

WHY IMAGE AND PERCEPTION ARE LOW ABOUT MUSLIMS AND WHAT COULD BE DONE TO BETTER IT

The world over the perceptions of Muslims suffered after Osama Bin Laden, the 9/11 incident, Taliban, ISIS etc. The impression gathered that Muslims were involved in acts against humanity. This made Muslims, their hijab, beards and turbans etc. a symbol of terrorism and oppression. The fact that these organisations were killing more Muslims than non-Muslims was not of any concern to anyone.

The fact that out of 130 billion Muslims in the world at any given time not more than forty fifty thousand could be counted as a part of these organisations or as their sympathisers making it absolutely an insignificant percentage did not matter. It became acceptable to demonise them. This led to a remark by a famous Indian politician that "while all Muslims were not terrorists, all terrorists happen to be Muslims"

Back home in India the caste and religious politics was already being played since a long time. Most importantly opening of the lock of Ramjanmbhumi and the judgement of Shabano case were two most significant incidences in modern India that gave rise to anger against the Muslims community and projected it as an unreasonable, rigid, conservative and orthodox community at odds with a changing modern India.

These sentiments were quickly used by the Bhartiya Janta Party to portray that Muslims were being appeased by the secular parties for their vote bank while Hindus were being ignored. Muslim leadership at that time proved to be wholly inadequate to deal with this new challenge and was oblivious to the changing sentiments in the majority community. These sentiments kept on increasing and with it also the Anti Muslim vote bank.

Unfortunately it was the Muslims themselves who portrayed themselves as different 'the other' by insisting on a separate identity, a separate law for them etc. This 'other' identity was later used in electoral politics to gather the anti-Muslim vote bank because they were seen as being appeased by the secular parties. The fact that Muslims economically were the poorest of the poor and were not benefited in any manner did not cut much ice and this fact was completely ignored.

Therefore today the mess Muslims find themselves in is because of a combination of poor education, intellect and poor leadership of the past as well as the clever manipulation and use of these sentiments to create a larger anti-minority vote bank by making the majority feel neglected.

Therefore to change this perception, it is important that Muslims realise that they are a minority and forget their past, concentrate on the future and accept the changing world, accept the challenges that they face and deal with it through education, hardwork, reforms and social service not only within their community but with all other communities too, in their districts, states and in the country.

There has never been a restriction on offering our prayers, keeping rozas, going to dargahs, giving zakats, performing Haj etc. by any Govt. Therefore there has never been an attack on our religion but the criticism has always been about the Muslims.

being conservative, anti-hindu, anti-Indian ,fundamentalists ,who give more importance to their religion and their islamic identity than their country or the indian identity . When actually there is no conflict between the indian constitution and islam nor of identities except those that are self created To be secular and benefit from a secular society, Muslims need to present a secular face themselves. Unfortunately this has not been the case.

The Muslims right wing and orthodox clergy has been in the forefront of Muslim voice and representation and the reasonable secular scholars have taken a backseat. While one cannot deny that there is a deliberate consistent effort to demonise Muslims and to take advantage of these sentiments to seek votes in the context of domestic indian politics . I believe it will become more difficult as and when these perceptions are changed There are 200 million Muslims in India and they are not going anywhere in a hurry. Therefore it is necessary that each of them acts as a soldier of peace, brotherhood and participates in nation building along with their non Muslim brothers , they should come out in large number and participate in all activities, festivals, and be seen actively helping in times of difficulties and calamities anywhere.. The more the cordial relationships are built at the business and social levels the more difficult it will become for the messengers of hate

There is no restriction on person of any religion in entering the Gurudwara as long as their guidelines are followed. However, non Muslims do not enter mosques due to the feeling of being unwelcomed.Perhaps we need to be more open Other than the time of prayers visit to mosque, following the guidelines in respect to the islamic culture is also one way of promoting interfaith relationships.. Using mosques for the service of people of all faiths in time of calamities is another

Watercoolers in summer outside the mosques in crowded areas, tea in winters could be made readily available for the passer bys of any faith to generate goodwill.. While we do this, we must keep in mind that there is a media with vested interest, and fixed agendas . They are not only dividing the society and thus doing a disservice not only to the Muslims community but to the nation as a whole. Therefore, it is our national duty to take them on within the legal framework. This will also go a long way in reducing the negativity that is being spread about muslims . Improving and reforming ourselves and our image therefore will have to go hand in hand along with fighting those who are purposely indulging in such acts.
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