

India the Dar al-Aman

Ranjit Sau

DESCRIBING INDIA AS A hostile country—in Arabic, *dar al-harb* (house of war) - has been part of the anti-British struggle during the Raj, said Abdul Hamid Naumani, spokesman of the Jamait Ulema-e-Hind which is a religio-educational organisation with a hold over the Deoband seminary. And he concluded: 'That concept is no longer relevant; it is now *dar al-aman* (house of peace).'

Explaining the change in the assessment of India by the Islamic school, Naumani said. 'If Muslims get elected through democratic process and can hold important positions, how can India become a hostile land?'

Traditionally, a Muslim country is said to be one where seven-tenths or more of the population are Muslim. The societal place of Muslims in a Muslim-minority country has been an intricate proposition to the ulema. Orthodox schools contended that it was not possible for a Muslim to live a good Muslim life in a so-called infidel land. He must leave home and go to some Muslim country. If the infidel country was tolerant and allowed him to practise his religion, might he stay? The answer was in that case it was all the more important for him to leave, because under a tolerant government, the danger of apostasy was greater.

By the tenth century when Muslims had established their great empire, the ulema gave a religious interpretation of this conquest, dividing the world into the *dar al-islam* (house of Islam) which was presumably in perpetual conflict with the *dar al-harb* (house of war). Such demarcation has had no place in the holy Koran.

Former professor of Philosophy and Islamic Studies at the College of Geneva and at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, Tariq Ramadan, the grandson of Hassan al-Banna who had founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, is a renowned scholar. According to Ramadan, an intensive study of the orthodox ulema's criteria for the above-mentioned partition of the world into two zones in continuing antagonism is not authentic. Most of the ulema had insisted on the ownership of land and the application of Islamic legal system in order to declare the existence of a *dar al-islam* while it is the nature of the legal system and that of the government that are considered as relevant factors for a *dar al-harb*. In the first case the stress is on the population and in the second case on the government. This asymmetry is responsible for a deep divergence between contemporary ulema.

The ongoing debate on the binary partition of the world, apart from its definitional ambiguity, has become obsolete in modern times. The very elements of traditional consideration have changed. Now populations are in constant movement and the distribution of economic, financial, and political power as well as the diversification of strategic alliances and zones of political influences is too complex to bear the classical binary division.

The four elements of consideration referred to above, viz. the faith of the population living in the country, ownership of the land, nature of the government, and the laws in force in the country, are no longer unambiguous to set out a correct perception of the real situation of Muslims in the world of today. The structure of Muslim countries has changed, Ramadan maintains, under colonial domination including political actions known as 'protections'. Muslim societies have been reoriented by alliances between Muslim rulers and Western powers. These countries hardly deserve the appellation of *dar al-islam*, Ramadan asserts.

On the other hand, Islam is the second largest religion by numbers of believers in France; many a country in Europe and America is approaching that stage. An environment that ensures the freedom of conscience and worship to Muslims (i.e. of their faith and worship) and protects their physical integrity is not in fact a hostile space. In North America as in Europe, five fundamental rights are guaranteed that allow the Muslims to feel at home in their countries of residence. So, Imam Faysal al-Mawlawi says: 'We are not, in the West, in the *dar al-harb*; we are in an abode of invitation to God,' which he characterizes in Arabic as the *dar al-dawa*. He goes on to expand: 'In our opinion, the whole world is a *dar al-dawa*', for the twenty-first-century Muslims. Ramadan agrees with the Imam, albeit with a slight amendment in nomenclature: 'dar' meaning 'house' is too constrictive in the present context; so he replaces it with *alam* which refers to the whole world. To Ramadan, Muslims now live in the *alam al-dawa* i.e. the world of divine invitation.

Once the Arabs had come out of the peninsula into the wider world, they found that nearly everybody belonged to the *ahl al-kitab*, the People of the Book, who had received authentic scriptures of their own. Indeed, until the mid-eighth century, conversion was not encouraged. The Muslims coexisted amicably with the non-Muslim world; and the concept of *aman* (peace) took hold among them.

The spectacular Dar ul-Aman Palace (abode of peace) is a European-style palace located about ten miles outside of the centre of Kabul, Afghanistan. It was built during the 1920s as a part of the reformist King Amanullah Khan's modernisation drive. It is a magnificent neoclassical building on a hilltop overlooking a sprawling, dusty valley in the western part of the Afghan capital. The Dar ul-Aman Palace drew its meaning from the Arabic term *aman*. The Jamait Ulema-e-Hind now is imbued with the similar inspiration.

On 24 February 2009, the Jamait expressed also its opposition to the practice of having Hindus dubbed as *kafir*, and pointed out that this term, *kafir*, did not have any derogatory connotation anyway. At any rate, it should be shunned to avoid possible misunderstanding among communities.

The original notion of *kafir* (plural, *kuffar*) has often been misunderstood, quite apart from the fact that many Muslims use it as a definite insult. But, the word has a neutral sense in the Islamic sciences, Tariq Ramadan opines, and it is clearly perceived at various levels. According to its root, the general meaning of 'kafir' could be rendered as 'a denial with a veiled heart': this refers to those whose original longing for the Transcendent has been stifled, veiled, shut off in their hearts to the extent that they deny the presence of the Creator. But 'kafir' may also indicate one who denies the evidence of truth. To this must be added relevant kinds of negation which are determined according to what is denied: e.g. the truth of the message, the nature of a particular commandment, and so on.

In the light of Ramadan's interpretation, the stand taken by the Jamait is undeniably valid as it opposes Hindus being dubbed as 'kafir'. For the true believers, the position is: 'You have your religion, and I have mine' (Koran, 109:6). □□□