global population in 1900 AD was 12%. In 2000 this became 20% and it is expected that this will increase to at least 25% by 2025 AD. Their population growth as compared to others is quite large.

Tenets of Islam

Literally Islam means total surrender to the will of Allah as well as peace. It is the primary duty of its followers to fully surrender to Allah. Only with full surrender peace is obtained. A Muslim is one who surrenders to Allah.

Islam is based on five pillars: Faith (Iman), Namaz, Zakat, Rozza and Hajj ¹.

Of these Faith is of supreme importance. It consists of five tenets:

¹ Zakat, tax for welfare; Namaz, prayers five times a day, Roja, fast during Ramazan; Hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca

Belief in Allah, the only One God
Belief in the Angel as the communicator of the messages from Allah to the Prophet
Belief in Muhammad as the last prophet of Allah
Belief in the Quran as the Divine Book
Belief in the Day of Judgement.

One who believes in all these tenets is a 'believer' or a Muslim. One who disbelieves in even one of these is a disbeliever. Besides these there cannot be a belief in any other things like belief in rebirth or Ishwar and Allah are one and the same. This is considered as Shirk or Kufr and is the most detestable crime in Islam.

And this is where Islam is at loggerheads with others. *It is an uncompromising conviction of Islam that this world solely belongs to Allah and his prophets and followers. None else has a right to exist.* In fact about 60% of the Quran denounces non-Muslims and Muslim hypocrites. Hence it is the primary obligation of a Muslim that he converts the other to his faith or wipes him out. This task is now considered as Jihad. But before exploring Jihad we should have a basic idea of Islamic scriptures.

Sources and Scriptures

Islam is based mainly on these three
(1) Quran, (2) Hadis and (3) Shariat

We have already referred to Quran before and we shall again look into it later when we discuss Jihad. Hadis or Sunnah is a collection of the doings and sayings of the Prophet. Quran is the message of Allah, and the Prophet has shown how to live accordingly. Muslims follow his example in every act. Putting it in other words, Quran shapes the Muslim mind and Hadis determines their day to day life. Shariat is the Muslim law based on Quran and Hadis. It minutely considers every aspect of life and establishes the code of conduct to be followed by Muslims.

With this basic knowledge of Islam we can now proceed to examine Jihad

What is Jihad?

Jihad is an extremely potent and flexible weapon in the armoury of Islam and is considered as its 'sixth pillar'. Its scholars term Jihad as 'the core of Islam' and the 'most glorious' word in its dictionary. While an exact translation of the word is not possible it may be broadly interpreted as striving, struggling and trying to advance 'Allah's Mission' i.e. struggle for the cause of Allah. In essence it means using all our strength to struggle against enemy. These enemies are three- we ourselves, Devil and human enemies i.e. those who don't believe in Islam.

As far as non-Muslims are concerned, of these the human enemies are the most important. Because as long as a Muslim's enemy is himself or the devil, others are not in the picture. But as soon as human enemies are included, Jihad immediately becomes a serious concern of all non-Muslims. To understand who these enemies are and why so, we have to study Quran and Hadis as well as the Prophet's life (Sira). And in doing this we have to remember two things - the structure of Quran and the stages in the Prophet's mission.

Altogether there are 114 surahs or chapters and about 6200 ayats or verses in the Quran. But

to a new reader their arrangement is confusing. The revelations received by the Prophet during his lifetime have not been compiled subject or time wise. What has happened is that the longer surahs generally come in the beginning followed by the shorter ones. As a result his first revelation constitutes the 96th surah. Apart from this even in a single surah, ayats revealed at different stages have been incorporated. Hence it becomes very important to know when each ayat and surah has been revealed. Fortunately now there is more or less a good agreement among the western and Islamic scholars regarding the chronological order.

After the first revelation the Prophet lived for about twenty-three years. These have been divided into five stages or periods. During the first period of three years i.e. 610-613 AD he preached secretly. The keywords for this period are tolerance and a defensive strategy. In the next, i.e. the period until Hijrat (or migration to Medina in 622 AD), the Prophet preached publicly, *inviting* the unbelievers to embrace Islam. The strategy of tolerance continued. These two belong to the Meccan period. During these periods it is estimated that the number of his followers at any stage did not exceed 100-150. With such small numbers he just could not afford to be aggressive.

In 622 AD the Prophet migrated to Medina since opposition to him in Mecca had become quite fierce. This period of 10-11 years until his death is known as the Medinan era. It is divided into three periods and deserves a close study. The third period (first in Medina) is reckoned until the battle of Badr in 624 AD. In this period the Prophet has been instructed to take up to arms for self defence as well as raiding the Meccan trade convoys. The fourth period is for the next 6-7 years until his total victory in Mecca in 630 AD. In this he has been directed to invade on some occasions. In the last stage of two years until his death in 632 AD, he reigned supreme in the whole Arabia. The ayats revealed in this last period are openly aggressive and are known as the ultimate word on Jihad and are also legally considered as decisive.

We now clearly see that in the Quran the definition and strategy of Jihad depends on circumstances prevailing in a given situation. Hence the Muslim society tailors its behaviour according to these circumstances ². We shall next study a few sample ayats of each period to see how this reconciliation is done.

The Meccan period

Number wise most of the surahs have been revealed in Mecca. But significantly very few of them talk about Jihad. Thus in the 29th surah of this period, Jihad is mentioned in three ayats

29.6: 'And whosoever strives, only strives for himself'

in this ayat, often quoted by Muslim scholars, Jihad can be interpreted as a struggle against ones own shortcomings

29.8: 'But if they (parents) strive that you worship other deities besides Me, do not obey them (i.e. do not accept polytheism)'

obviously the Jihad here is that of idolaters ordering or compelling the believer to worship

² It has been observed that as long as the Muslim population remains around or under 2% in any given country, they will be for the most part be regarded as a peace-loving minority, and not as a threat to other citizens. See later

other gods also

29.69: *'Those that strive for Our cause, We will surely guide them to Our own paths (Islam)*

here Jihad stands for 'effort' to perform the good deeds ordained by Allah

25.52: *'So obey not the unbelievers, but strive against them (i.e. preach Islam) most strenuously with the help of this (the Quran)*

Jihad here refers to struggle, but only with the help of the Quran i.e. preaching with arguments, and not with the sword. 'With this' means 'with the Quran' here. Many also point out to the Hadis in which the Prophet's words, 'Haj pilgrimage is the best among Jihads', signify a non-violent and spiritual Jihad. In the Meccan Surah No.42, there are Ayats permitting use of force for self-defence. But this is always permitted in any society and can only be termed as a '**no objection**' command.

Armed Jihad is not a task to be undertaken by a single individual; it is neither a verbal harangue nor a righteous anger or curse; you have to possess strength to wage it. This ability was obviously lacking in the Meccan period when the Prophet and his followers were in a small minority (estimated to number not more than 150) and hence could only *invite* idolaters to their faith.

The Medinan Period

The picture now completely changes. In Medina, as a result of astute tactics adopted by the Prophet, Muslims were well organised as a state and growing in strength and could now force changes. Hence Jihad could take a progressively aggressive colour. In fact about 97% of the ayats on jihad have to do with violence and these occur in this period. Out of a total of twenty-four Medinan Surahs, as many as nineteen have commands on Jihad which mainly deal with armed struggle.

But armed struggle involves right policy, tactics, diplomacy and strategic decision making. 'Jihad' certainly does not imply launching a blind assault like the Rajputs without reckoning the right time, strength, situation and probability of victory! It fully encompasses war-strategy, treaties, compromises and even withdrawals ³. It is equally applicable to peace, to protect and expand the kingdom, to protect the faith as well as to cause its spread. All these are implied in Jihad and seen in the tactics adopted by the Prophet in this era to expand his influence

Increasing aggression

The first Ayats permitting arms occurs in Surah No.22 permitting the Prophet to raid the Meccan caravans, about seven months after his arrival in Medina. They *permit* the believers to bear arms and attack the unbelievers since they have been *unjustly* driven out of Mecca (22.39).

Sanction is given to those against whom war is made because they were wronged and Allah is indeed able to give them victory (22.39)

Those have been driven out from their homes unjustly only because they said that our Lord

³ Shivaji is a good example of an Indian king who adopted this strategy

is Allah (22.40)

It will be seen that this is not exactly self-defence but a punishment. The reason given in the Surah for punishing the unbelievers with hellfire is that they are unbelievers and their 'injustice' or crime is that they continue to remain unbelievers. The expulsion of the Prophet is only as a result of their disbelief. It must be clearly understood that the word 'injustice' has a very different connotation in Islam and means accepting polytheism. Although it is true that the believers were harassed in Mecca, the unbelievers can also equally rightfully claim that they could not tolerate the criticism and slander of their gods, ancestors, faith and religion; humiliation of their venerable gods and ancestors; breaking of their idols and the assertion that their ancestors have invariably gone to hell. And since they could no more tolerate this abuse, they resorted to opposition in order to protect their honour, sentiments, religion and pride ⁴. They can claim that it is the believers who first assaulted our faith and the steps which we subsequently took were to defend and resist such attacks; what we did was only our defence against this aggression.

Now how do we react to this logic? If anyone denies or criticises Allah, the Prophet and Ayats, the commands in the Quran repeatedly assert: '*Woe on that day to the unbelievers*'. The believers have argued that because the unbelievers attacked our True Faith, we had to do 'Jihad' against them. But with the same logic the unbelievers can also complain and justify their attacks in the same manner and legitimise their harassment. It becomes a circle of a never ending actions and reactions and one would like the Muslims to ponder over this fact.

The next (chronologically) Surah No.2, revealed a little before the famous battle of Badr where a small Muslim force overpowered the thrice as numerous Meccan army, *commands* the believers to wage Jihad. Thus:

'Fight for the cause of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not transgress the limits. Lo Allah does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you find them and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter... but if they desist, then Lo! Allah is forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until persecution is no more and religion is only for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility, except against wrong-doers. (2.190-93).

These Ayats clearly show that idolatry/polytheism (which is followed by the majority of Indians) is the worst possible sin in Allah's eyes and that his Mercy and Grace is exclusively for his followers and not universal. The tone is still defensive (transgress not the limits), since Muslims were yet to acquire requisite strength.

Some progressive Muslim scholars like Asgar Ali Engineer have used these Ayats of the first three periods to argue that Islam is basically defensive in nature. But they do not talk about the last two periods and since we are ignorant about Islam we never question them about it.

Before we proceed further it will be instructive to see how Islam interprets some of the words used in these ayats. *Desist* here means refrain from idol worship i.e. embrace Islam.

⁴ Here you may give the example of the demolishing of the Babri structure which the Muslims claim was an 'unjust' act. They conveniently forget that it was Babar who demolished the original Ram Janmabhoomi temple and built the mosque on the site which Muslims considered as a 'just' act. Over 30,000 Hindu temples have been razed or converted into mosques by the Muslims.

Transgress not the limits also means do not fight if they accept Islam. *Wrong-doers* or guilty are those who do not accept Allah's religion. *Religion is only for Allah* means everybody's religion should be Islam. *Allah is forgiving, Merciful* generally means that if disbelievers accept Islam, Allah will pardon them and have mercy on them. With these interpretations it is clear that these ayats command Muslims to fight against others until they accept Islam.

Let us now see who the disbelievers are. They have been divided into four categories: (1) the most abominable are the idolaters and polytheists i.e. we Hindus, (2) next come Jews and Christians i.e. 'People of the Book' ⁵ (3) hypocrites i.e. those who pretend to be Muslims but actually work against Islam ⁶, and (4) non-believers outside Arabia.

This Surah also contains the important message:

'Warfare is ordained for you though it is hateful to you' (2.216).

the same ayat continues,

'But Allah knows(what is good for you) and you know not'.

So it is not a question of an individual's conscience, when the directive comes a Muslim has to carry out Jihad.

After Muslims won the battle at Badr the revelations made in the eighth Surah are important for us to understand. Allah has now bluntly declared in the eighth ayat

That he might cause the truth to triumph and bring (disbeliever's) vanity to naught, however much the guilty might oppose (8.8)

And in the very next ayat he has assured

..I will help you with a thousand of Angels (8.9)

In fact the eighth surah is called 'Spoils of War' and Allah has given full permission to plunder. This consists of three things - enslaving the males, appropriating all their wealth and enjoying their women as sex slaves. *This plunder was the main attraction and incentive for Muslims to go for Jihad.*

As the Prophet won victories in subsequent battles, the commands for Jihad became progressively more stringent. The 15th ayat in the 49th surah defines its importance

The (true) believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Messenger and afterwards doubt not, but strive with their wealth and lives for the cause of Allah (49.15)

⁵ Note that both Arabs and Jews are descendents of a common ancestor Abraham. Jews are the progeny of his legitimate son, Isaac and Muslims that of Ishmael (who was born of a slave girl, Hagar). In effect their bitter wars since the days of the Prophet are reminiscent of the Kaurava Pandava war of Mahabharat.

⁶ Various Muslim sects bitterly quarrel with each other (i.e. do jihad) accusing each other of hypocrisy using ayats on hypocrites to justify their act. The present Shia-Sunni conflict in Iraq may be cited as an example

Thus Jihad received a ranking next only to Allah and the Prophet clearly showing its importance in Islamic theology. With increasing power, attention was focused on the hypocrites amongst the Muslims as well as People of the Book; i.e. Jews and Christians. The Prophet also went to the extent of asking the powerful neighbouring Persian and Roman emperors to embrace Islam along with their citizens. And within a decade after the Prophet's death, Arab armies marched on them and subjugated them to expand the Muslim empire worldwide.

Being an astute general the Prophet however under Allah's guidance tailored his policies to the needs of the day. Thus, depending on the situation,

'if they incline to peace, you also incline to it' (8:61)

permitting the Muslims to enter into peace treaties as a matter of tactics if the situation so warranted ⁷, although,

'be not weak and ask for peace while you are having the upper hand' (47:35).

As for Muslims living in non-Muslim lands, Muslims are invoked to,

'if they seek your help in religion, it is your duty to help them except against a people with whom you have a treaty' (8:72).

These ayats give an indication of the various tactics the Quran asks the Muslims to adopt in order to ensure ultimately a total victory.

An important strategy is to spread fear and terror amidst the enemy society (as the terrorists are doing in India at present) so that it ultimately surrenders without undue struggle

Qur'an 7:3 "Little do you remember My warning. How many towns have We destroyed as a raid by night? Our punishment took them suddenly while they slept for their afternoon rest. Our terror came to them; Our punishment overtook them."

Qur'an 8:12 "I will instil terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them."

And it is immaterial whether one is killed in this mission

Qur'an 9:111 "Allah has purchased the believers, their lives and their goods. For them (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise). They fight in Allah's Cause, and they slay and are slain; they kill and are killed."

And this is what the Jihadis are doing throughout the history of Islam. They kill others and get killed themselves. These are the ayats which inspire the modern suicide bombers!

The Final Ayats on Jihad

⁷ We can find an example in the Prophet's life when he entered into a no-war pact with Meccans with the treaty of Hudaibiya which he subsequently revoked when it suited him and attacked Mecca.

In 630 AD the Prophet attacked Mecca with a huge army and conquered it. He now became the Master of entire Arabia. Now the doctrine of Jihad has become even more cold-blooded. We see this in surahs five and nine which have been revealed a little before his death and hence are considered final and decisive. We shall see a few sample ayats from these surahs on various relevant topics

Against idolaters

Qur'an 5:33 "The punishment for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive after corruption, making mischief in the land [those who refuse to surrender to Islam] is murder, execution, crucifixion, the cutting off of hands and feet on opposite sides, or they should be imprisoned. That is their degradation and disgrace in this world. And a great torment of an awful doom awaits them in the hereafter. Except for those who repent (and become Muslims) before you overpower them and they fall into your control."

Qur'an 9:5 "When the sacred forbidden months for fighting are past, fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them, take them captive, torture them, and lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war."

Against Jews and Christians

Qur'an 5:51 "Believers, take not Jews and Christians for your friends."

On Muslim hypocrites

Qur'an 9:73 "O Prophet, strive hard [fighting] against the unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be harsh with them. Their abode is Hell, an evil refuge indeed."

If one Muslim sect wages Jihad against another, it is these ayats they use for justifying their actions. 56 out of 129 ayats in the ninth surah which is the final surah on Jihad are devoted to hypocrites!

Chronologically the final ayat on Jihad in this surah is very important

O who you believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you and let them find harshness in you (9.123)

The commentaries of eminent Islamic clerics and scholars clearly show that the scope of this Ayat is very vast. After a territory is Islamised, then countries neighbouring it are next attacked and Islamised, thus ensuring a progressive and eventually a total expansion of Islam all over the whole world. The Ayat aims to encompass the whole earth with 'Allah's Kingdom'. It is quite logical that such a command on Jihad is proclaimed in the last Ayat on the subject. The Muslims draw inspiration for the last fourteen hundred years from such Ayats in their endeavour to globalise their 'True Faith'.

So far what is Jihad and how it has developed its strategy over the Prophet's lifetime has been explained. Let us now see how it is applied in today's context ⁸.

The Prophet himself has declared that 'Jihad (war) is deceit' and there are enough instances in his life to show how he has adopted various tactics to achieve his goal. Following him

⁸ In general common Hindus see their friendly Muslim neighbours around them and feel that Hindu organisations are unnecessarily raising a bogey. Hence it is important to know various stages of Jihad which explain the changing Muslim behaviour

these tactics have been formulated as Taquiyyah or Holy Deceit ⁹. Thus we see that in countries like Japan, Canada and Singapore where the Muslim population is small and the government strict, Muslims adopt the first two Meccan stages and profess tolerance of the nations' faiths.

But in certain European countries like UK, France and Spain where their numbers have now increased significantly they have progressed to the third stage and have started to indulge in terrorist activities. We see the fourth stage in central African countries like Nigeria and Sudan where Muslim-Christian civil wars are being fought. We see the fifth stage in our neighbouring countries Pakistan and Bangladesh where Hindus have been eliminated. Thus in today's Pakistan according to the 1941 census the proportion of Hindus, Jains and Sikhs was 19.7%. After the 1947 partition their proportion was drastically reduced to mere 1.3%. and in Bangladesh according to the 1901 census there were 34% Hindus. This percentage came down to 23% in 1951 after the partition and is now barely 5-7%.

In our own country we see that wherever Muslims are present in small numbers they are very friendly with their neighbours and it is difficult to believe that they can indulge in any violence. Any violence by their community is blamed on a minuscule fundamentalists! But once their proportion significantly increases as in Assam and Bengal which border Bangladesh they begin to expel the Hindus. Thus in the border district of Bongaigaon in Assam, while the Muslims increased by 31.8% during the 1991-2001 decade the increase in Hindu population was a mere 2.3%. On an average the Muslim increase was much more than twice that of Hindu in the border districts of Assam and Bengal during this decade.

Hence we can only conclude that wherever Muslims reside in this world their mindset is to convert the disbelievers' 'Mecca' into a Muslim 'Medina'. And the way to achieve this is with Jihad !

Acknowledgement

Islam- Maker of the Muslim Mind, Seshrao More, Rajhans Prakashan Pune, 2004
Chapters 7 and 8 on jihad were referred to in compiling this note

⁹ Al-Taquiyyah, from the verb Ittaqu, linguistically means dodge the threat. Politically it means simulate whatever status you need in order to win the war against the enemy. In practical terms it is manifested as dissimulation, lying, deceiving, vexing and confounding with the intention of deflecting attention, foiling or pre-emptive blocking. It is currently employed in fending off and neutralising any criticism of Islam or Muslims. These tactics are supported by ayats like, '..... *He who disbelieves in Allah after his belief in Him* (is the liar) except who is compelled while his heart remains steadfast with the faith (has nothing to worry) 16.106. the likes of Ashgar Ali Engineer, M J Akbar and most Sufis are only indulging in Taqiyyah when they paint Islam as a moderate faith to the gullible Hindus.