

Voices From Rationalists

India without religious communalism is unthinkable. It has been there for decades. During this time it has become a running sore, its solution appearing ever more distant. There are many reasons for the triumph of communal politics. And secular ideologues never get tired to churn out their pet themes of how to defeat communalism while mocking at their secular identity at every critical juncture. Beneath the growing fear and communal tensions of Indian society lies one calculated move to ignore the voice of rationalists from the minority community. It is one way to nourish the system that sustains isolationism which in turn makes all efforts to cultivate communal harmony difficult. The patent allegation against the liberals and democrats of minority community is that they never come forward to condemn religion-based violence and refuse to take effective steps to combat it. But when they really come forward to speak out, everybody plays it safe to overlook it.

On 31st May 2008 New Delhi's historic Ram Lila maidan witnessed a huge turnout (between 10,000-15,000) of Muslims at a peace-conference organised under the aegis of Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind and Darul Uloom, Deoband. The meeting was supported by other important organisations including All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow, and leaders of different faiths and sects. The message of this anti-terrorism and peace conference was as summed up by Darul-Uloom's deputy rector Hazrat Maulana Qari Sayed Mohammed Usrnan, "Terrorism is the gravest crime as held by Quran and Islam". The highlight of this meet however was a fatwa sought by the Jamiat leader and Member of Parliament, Maulana Mahmood Asad Madani and issued by the Darul Uloom, Deoband. The fatwa was against all forms of terrorism.

The conference and the fatwa issued are of great importance for more reasons than one. Deoband, arguably one of the most important Islamic centres of learning in the world after the Al Azhar University at Cairo, has been in the news for all the wrong reasons in the recent past. This is so because Deoband has been widely believed to be the motivating ideology behind many recognised terrorist groups like the Taliban, the Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Harkat ul-Mujahideen. Interestingly, what many commentators and analysts researching the phenomenon of 'Islamist terrorism' failed to highlight was the fact that the world-renowned seminary never endorsed the Taliban or the brand of Islam that they tried to impose upon the hapless Afghans. This public denouncement of terrorism as anti-Islamic, coming soon after the February 2008 Deoband conference where a similar stand was taken sans the fatwa, also answers a question raised often from various quarters: 'Why don't Muslims condemn terrorism or do Muslims ever condemn terrorism?' Though this question has been answered effectively several times at different fora, it somehow keeps coming back for revalidation. Probably those asking such questions never wait to listen to the answers and quickly pronounce the whole Muslim community guilty of not condemning acts of violence being carried out in the name of Islam.

When the unified voice of over 10,000 Muslims got relegated to a few column spaces somewhere in the corner of the mainstream English dailies, how does one

expect the voices of the common man in Lucknow , Ahmedabad or Hyderabad would reach different corners of the country?

A major part of the problem is that even secularists, not to speak of saffronites look reluctant to see much in this sane voice. Nobody is listening. Those who preach divine violence face condemnation from their own community. But crisis managers who try to solve the most worrisome crises like communalism may get jobless if communal violence becomes a thing of the past. □□□