Islam, Religious Freedom and the “People of the Book”

The Islamic concept of religious liberty is integrally related with its historical and transcendental relations with Judaism and Christianity. Islam is the youngest of the three Semitic religions and stems from the same root out of which Judaism and Christianity were born. In Islamic theological formulations, the three religions constitute successive moments of Semitic consciousness in its long march as the carriers of divine mission. In fact, Islam bases its claim of legitimacy on the earlier revelations received by prophets Moses and Jesus. In other words, Islam’s own claim of legitimacy and authenticity stands or falls on how one views the historicity and transcendentalism of Judaism and Christianity. Without acknowledging the legitimacy of Judaism and Christianity, a Muslim cannot assert his/her own claim to being a Muslim.

But much more important is the Islamic belief that God has left no people without a messenger, from among themselves to teach them that there is no God but God and that man should only worship Him. Once a Muslim believes that all men are endowed with a sensus-communis enabling them to know the true religion, to recognize God’s will, he/she is ready to acknowledge the legitimacy of, and to accord religious liberty and freedom to, all believers. Again and Again the Quran exhorts Muslims to study history, with a view first to discover within each nation endowments of God to which He had sent all his apostles at all
places and times to teach, and second to relate to this primordial religion and call men to it.

With reference to the Jews and Christians, a much deeper relationship is emphasized when the Quran calls the adherence of all the three religions to unite and converge in what it calls the ‘religion of Abraham.’ Some Western scholars have noted a tension between Islam’s unqualified affirmation of this spiritual integrity of Judaism, Islam and Christianity on the one hand, and its criticism of the ‘distortions’ in the two earlier Semitic religions. But listen to these voices from the Quran, perhaps the clearest statement affirming religious pluralism as God’s will and design: “And to you o Mohammed, we have revealed the book containing the truths, confirming the earlier revelations and preserving them from corruption and change. If God had willed, He could surely have made you one people, professing one faith, but He did not do so. He wished to try and test you, so try to compete with one another in good deeds, back to God shall you return, all together and he will tell you the truth about (what) you have been disputing.” The Quran clearly and categorically excludes coercion in matters of religion and states: “There is no compulsion in religion.”

In view of the above Quranic statement, the Islamic governments that do not grant the same religious, civil and political liberties to non-Muslims, as are enjoyed by Muslims, or try to impose Islamic laws on non-Muslims, are clearly in violation of this Quranic injunction. The Prophet (PBUH) allowed the Christians to pray in his own Mosque when they visited him as his guests. He accorded full religious liberty in the city state of Medina to the Jews and endorsed a constitutional charter that gave them full rights as citizens. So there is no Islamic justification whatsoever of imposing restrictions on non-Muslims, and especially on the “People of the Book,” whom the Quran calls ‘believers,’ by Muslim governments, whether they are motivated by religious zeal or by political
considerations. It goes against the very spirit of the Quran to treat them as second class citizens and deprive them of the political privileges, civil liberties and religious freedom enjoyed by their Muslim brethren or ‘cousins,’ as Wilfred Cantwell Smith puts it.

In recent years, both as a result of the increasing interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Islamic world and the west as well, and as a result of the serious efforts in the way of interfaith dialogue, the Muslim intellectuals are making fresh efforts toward developing and re-articulating the structure of the relationship with the ‘other,’ especially with the Christians and the Jews. Some of the most important points of the new discourse are the following: First, the Quran recognizes the Christians and Jews as believers, and believers at par with Muslims as it declares, ‘Those who believe [in the Quran], those who follow the Jewish scriptures, and the Christians, who believe in God and the last day and do good and righteous deeds, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.’

Secondly, the Quranic critique of the Christian and Jewish communities at the time of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) is a moral critique, perfectly justified, but it is not a blanket condemnation of Judaism and Christianity. The Quran makes a clear distinction between the Jews and Christians who have strayed away from the right paths and those among the Christians and Jews who have kept their faith and who are righteous in their deeds. The moral critique of the Quran directed at the Christian and Jewish communities at the time of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), I believe, would equally and justifiably apply to many Muslims of today.

Thirdly, among all the religious communities, Muslims should be justifiably proud of the way they have historically related with other religious groups, especially with the Jews and Christians. Jews have lived in peace and
prospered under Islam for centuries, during which time Islamic governments saw both righteous as well as tyrannical rulers. Fourthly, non-Muslims should not be subject to Islamic laws in Muslim states, as Muslims would not like to be governed by the laws of other religions where they live as minorities. Fifthly, the historical institution of Dhimma (protected communities), where non-Muslims were accorded full protection by Islamic governments and were exempt from requirements such as military services, is no longer relevant. I have not come across any major contemporary Islamic thinker who still upholds that the classical form of Dhimma is still relevant in today’s world. Non-Muslims are full partners in an Islamic system, and any discrimination against non-Muslims would be against Islamic social ethics as well as against the Quranic injunctions. The sixth point on which a consensus is emerging is that Muslims, Christians, and Jews as three branches of the Abrahamic tree and as inheritors of the same divine message, having common obligation and a responsibility to walk together toward building a morally based just social order and peaceful world order.

Religious Freedom and the “Church-State” Relations
The question of religious freedom is not a question of the rights of the majority religious community in a particular society; as a privileged community, its rights of religious freedom are well-protected. The question of religious freedom is, primarily, a question of the rights of minority religious communities who need either a constitutional mandate or a social contract that could protect their right to practice their faith freely. Additionally, it is also a question of the right to express dissenting views, even when one belongs to the majority religious community, provided that these dissenting views are expressed in a respectful manner and the intention is not to make fun of, or insult, the religious sensibilities of others.
From a legal-constitutional and political perspective, the degree and extent of religious freedom in a given society is integrally linked to the nature of the relationship of religion and the state – or Church and the State, as the issue is usually defined in Western societies. After all, it is the precise configuration of the church-state relationship that determines the freedom, or lack thereof, of religion enjoyed by minorities in a given political context. Contrary to the widely held perceptions, however, there is no single, monolithic model of church-state relationship even in the so-called secular Western societies, what to speak of Islamic societies. Like its counterpart, that is, religion, secularism, too, has manifested itself in different forms and with a considerable degree of shades and nuances in the modern world. Let’s look at some of the more prominent models of church-state relationship in recent history and see how the idea of religious freedom is handled in each of them.

1. The American Model:

The American model is based on the idea of the separation of the church and state as articulated in the First amendment of the US constitution. But the First Amendment consists of two clauses of cardinal importance: “the Establishment Clause” that prohibits the state from establishing any religion as a state religion; and the “free exercise clause” that guarantees freedom to all citizens to practice their religion as they please. In other words, the state privileges no single religion over the others but, at the same time, places no obstacles in the free exercise of religion by anyone. The American model is thus a true religious laissez-faire model, very much along the lines of its capitalist economy. However, the so-called Jeffersonian “wall of separation” between church and the state in the U.S. Constitution is not a wall made of steel and concrete; it’s a plastic wall in that it’s flexible and thus can be pushed slightly right or left depending on the changing political dynamics of American society and politics. But neither is it like a Berlin Wall that could be, one day, demolished in a fit of religious zeal; it can be moved
a little either to the right or to the left but, as we have seen in recent American history, both the U.S. Supreme Court and the vital center of American politics have made sure that the wall stays and also that it does not lean too much to either side.

It is this vital American center and the constitutional guarantees of the First Amendment that, despite some occasional rhetoric by people like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Frank Graham, and John Ashcroft that “America is a Christian nation,” make America as the world’s freest society for religious minorities.

2. The French Model
Unlike the American model, the French model of secularism and church-state relationship begins with a fundamental – and inherent – hostility towards organized religion, a legacy of the French Revolution of 1789 that sought to demolish the power of both the monarchy and the Catholic Church. This historical legacy of anti-clericalism has thus created a fundamental distrust by the state of display of all kinds of religious symbols in the public square, despite the constitutional guarantees of the free exercise of religion by the followers of all faiths. In the French model, it is not only that the state does not favor any one religion over the others; it disfavors all religions equally, but tolerates their existence in society either as a part of the human rights project, or as a source of social solidarity in Durkheimian sense. While the American model of secularism and the “wall of separation” between church and state does not prevent the state from treating people’s religions beliefs and practices with a great degree of respect, the French secular state, on the other hand, regards all organized religious activities with a degree of disdain and suspicion lest they tread too heavily on its cherished tradition of laicite. Hence, notwithstanding its commitment to religious freedom, its watchful eyes are always fixed on the
trajectories of religious expressions in public life, as the French Muslims have discovered recently when the hijab was banned in public schools.

3. The British Model

The British model of church-state relationship is most interesting. The Queen is head of the Anglican Church and is “the defender of the faith,” i.e. the Anglican faith. In this sense, Britain is not, strictly speaking, a secular state since the Anglican Church is the privileged religion of the state. But despite the fact that the Anglican Church is the official religion of the state, the state does not discriminate against other faiths and affords them equal religious freedom. In other words, in the state balls, the Queen would prefer to dance with the Archbishop of Canterbury first and only then with the rabbis and maulanas, or guru maharajs, but dance she will. Notwithstanding the fact that the Anglican Church is part of the state hierarchy and receives funds from the treasury, other religions also receive benefit from the state for certain parochial activities.

4. The Soviet Model

The Soviet model of church-state relationship and secularism that was practiced from 1917 Russian Revolution up to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was based on the Marxist idea of religion as an “opium for the ignorant masses,” and, hence, to be uprooted completely from their consciousness to achieve their full emancipation as free agents. The state in the Soviet Union, especially during the Stalin era, was an equal opportunity oppressor for all religions in its realm and, in this sense, its policies were non-discriminatory. The question of religious freedom, in this context, did not arise at all, whether it was the Russian Orthodox Church or Judaism or Islam, since they were all considered subversive for the communist project.

5. The Turkish Model
As is often pointed out, modern Turkey is the only avowedly secular state in the Muslim world, which, most categorically separates the spheres of religion from those of the state. But the classical Ata-Turkish model of the secular state, which, in its ideal form, is derived from the French model of anti-clericalism, is unique in the sense that while it guarantees all kinds of religious freedoms to minority religious communities, its attitude to the religion of the majority – Islam – is that of clear hostility. Again, the fear lurking behind this paradoxical orientation is that Islam might not stage a comeback through the backdoors of civil society to eventually subvert the cherished Ata-Turkish project of secular modernity. Hence, the state authorities are always swift to take legal action against any public – and, in many cases, private – expressions of Islamic beliefs and practices. Thus the Ata-Turkish model of secularism and church-state relations is unique in the sense that while followers of all minority faiths are free to exercise their religion, the majority Muslim communities’ religious freedoms are severely restricted – a clear case of reverse discrimination if you will.

6. The Indonesian Model:
The Indonesian model of the church-state relationship, first articulated by President Soekarno in the 1960s, is also unique in the sense that while it rejects the idea of a single religion preferred by the state, it, nevertheless, acknowledges the core religious and moral-spiritual principles common among all faith communities represented in Indonesia as guiding principles of state policy. This doctrine of *panca silla* (five principles) – a modern-day version of the great Moghul emperor Akbar’s *Din-e-Elahi* – commits the state to promote common spiritual values of all religions in its policies, but avoid official entanglement with any one of them. Religious freedom for all faith communities is thus guaranteed in a moral-political context that is informed by pantheistic universalism.
7. The Saudi Model:
The Saudi Arabian model of the church-state relationship is unapologetically committed to upholding the superiority of Islam and does not even pretend to extend freedom of religion to other faith communities. Based on the historical legacy of a solid religio-political alliance between the Aal-e-Saud and the Aal-e-Shaikh, the Saudi model has created an impenetrable structure of mutual obligations between the Saudi state on the one hand, and the Wahhabi religious establishment, on the other. Drawing on its unique position as the guardian of the two holiest places of Islam, the Saudi state unabashedly proclaims Islam as a religion of both the state and society, and delegitimizes all other faiths as a logical corollary of its primeval commitment to Islam. The absence of religious freedom for all other religions except Islam, under such circumstances, becomes a foregone conclusion.

8. The Iranian Model
In the post-1979 Iranian model of the church-state relationship, both the church and the state are integrally intertwined and the boundaries between the two are often blurred. In fact, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran not only privileges a particular religion – Islam – but also a particular sect – Shi’ism – within that religion and gives the clergy the ultimate authority to veto the state policies and proposed legislation under the doctrine of the Vilayat-e-faqih. Despite this preponderance of Shi’i Islam in the affairs of the state, however, religious and sectarian minorities in Iran have enjoyed considerable degree of religious freedom compared to what is generally available to them in neighboring Muslim countries.

9. The Taliban Model
The Taliban model, as practiced by the Taliban in their short-lived Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan during 1998-2001, is the Iranian plus the Saudi model
multiplied by ten in terms of its exclusive privileging of Islam over all other religions, and also in terms of its fanatical and zealous, and sometime brutal, enforcement of their particular understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices through the coercive power of the state. Religious freedom for other faith communities as well as the dissent from the officially approved interpretation of Islam are not only restricted but are also severely punished. The state, in this model, assumes the role of the ultimate guardian and defender of the faith – in this case, Islam – and can go as far as demolishing and obliterating the religious symbols of other faiths, as was evident in the Bamiyan incident.

10. The Pakistan Model

Although Islam has been an integral part of the state and nation-building since the very inception of the state in 1947, the religion-state relationships have varied considerably during its 60 years of independent history. From the early parliamentary era’s Islamic liberalism, to Ayub Khan’s Islamic modernism, to Yahya Khan’s Muslim nationalism, to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s Islamic socialist populism, to Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamic fundamentalism, to Pervaiz Musharraf’s enlightened Islamic moderation, Pakistan seems to have explored all Islamic alternatives available in the textbooks. But at least until Yahya Khan’s period, in terms of substantive policies, Islam remained peripheral to the affairs of the state. This meant, among other things, that the religious minorities were left alone and, relatively speaking, enjoyed considerable freedom to practice their faith. Then came the fateful decision in 1974 by the government of Prime Minister Bhutto to declare the Ahmadis as non-Muslims which opened the floodgates of series of discriminatory laws and regulations against the minorities during the Zia-ul-Haq period. What happened to religious liberties in subsequent years was not only the direct result of these discriminatory laws but, more so, the result of the general atmosphere of religious intolerance created by these laws at the societal level. It is this legacy that has not only created a social climate of religious
intolerance, sectarian violence, and frequent mob attacks on those accused of blasphemy, but has also stifled dissent and a candid debate on religious issues. It is, indeed, ironical that the state in Pakistan first creates a legal-constitutional framework of discriminatory practices and then, quite innocently, protests against the rise of religious intolerance of the people and extremism of certain religious groups.

Having examined these ten different models of the relationship between religion and the state, it becomes evident that the question of religious freedom in a particular society and political system ultimately depends on how the relationships between religion and the state are configured and articulated in legal-constitutional mandates and conventions. The more the state embraces religion warmly, the more the religious liberties get cold feet. The closer the state gets to religion, either in friendship or in hostility, the farther away are the prospects of religious freedom. And then there arises a much more serious problem: when the state and religion become one, then no distinction can be made between political dissent against the policies of the state on the one hand, and the “heretical” stance against the established religion, on the other. All roads lead to hell.

**Islam vs. Secularism in the Modern World**

I will now turn my attention to the second part of my presentation dealing with debate on Islam versus secularism and how it affects the issue of religious liberty. The most significant and the most contested theme, I believe, in the contemporary Islamic intellectual and political discourse, has been the conflict between religious and secular identities of self, community and the state. The debate on Islam versus Secularism became more acute, after the end of the Ottoman Caliphate and the introduction of a series of reforms by the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kamal Ata Turk. It was not the kind of secularism in
which the state is detached from religion, in which the government exerts no pressure in favor of one religion against others, in which the state does not impose one religious policy on education, culture or society.

The Turkish secularism began with the assumption that religion, and in this case Islam, was an impediment to state formation, nation building and material and intellectual development. Mohammed Arkoun, the famous North-African Muslim scholar, has recently argued that the Ata Turkish view of Islam, on the one hand, and of secularism, on the other, is typical of that naïve consciousness found among most Muslim intellectuals between 1880s and 1940s. Their superficial experience in European schools and universities created a cultural shock they never managed to overcome. These were the intellectuals and Muslim leaders who attributed Western public liberties, economic dynamism, cultural creativity, comfort and cleanliness of public and private spaces, and the wealth of cities like Paris, London and Berlin, to the diminished role of religion and to secularism. Thus militant secularism was perceived as the effective prescription that will cure all ills of Muslim societies. Unlike the contemporary critical Islamic scholarship of Anouar Majid, Talal Asad, Bobby Sayed, and Mahmoud Mamdani, who have subjected the conventional wisdom on secularism and modernity to a devastating critique, the earlier generations of Muslim intellectuals, as Mohammad Arkoun has pointed out, did not have a sufficient grasp of history to be able to pin down the ideological genesis, socio-political functions, and philosophical limits of secularism in the West. There was this Turkish journalist, Abdullah Javid, who wrote on the eve of Ataturk’s revolution who said, ‘there is no second civilization. Civilization means European civilization, and it must be imported with all its roses and with all its thorns.’ Well, when the shipment arrived from the West, for most of the Muslim masses, it was mostly thorns, not roses. Ataturk’s attack on the ideological universe of Muslims was total. The Arabic alphabet was replaced with the
Roman alphabet, the turban and the fez was replaced by the Western hat, and the Shariah with the Swiss legal codes. Official ceremonies, cooking, furniture, architecture, the calendar, personal law, education - in short all those ideological systems that affect individual and collective sensibilities, were officially abolished, using the coercive apparatus of the state.

It is no wonder that the ideological gap between the revolutionary secularists and the masses they claimed to emancipate impaired the symbolic capital that is an integral part of a living tradition. It is instructive to note, as a footnote, how the meaning of these markers are being revised in the current wave of Islamic resurgence against the secular states, when the wearing of veils by women and turbans by men is seen as a form of political resistance against the secular states of today. Throwing away of a turban and putting on a Western hat was a symbol of emancipation in the 1920s for the Muslims. It is the turban and the veil today that have become a symbol of emancipation from both the colonial heritage, and the secularist regimes of today.

Muhammad Iqbal, the great poet philosopher of Muslim India and Pakistan, was perhaps the first Muslim scholar to warn the Muslim world of the dangerous consequences of militant secularism and liberalism. He welcomed the liberal movement in modern Islam, but pointed out that liberalism has a tendency to act as a force of disintegration. He was particularly concerned about what he called the ‘race idea,’ which he thought was a necessary part of secular liberalism when politics is divorced from broad universal human concerns of religions. In one of his famous Urdu lines he says “Separate politics from religion, and you are left with Genghis Khan.” He was afraid that Muslim religious and political reformers in their zeal for liberalism were overstepping the proper limits of reform in the absence of a check on the ‘youthful fervor.’ He wrote, “We are passing through a period similar to that of protestant revolution in Europe and
the lessons which the outcome of Luther’s movement teaches, should not be lost on us. A careful reading of history shows that the reformation was essentially a political movement and the net result of it in Europe was a gradual displacement of the universal ethics of Christianity by systems of national ethics. The result of this tendency we have seen with our own eyes is the current European war [World War], which has made the European situation still more intolerable.” At another point he writes, “Humanity needs three things today - a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis.” He lauded modern Europe for building idealistic systems on these lines but said that, “Truth revealed to pure reason is incapable of bringing the fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring.” At one point his criticism of Europe’s secularist liberalism becomes more emphatic when he writes, “Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man’s ethical advancement.”

Iqbal reminds the Muslim revolutionary secularist leaders of his time, especially in Turkey, who were bent upon dismantling the spiritual moorings of Muslim politics on the militant anti-clerical French model, that in Islam, the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains. In Islam, it is the same reality which appears as the Church looked at from one point of view and the state when looked at from another point of view. At the same time, however, he was not advocating theocracy, ruled by one or a group of “representatives of God on earth”, with a despotic will of their own. For Islam, he says, “Everything is holy and has spiritual essence and as the Prophet [PBUH] so beautifully put it, “The whole of this Earth is a mosque”.

The state, according to Islam in Iqbal’s view, therefore, is an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization. It cannot therefore be divorced from spiritual
concerns and universalistic orientations of religion, be it of Christianity, Judaism or Islam, without necessarily recognizing any strict system of legal code that is to be imposed by the state. Unfortunately, Mohammed Iqbal’s words fell on deaf ears as far as the Muslim political elite were concerned. The secularist project with militant zeal that was undertaken in Turkey, Iran, Tunisia, and Algeria and, to a certain extent in Egypt, and several other Muslim countries, had devastating consequences and created a breach between the rulers and modern secular elites, on the one hand, and the Muslim masses on the other. The kind of secularism that was introduced in Muslim societies and was preached by militant zealots was closer to atheistic and anti-religion secularism of the French experience. Then came the Marxist model of secularism in Muslim central Asia and to some extent in few Middle Eastern countries that tried to force the Muslim masses to abandon Islam even in their private lives. Atheism and secularism became substitute religions, with same enthusiasm, with similar demands of conversion and born again excitement and militancy.

There is a story I read a long time ago about the coming of secular modernity in Afghanistan under the Amanullah regime in the 1920’s, the first modernizer of Afghanistan. In this story there is a burqa-clad Muslim woman in Kabul who is besieged by a crowd of militant modernists who are tearing apart her veil. The poor woman, feeling as if she has been made naked in the presence of strangers, stands trembling not knowing what to do, while the crowd is laughing at the triumph of modernity and secularism. And then I look at another picture, another scene in Kabul under the Taliban, where the same unveiled woman, who was emancipated by Amanullah in the 1920s, is besieged by the Taliban fanatics and they are “re-covering” her with the same burqa which was torn apart in the 1920s. In this picture, the Taliban are laughing as if Islam had returned with a vengeance.
So what is the lesson here? One extremism gives rise to another extremism. Extremists and perverse religious movements arise when the mainstream religions are pushed aside and are marginalized. The popularity of the so-called militant fundamentalist ideology in Muslim societies, among other factors, is also a reaction against militant secular modernism. The failure of both liberal and socialist paths to secularism as pursued by Kamal Ata Turk of Turkey, the Shah of Iran, Bouriguiba of Tunisia, Jamal Nasser of Egypt, Soekarno and Suharto of Indonesia and others, further strengthened the appeal of extremist fundamentalists in Muslim societies. The main dilemma in today’s Muslim societies is that while Islam is deprived of its meaningful role as a moral and spiritual guide in substantive public policies, it is nevertheless most cynically and most shamelessly being used instrumentally by the state authorities at a symbolic level to legitimize the absolutist power, unjust and inequitable policies, corrupt practices and oppressive rules. This is what I call a double jeopardy for Islam. The third dimension of this tragedy is that some radical Islamic groups, in order to break this double bind that Islam is facing today, that is, the lack of the substantive role of Islam on the one hand in public affairs, and the cynical, instrumental use of Islam by the oppressive rulers, take up their own sword of Islamic righteousness and start taking revenge on, say, a poor woman in Kabul, a Coptic church in Egypt, a German tourist in Luxor, Egypt, an Australian tourists in Bali, Indonesia, innocent villagers in Algeria, and the working class Christians in Pakistan.

There are religious Ayatollahs and there are secular Ayatollahs. There is a religious fundamentalism and there is a secular fundamentalism. In terms of the consequences for pluralism and religious liberty, there is no qualitative difference between the two – both are equally totalitarian, equally exclusivist, equally intolerant, equally narrow-minded, and equally antithetical to the idea and practice of religious liberty. And both are equally absolutist and zealot. Both
religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism claim to serve as an irreducible basis for communal and personal identity. The question that I would like to raise here is: Isn’t there a middle way between Mullah Omar and Salman Rushdie in Islam – between militant theocracy with total absence of pluralism and religious liberty on the one hand, and blatant contempt for Islam and militant secularism, on the other?

Tayyab Salih is a Sudanese writer who has written a wonderful short story entitled “The Dom Tree of Wad Hamid.” In that short story there is this socialist government in Khartoum in the post-independence era, which wants to build a shipping dock on the Nile River precisely at a point where a religious saint is buried. The villagers resist the move by the government and they rise in revolt. The government official, who is responsible for dismantling the shrine and building the dock, comes to the village to tell the villagers of the government’s plan to demolish the shrine. An old man from the village tells him that there can be a place for your development project and there can be a place for the shrine. There will be no harm done if you leave this shrine alone and take your shipping dock a little further down the stream. I think there is a lesson in this story for Muslim societies and regimes.