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Thought for the Month

The unbelievers will be
Led to Hell in groups:
Until, when they arrive there,
Its gates will be opened.
And its keepers will say,
“Did not messengers come
To you from among yourselves,
Rehearsing to you the Signs
Of your Lord, and warning you
Of the Meeting of this Day
Of your?” The answer
Will be: “True: but
The Decree of Chastisement
Has been proved true
Against the unbelievers!”

Al-Quran- 39:71

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FOCUS

All minorities inhabiting India have their legal affiliation with the country in two ways: as individuals; and as members of a particular group professing a distinct religion. In their first mentioned capacity constitutional recognition comes to every minority as a citizen of India. Part II of the Constitution deals with citizenship and says that whosoever fulfils the conditions laid down in that part “Shall be a citizen of India”. In the second mentioned capacity who is as a group professing a distinct religion constitutional recognition comes to minority as a ‘religious denomination’ (Articles 26 and 27) and as a ‘minority based on religion’ (Article 30 clauses 1 and 2). Another noteworthy feature of the Indian Constitution is that although it declares India in its Preamble to be a ‘secular democratic republic’ it gives recognition to all religions professed by citizens of India and also gives recognition to group identities as such. More importantly, the Constitution makes it abundantly clear through Article 15, clauses (1) and (2), that no citizen of India will be discriminated against by the State on the ground of religion he professes nor he will be subjected to any disability on that score. On the basis of the above provisions of the Indian Constitution, it is clearly established that every minority of India is individually a part of the Indian nation and all minorities of India, being members of a distinct religious community, which together with other religious communities constitute the Indian nation, collectively also form part of the nation. It is significant to point out that except for the Preamble, the word nation has nowhere been used in the Constitution in relation to ‘the people of India’. Moreover, the Indian Constitution does not list all the religious communities which together form the Indian nation. In two specific contexts it mentions Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists by name—Explanations 1 and 2 to Article 25 (2) (b) — but, it is just incidental and does not mean that those following any religion other than those named are in any degree excluded from the Indian nationhood.

It has been rightly observed that “it would have been a blunder on the part of the makers of our Constitution if, they had omitted to make any special provisions for the socially and economically backward communities, for, the democratic march of a nation would be impossible if those who are handicapped are not aided.” Indeed, the principle of democratic equality as outlined in the Preamble to the Constitution can work successfully only if the entire nation is brought on the same level, as far as practicable.

Taking into cognizance this objective, the founding-fathers of the Indian Constitution prescribed certain temporary measures to help the backward sections to come up to the same level with the rest of the nation as well as certain permanent safeguards for the protection of the cultural, linguistic and similar rights of any section of the community who might be said to constitute a ‘minority’ from the numerical, not communal point of view, in order to prevent the democratic machine from being used as an engine of oppression by the numerical majority.

From *We, the Minorities of India* by Prof. Z.M. Khan and S.N. Yadav, pp. 29-31

Activities of the IOS Headquarters

IOS online panel discussion on Majoritarian Politics in India

An online panel discussion on “Majoritarian Politics in India” was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies on October 9, 2021.

The theme was introduced by the assistant professor of Political Science, Zakir Husain Delhi College, Delhi University, Dr. Md. Aftab Alam.

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Md. Aftab Alam said that majoritarianism was a serious threat to the essence of democracy. He observed that in the recent past, increasing majoritarianism and political polarisation had been witnessed in the country. It was a commonplace among political scientists that the polarisation in India was more toxic today than ever before. Calling the topic relevant in today’s context, he said that India was witnessing the shift of population myth to majoritarian nationalism. New form of nationalism had emerged in the country, which could be understood in global perspective. The wave of new form of nationalism gave rise to populism as well as vigilantism in the name of *Gau Raksha* (Cow protection), Romeo group, etc. He said that the Modi government passed certain anti-Muslim laws, anti-conversion law being one of them. In order to implement the Hindutva project and cultural nationalism, the politics of hate was being pursued by means of banning slaughter houses, mob lynching of innocent Muslims, targeted violence against Muslims and

Christians and attack on Churches. The bogey of love and Corona jihad was raised to instigate the majority community against Muslims. Tabhligi Jamat was targeted to malign the Muslim community, he noted.

Dr. Alam said that new things were being added to jihad. The calling of *Azaan* on the mike was being made an issue to play up sectarian sentiments. A similar move to erase history was being made by the Hindutva zealots to put research on the subject on the backburner. Besides mainstream media, social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter were being

fulfilled. He sought to know what type of life a citizen was leading. As a citizen, one’s faith should not be allowed to be shaken. India ultimately became a secular state with no religion of its own. At the time of Independence, contradictions were many, some in the name of religion or language. The concept of religion implied that no citizen would be discriminated against and decisions to be taken on the basis of numbers. All the institutions of state were mandated to hold elections with the resolve to express faith in them. Instead of demanding the rights, today’s crisis hinged on saving the existence. He observed that multiple identities were overlapping, leading to the clash of identities. As far as caste configuration was concerned, depressed, exploited, and deprived sections constituted 54 per cent of population. If the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were added to it, the total population made up to 85 per cent. Social ideologies identified Hindutva with majoritarianism.



A view of the panelists

systematically controlled by the fringe organisations of the Sangh in contradiction to secular values, he added.

Asstt. Professor, department of Hindi, Zakir Husain Delhi College, Delhi University, Dr. Laxman Yadav expressed concern over falling values in politics. It was a moot question today how to view majoritarianism. Every narrative had been so simplified that the gap between facts and arguments was closed, leaving no room for enquiry. He opined that the narrative of the nation and democracy had two aspects. While one was theoretical, the other was practical. The question arose if the promises made on January 26, 1950, were

Dr. Yadav argued that the new national narrative of social justice emerged in 1990, and efforts were made to sharpen it. In order to counter the narrative of social justice, Hindutva forces embarked on the *Kamandal* (Temple) movement that was marked by riots in the country. The movement paid handsomely to the Hindutva forces, and the new government installed in 2014, invented a new slogan ‘*Sub ka Saath Sab ka Vikas*’. This was replaced with ‘*Subka Vishwas*’ in 2019. The intent of these slogans became loud and clear by 2021, when PSUs (Public Sector Undertakings) were put on sale. With the birth of new nation-state in 1950, it was expected that the promise to grant ownership rights of the land

would be fulfilled and the government would provide medical and health services and education to the people. But the entire narrative changed with love jihad, madarsa, triple talaq, etc., becoming the catchword. This discourse did not include poverty, unemployment, healthcare, education, etc. The current year was marked by the power gradually shifting to the private sector. He insisted that citizens were given the right to vote, but equality, education and health were a far cry. There was no discussion on more than 300 mob lynchings. The deprived and exploited were the target of majoritarianism. He opined that nobody would be spared of the onslaughts of majoritarianism.

Vague nationalism and false history formed a part of the big project to divide people on communal lines. He called for defeating fake majoritarianism. The country was currently in the throes of a grave crisis. The politics of social justice had to be pursued with renewed vigour to realise the idea of a nation as visualised in the Indian Constitution, he added.

Associate Professor, Centre for Political Science, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr. Ajay Gudavarthy, held that majoritarianism did not hinge on numbers only; it sought to establish a social identity and social structure. There was a powerful and privileged class that wanted to bring together other majoritarian population. There was a need for social ethics, notion, ideas, etc., to overthrow majoritarianism. Population and numbers together with the social ethics could defeat majoritarianism.

Dr. Gudavarthy pointed out that the generic norm had been

institutionalised. Neo-liberalism also had a contributory role in the rise of majoritarianism. Generic anxiety, a mental and social state, was coming from neo-liberalism, and unless alternate ethics was developed, it would be difficult to defeat majoritarianism. Hegemony through lawlessness was another aspect of majoritarianism.

Dr. Gudavarthy observed that the Hindutva politics was against change. Majoritarianism needed to be understood in the context of the power they wielded. Thus social and political power was needed to create opposition. Secular politics could

as Khalistanis and called JNU students urban naxals, he concluded.

In his presidential remarks, Prof. Z.M. Khan said that the panel discussion was very useful to understand the niceties of Hindutva politics. He held that secular politics was the only answer to the politics of sectarianism, promoted by the saffron brigade.

At the end, Dr. Md. Aftab Alam, while proposing a vote of thanks to the participants, observed that a kind of social ethics, ability to put questions, self-righteousness, and social behaviour were the norms to counter majoritarianism.



L-R: Prof. Shivani Sharma, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, Prof. Dr. Harmohinder Singh Bedi, Prof. Arvind, Prof. Syed Jamaluddin, Prof. Hamidullah Marazi and Prof. Ravindar Kumar Kaushik

IOS-Punjabi University organises two-day National Conference on “Inter-Religious Understanding: Its Implications for Human Rights”

A two-day National Conference on “Inter-Religious Understanding: Its Implications for Human Rights” was jointly organised by

the Institute of Objective Studies and Punjabi University at Patiala on September 29-30, 2021.

Inaugurated by the Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, Prof. Arvind, the inaugural session was graced by the Chancellor, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Prof. Dr. Harmohinder Singh Bedi as special guest, Prof. Shivani Sharma from Chandigarh University, Punjab and Dr. Firoz Mohammad, Executive Director (Liberal Arts, Humanities and Creative Practices) Chandigarh University as guests of honour. While Prof. Dr. Mohd. Habib, Head, department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, presented the welcome address, Prof. Hamidullah Marazi, Convenor, IOS Forum for Inter-Religious

counter generic insecurity that had grown over the years. Secular politics should not be confined to one community. At a time when the RSS was building a monolithic project to assimilate castes, there was an urgent need to break sectarianism and promote secularism. It was also obligatory on every conscientious person to question his own internal dynamism of contradictions. There should be no exclusivism within the community. He called for achieving the ability to speak for others and raise questions, along with the representatives of other communities, be it the farmers or other sufferers. There was a commonality that the Hindutva project did. That was the reason why it termed the Sikh farmers

Understanding, Delhi, introduced the theme. In his key-note address, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, Professor of Law & Director Coordination, GGSIP University, Delhi, and the Vice Chairman, Institute of Objective Studies, observed that there was a deep link between humanity and religions. The importance of the conference should be understood in that context.

Inaugurating the conference, Prof. Arvind expressed happiness that the university was hosting a national conference on the subject that assumed much importance in the present context. Prof. Harmohinder Singh lauded the efforts of the organisers to discuss the issues related to inter-faith understanding. He said that his university would explore possibilities to hold such a conference. Prof. Shivani Sharma, explained the revelations and *anubhuti* in the light of Vedic practices. Dr. Firoz Mohammad held that religions were made to spread the essence of humanity. He emphasised the need for holding dialogues and conferences to promote better understanding among religions. Presiding over the session, Prof. Syed Jamaluddin, Director, IOS Centre for Historical and Civilizational Studies, held that such conferences should be regularly organised to help dispel misconception about different religions. He said that the IOS had been holding such dialogues to negate the misunderstanding among religions.

Business Session I

Chaired by Prof. Mohd. Roslan Mohd. Noor, Malay University, Malaysia, the session focused on inter-religious understanding and religions. Prof. Hamidullah Marazi moderated the session. The speakers of the session were, Dr. Daljit Kaur, associate professor, department of History, Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi, Bhupinder Singh 'Bashar', Kolkata. While the former spoke on "Sikhism: Tapestry of serenity and valour", the latter focused on "Inter-religious understanding and dialogue for

promoting humanity". Dr. Naseem Gul & Ms. Ujala Amin from department of Islamic Studies, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University (BGSBU), Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir spoke on "Ethical philosophy of Sufis: A nourishment to the communal harmony in Kashmir", while Dr. Nazeer Ahmad Ab. Majeed, assistant professor, K.A. Nizami Centre for Quranic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, spoke on "Human rights as a mediator of interreligious understanding".

Business Session II

The second business session focused on inter-religious dialogues for promotion of humanity and justice, and was chaired by Prof. Ishrat Alam of AMU. Prof. Hamidullah Marazi moderated the session. While Dr. Md. Abrarul Haque, guest faculty (Islamic Studies), MANUU, Lucknow Campus, spoke on "Fr. Thomas Michel's Approaches to Christian-Muslim Dialogue", Dr. Poulosiju K.F., assoc. professor, Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, UC College, Ernakulum, Kerala, presented the paper on "Dialogue to Enhance Humanity: The vision of Pope Francis in FratelliTutti". The third speaker was Gulzar Ahmad Bhat, doctoral candidate, department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology Awantipora, Kashmir, who focused on "Social Justice: A Key to Communal Harmony". He was followed by Waheed Ahmad Ahanger, Ph.D. student, School of Education, Central University of Kashmir, Green Campus Ganderbal, J&K and Dr. Firdous Ahmad Sofal, assistant professor in the same university. Both of them spoke on "Religion and Social Justice: Role of Major Religious Schools in Fostering Social Justice in India". While Dr. Amita Valmiki, assoc. professor and head, department of Philosophy, Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Mumbai, discussed on "Dialogical Communication between the Religious Traditions of Asia and

Africa", J. Peter, research scholar, Christian Tamil Studies, Madurai Kamraj University, Madurai, T.N., spoke on "Social Justice in Christian Perspective". The last speaker was Nazir Ahmad Sheikh, research scholar, Philosophy, Barkatullah University, Bhopal, who focused on "Ghazali's View of Human Dignity".

Business Session III

The third business session on second day focused on dialogue in action for justice and protection of human rights, which was chaired by Prof. D. A. Gangadhar, professor and former head, department of Philosophy & Religion, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. Moderated by Prof. Hamidullah Marazi, the session commenced with the talk of Dr. Mohammad Habib on "Islam and Inter-religious Understanding: Its Implications to Human Rights". He observed that Allah's words were revealed through the Prophet (PBUH) and preserved in the Qur'an. Religion was one and its aim was to uplift human beings by valuing human rights. The Qur'an says, "Unto you your religion; Unto me my religion." There was no compulsion in religion. This simply meant that it was left to people to decide their faith or otherwise. Unfortunately, Islam was misquoted in the context of human rights. Islamic values and its identity had been presented by the western scholars in a biased manner. He concluded by noting that the faith was a matter of choice. Dr. Javed Nadeem Nadvi, department of Arabic, MANUU, Hyderabad, spoke on "Islam in a Multi-faith Society: Adherence with Rights and Respect". He said Allah is merciful and compassionate. He introduced His Prophet (PBUH) as *Rahmat-ul-Lil Alamin*. Referring to the Prophet's (PBUH) treatment to people, he said that he pardoned Haris despite his unpardonable misdemeanours. He also pardoned Sura'qa. Sulah Hudaibiya (Treaty of Hudaibiya) was the best example of engaging with the enemies in the most

humane manner. His behaviour on the warfront also did not have a parallel in the history of mankind.

Dr. Hassan Shareef, assistant professor and head, PG Department of Islamic Studies, SAFI Institute of Advanced Study, focused on “Peaceful Coexistence in Indian subcontinent: Lessons from Madina Charter of Prophet Muhammed”. He said that the Charter was an example of unity in diversity. It also created a platform to promote peace, love and compassion among people of diverse ethnicity, he noted. While Iymen Nazir, Ph.D. scholar, department of Religious Studies, Central University of Kashmir, presented the paper on the “Rights of Religious Minorities in India Through a Constitutional Perspective”, Dr. Afroz Ahmad Bisati, assoc. professor, department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora, Kashmir, focused on “Cultural Diversity Under the Frame of the Indian Constitution”. She held the anti-conversion law as anti-constitutional as Indian Constitution guaranteed religious freedom. Calling India’s multi-cultural diversity as unique, she said that inter-faith dialogues should be held to cement the bond of brotherhood and communal harmony.

Dr. Masihullah, guest teacher, department of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, presented his paper on “Meesaq-e-Madinah”. Meesaq-e-Madinah (Charter of Madina), which had 47 points, was the first written agreement. Under the Meesaq-e-Madina, the Prophet (PBUH) was the last authority to decide contentious issues. He opined that Hindu-Muslim unity could create a good society. Dr. Nazir Ahmad Zargar, assistant professor, department of Religious Studies, Central University of Kashmir, Kashmir, held that the Shari’ah was based on the benefit of all. According to him, Shari’ah had 6 objectives. These were – life, property, progeny, honour, preservation of age and preservation of

Al-Aql. Sharia commanded the faithful to avoid certain indulgences. Prof. Jashpreet Kaur Sandhu from Punjabi University, Patiala, underlined the need for mutual understanding among different faiths. She said that truth was multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. She observed that God is not specific to any particular religion and thus human interaction was necessary for preventing violence and ensuring peace all over the world.

Presiding over the session, Prof. D.A. Gangadhar said that Islam was one of the strongest religions of the world. Calling for world peace, he held that the problem of human rights was of utmost importance today. The crux of the matter was ‘*Kuchh kahiye; kuchh suniye*’ (Say something and listen something). One could never nurture religious intolerance if he followed his religion in letter and spirit. There were two aspects of a religion – practical and theoretical. He was all praise for Islamic sufism and noted that it was the practical aspect of Islam. Speaking in the Indian context, he said that pluralism was deeply rooted in society and the country. He concluded by observing that no effort should be spared to take the country on the path of development.

Business Session IV

Devoted to the theme Inter-Religious Understanding in Islam and Indian Religions, the fourth session was chaired by Prof. Abdul Rashid Bhat, Central University of Kashmir. Dr. Nazir Ahmad Zargar moderated the session. Prof. Aleem Ashraf Khan, former head, department of Persian, Delhi University, was the first speaker who focused on “Traces of Tolerance in Persian Malfuz Literature”. He said that India had been a centre of rational and intellectual sciences. Teachings of sufis, particularly, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya Mahboob-e-Ilahi, always inspired peace and amity in society. He was a true pir. Sikh gurus also spread the message of love and peace. He observed that Din-e-Ilahi was aimed at harmony and religious tolerance. He

was followed by Dr. Ashraf Amin and Ms. Ujala Amin, guest lecturer and doctoral candidate respectively, in the department of Islamic Studies, BGSB, Rajouri, who spoke on “Revisiting Socio-religious Harmony: A Study of Sufi-Saint Traditions of India”. Both of them insisted that religion was the lifeblood of the Indian sub-continent. Ignorance of other religions was the main cause of misunderstanding that permeated today. They said that conflicts were orchestrated to make political gains.

Sajad Ahmad Kumar and Dr. Rafique Anjum, research scholars, department of Islamic Studies, BGSBU, presented their paper on “Religious Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence: An Islamic Perspective”. They noted that religious pluralism and peaceful co-existence went hand in hand. Diversity was the law of nature, and multi-culturalism formed a part of it. Mohammad Osama, research scholar, Religious Studies, Punjabi University, who spoke on the “Rights of the Minorities and their Protection in an Islamic State”, argued that Islam was the first religion to give minorities their rights. Minority rights formed a place in the Charter of Madina. Ab. Majeed Ganaie, Ph.D. scholar, department of Religious Studies, Central University of Kashmir, presented his paper on “Inter-religious Understanding in Indian context: Dialogue a way forward for the promotion of humanity”. Ashaq Hussain Hijam and Dr. Firdous Ahmad Sofa, Ph.D. scholars, School of Education, Central University of Kashmir, Ganderbal, focused on the “Place and Promotion of Inter-religious Understanding with Special Reference to Various Major Schools of Philosophy”. Dr. Muied-ul-Zafar, assistant professor, department of Religious Studies, Punjab University, discussed “Inter-religious Understanding in Kashmir during the Sultanate Period”. He said that a new culture emerged during the Sultanate period. There was religious tolerance and understanding among the people.

Javad Ahmad Mir and G. N. Khaki, research scholars at CCAS, University of Kashmir, focused on “Dara Shikouh and his Model of Hindu-Muslim Inter-religious Understanding: An assessment” and “Contours of Religious Co-existence and Cooperation in Islam”. In their presentations, they said that Dara Shikouh was the believer of Tawhid. He was a Sufi and belonged to the Qadiriya order of Sufism. Dara Shikouh rejected exclusivism which pitted orthodox sections of Islam against him. It was Dara who got translated Vedas and Upanishads into Persian, they added. Ms. Ira Leo, & Rifat Khan, research scholars, Lovely Professional University, Jalandhar, who were the last speakers of the session, spoke on “Inter-religious Marriages and their Implications”. They said that marriage had been a universal social institution. The contemporary hostilities were politically motivated. They made special mention of Articles 16 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.

Valedictory Session

Delivering the valedictory address, Prof. Hamidullah Marazi pointed out that religion had two dimensions – the role of sages and religious communities. A platform to promote religious tolerance was needed. Similarly, ideological dialogues should be regularly organised to maintain peace. Clerics, gurus and sufis could play a significant role in the restoration of peace and communal harmony. Keeping this in view, Sheikh Farid reached out to people belonging to other faiths. He said that Islam laid emphasis on peace and spirituality. Issues involving Hindus, Muslims, Sikh and Christians should be discussed in secular and constitutional perspective, he stressed. Presiding over the session, Prof. Afzal Wani said that the two-day conference was historical as well as demanding because of the paradigm shift in religious faith at this juncture. Seers and saints had been preaching harmony among followers

of different faiths. The paradigm shift in the realm of religion suggested that faith should be rational with the purpose to reach the essence of it. As the sustainable development was much talked-about, sustainable thought was equally necessary. There should be no lopsided thought. He observed that since there was no prophet to reveal things, the responsibility now devolved on intellectuals to do so. Human history was witness to it that there were avatars and gurus who did their every bit to bring back things. This was repeated by the scholars. He said that religion was there to promote human dignity to teach and give respect to others. He remarked that if the shift took place in human mind, the objective of the conference would be fulfilled. He reminded that religion would lose its meaning if it does not promote human dignity.

Dr. Mohd. Habib, while lauding the activities of the IOS in reaching out to the minorities, depressed and deprived sections by way of research, survey, study and dissemination, said that it might be a small world but the vision was broad. It was like an oasis in the desert, an Anasagar in Ajmer, and Amrit in Amritsar. Dialogues and understanding among different religions must be a continuous process. He observed that humanity, tolerance and universal brotherhood were vital for human rights. Human rights and humanity were ingrained in all the religions, he concluded.

Prof. Syed Jamaluddin observed that Guru Nanak Dev laid emphasis on universality in his teachings. On this occasion, he read out a 6-point resolution which was unanimously adopted by the participants. The resolution read as:

1. There should be regular programmes on inter-religious understanding at various places of Punjab organised by the Institute of Objective Studies in collaboration with GGS Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.

2. A special course should be included in the educational curricula to teach common core values of harmony, peace and dialogue among Indian religions.
3. A committee comprising of scholars and academics should be formed by the Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, and Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, to regularly monitor the pace on inter-religious programmes.
4. Punjabi University, Himachal University and Chandigarh University should form a core group to carry on regular programmes on inter-religious dialogue in collaboration with the Institute of Objective Studies. Religious scholars and community leaders of all the communities should be invited to the programmes.
5. GGS Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, should be made a nerve centre to carry on such activities, and a core committee comprising of the representatives of the said universities who participated in this conference, should be formed to take ahead the programmes on inter-religious dialogue.
6. Urdu is the beloved daughter of Punjabi. Therefore, efforts should be made in collaboration with Punjabi University to revive literary and cultural ethos of Urdu in Punjab.

IOS online Lecture on “Impact of Changing Lifestyle due to Covid-19 Pandemic in India and its Management in Islamic Perspective”

An online Lecture on “Impact of Changing Lifestyle due to Covid-19 Pandemic in India and its Management in Islamic Perspective” was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies on September 25, 2021.

Prof. Haseena Hashia, Assistant Secretary General, IOS, who introduced the topic, said that this was the first lecture of a series of four

lectures. Briefly tracing the history of Covid-19 pandemic, she reported that India, being the second most populated country, suffered severely due to this pandemic and millions of people working in big cities were forced to move to their home states, which affected education not only in urban, but also in rural areas. Covid-19 pandemic caused isolation, fear and uncertainty among people. There was mass unemployment, anxiety and depression all around.

Delivering the lecture, head community development programme of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA, Mr.

Mamoon Al-Azmi observed that the Covid-19 brought in its wake challenges as well as the opportunities. It did have impact on human life but it was mostly negative. Driving home his point, he said that in Surah Baqarah, Allah talked about five trials and tribulations. These were similar to the

examinations for going to a higher status. *Tawakkul* (Trust in God) was the key to understand the vagaries of nature. Covid-19 pandemic was also one such calamity that struck the people irrespective of geographical borders. He also referred to Surah *Al-Fajr* to buttress his point that 'He tests man by unleashing the scourge of punishment.' In such times, Qur'an and Hadith were there for their guidance. Surah *Al-Ma'arij* warned of the consequences of disobeying Allah. Covid-19 pandemic could be understood in terms of the fury that nature demonstrated in the form of epidemics.

Mr. Azmi pointed out that nature was taking revenge on human beings due to number of gross mistakes, made deliberately or otherwise. As far as

Muslim Ummah was concerned, it should not live in fear. Instead, it should live in faith in Allah, who is the final and sole dispenser. Commenting on the general impact of Covid-19, he said that it meant an end of normal life and socio-cultural living. It also caused great risk to health, life and well-being of the people. Fear, uncertainty, instability, job loss and bankruptcy impacted the world as never before. He noted that the tourism industry alone suffered a loss of about two billion dollars globally. During this period, poverty and inequality became acute. Referring to personal impact and

which led many to poverty. With regard to the impact and opportunities to families, he said that living 24/7 with spouse and children offered them a chance to bond and catch up with their lives.

Mr. Azmi remarked that the Covid-19 pandemic threw social challenges as people felt disconnected in the absence of visiting family and friends. Besides, social and emotional isolation among people impacted their lives. If the social impact of the pandemic created a host of problems before the people, it also offered several opportunities. These included

distances and separation that created sweeter relationship. Referring to economic challenges, he said that the quarterly loss of the GDP in June 2020 stood at 24.4 percent while the quarterly growth in September that year contracted by 7.4 percent. There was drastic cut in export-import causing business losses. According to an estimate, the lockdown cost a huge loss of 4.64

billion dollars for a day. Similarly, the informal sector, which employed 70 per cent poor, registered a huge loss of jobs. Remittances sent by Indians abroad suffered a loss of 83 billion dollars. Commenting on the opportunities resulting from the economic impact, he said that reduced economic recoveries made restructuring much easier. As the economy recovered, new jobs were generated. Oil prices dramatically fell, saving US dollars as import costs. RBI and the government were offering stimulus packages for growth. Another boon in disguise was reduction in cars and flights that reduced the impact of pollution, he noted.

Speaking briefly on international impact of Covid and the challenges lying ahead, Mr. Azmi observed that



Mr. Mamoon Al-Azmi delivering his lecture

challenges of the pandemic, he said that people were forced to remain indoors 24/7 generating a feeling of imprisonment. Physical and mental health risks increased due to aloofness.

Dwelling on personal impact and opportunities, Mr. Azmi said that the pandemic offered an opportunity to be close to the family, rather than a chance to be closer. Flexibility of work time was another advantage of work and rest. Explaining the family impact and challenges, he said that families were not used to being together 24/7 for a long time. Children suffered loss of education due to closure of schools and missed friends. Couples got into fighting with domestic violence cases on the rise globally usually for 24 hours. Millions of jobs were lost,

export of goods and services suffered 32 percent loss while foreign exchange earnings fell by 76.3 percent (National Council of Applied Economic Research). During the first quarter of 2021, 14.5 million jobs were lost in the tourism industry. International impact also yielded opportunities that included better infrastructure and logistics. This also led to the simplification of various laws. Explaining the Islamic perspective on managing the impact, he said that only the learned knew the secret of the universe. Quoting Quran and Hadith, he said that only those who were patient would receive their rewards, unabridged, without limit. He observed that when Allah desired good for someone, He tried them with hardships. All the prophets went through trials.

Mr. Azmi presented a plan of action to face the challenges caused by the pandemic. He advised against giving up hope on the Most Merciful, Allah. He asked for making pragmatic planning to face challenges. Alliances must be sought and secured to support the plan. He advised to rely on Allah's help while implementing the plan. While examining the opportunities, confidence, competence, and courage should be strengthened to overcome difficulties.

He also focused on the five, The 'D' formula to face challenges. When the problem came, it should be examined first. Quoting Mother Teresa, he said that one could not solve the problem alone. He observed that problems created opportunities too. He concluded by expressing his opinion that, for him, Covid-19 was man-made because it was being developed in a laboratory. He also said

that social harmony and economic growth should remain in focus.

Presiding over the function, the Secretary General, IOS, Prof. Z.M. Khan, held that money was also a factor in lockdown times as those who possessed it, properly planned it. Referring to knowledge, he said that it could not be bifurcated as knowledge was after all knowledge. Islam asked the man to learn for living in his time.

Family as an institution was very important in Islam and one had the time to live in family. Many differences were sorted out when one lived in family. He urged Mr. Azmi to



Dr. Zeeshan Ahmed Misbahi delivering his lecture

be more involved in the activities of the Institute. He said that the IOS concentrated on research in conceptual field as well. He looked forward to the future cooperation and coordination with him.

Fourth IOS online Ibne Khaldun Lecture on “Kitab wa Sunnat mein Tasawwuf ki Buniyadein”

The fourth IOS online Ibne Khaldun Lecture on “Kitab wa Sunnat mein Tasawwuf ki Buniyadein” (Roots of mysticism in the Book and Sunnah) was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies on September 18, 2021.

Delivering the lecture, Dr. Zeeshan Ahmed Misbahi, a senior teacher at Jamia Arifiya, Saiyed Sarawan,

Allahabad, said that *Tasawwuf* (mysticism) was multi-dimensional. He observed that certain academics were using polemics to term Sufism as an alternative Islamic faith without looking deep into its foundations. Delving into the aspects of *Tasawwuf*, he said that it had six aspects: 1. Reality of mysticism 2. The study of sufism as a part of knowledge 3. Its state aid relationship with the Book and Sunnah 4. There was a system of *Sulook* (mystic initiation) which is proved by the Qur'an. *Tazkiya* (purification of mind) is based on the book of Sunnah 5. *Tasawwuf* as philosophy and 6. *Tasawwuf* as *Riwayat* (narrative). These were all based on the book of Sunnah. Earlier, there was no mention of *Tasawwuf*, but realism was there.

It was a double standard to relate other branches of knowledge to Islam and reject *Tasawwuf*. There was no dearth of literature on *Tasawwuf* as reality. A number of mystics had presented several aspects of

Sufism, he said.

Dr. Misbahi observed that the company of saintly persons was a very important element of Sufism. Several works, like *Awarif-al-Ma'arif* and *Kashaf-al-Mahjoob* focused on the subject in detail. The Company of *Saadiqain* (men true to their words) led the mystic disciple to the path of Allah. These *saadiqain* worked under a *Silsilah* (order), but this chain was broken once the *Ma'arifat* (mystic knowledge) was attained. The question arose how far it was justified to shun the book of Sunnah and turn to *Kashf* (divination). Referring to *Tasawwuf* as knowledge, he said that the Sufis called it the *Hijab-i-Adab* (veil of respect). In this connection, he mentioned *Majma-us-Sulook*, an

exhaustive work on sufism written by Makhdoom Sheikh Sa'adud-Din Khairabadi. Explaining *Ilm Hijabullah*, he said that this applied to one who completed the acquisition of knowledge. Similarly, *Haal* (ecstatic state) was a reality and a state in which a faithful stood before his Creator. A faithful was also supposed to consider that Allah was standing in front of him during the prayer, he added.

Dr. Misbahi explained the conditions of *Sulook* in the system of *Tasawwuf*, which involved lesser interaction with people, limiting it to a bare minimum. Reclusion was necessary for a lasting association with Allah. These actions needed to be guided by a *Murshid* (spiritual mentor) who exercised control over his disciple. A *Murshid* is provided by God to make the disciple experience divine pleasure. This was called *Nizam-e-Sulook* (The system of Sulook), he noted.

Elaborating on *Tasawwuf* as philosophy, Dr. Misbahi held that the philosophy of *Wahdat-ul-Wajood* (unity of divine manifestation) was not *Tasawwuf* in essence though all the sufis subscribed to it. He ended his lecture by observing that all the practices of sufis were based on the Hadith.

Dr. Syed Waqar Anwar said that things forged ahead when an old adage was interpreted in the new context. *Kashf* too had certain limitations. He also referred to the experiences undergone by the sufis and the invocation of God. Imam Ghazali wrote on *Tazkiya-e-Nafs* (purification of mind) and *Maarifat* (mystic knowledge). Commenting on the philosophical aspect of sufism, he said that the Ummah made many

experiments that helped understand Islamic mysticism.

Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies, Jamia Hamdard, Dr. Waris Mazhari, remarked that there was a lot of confusion on the subject. Therefore, efforts should be made to clear misconceptions about it. He said that research and inquisition was lacking today, and as a result, the confusion still persisted. He rejected the view that there was no existence of sufism in Islam by saying that *Ilm-e-Kalam* came into existence later. He said that sufism was very much a part of morality one might or might not

expression of the attributes of Allah. He said that it was the job of the sufis to connect *Bandah* (most humble servant of God) with his Master, i.e., God. He held the lack of knowledge responsible for the confusion over *Tasawwuf*.

IOS and CDPP jointly organises a webinar on “Growth of the Muslim Middle Class in India”

The Institute of Objective Studies, in association with the Centre for Development Policy and Practice (CDPP), Hyderabad, organised a webinar on “Growth of the Muslim Middle Class in India” on September 17, 2021.

Introducing the topic, the assistant secretary general, IOS, Prof. Haseena Hashia said that Muslims constituted a very important segment of society. They equally contributed to the country's GDP and job creation. The Muslim community was also the shock absorber of society. The rate of literacy among Muslims had

increased. They were also catching up with the expansion of education. Tourism in several states had economically improved their standard of living. Though there was an increase in their income yet they had not reached the level of upper class. The community's status has improved after Independence but not at the level that was envisaged, she noted. Former bureaucrat and a member of the Planning Commission, Dr. Naresh Chandra Saxena explained that a middle class person earned Rs. 20, 000 to Rs. 25,000 a month. That was the yardstick to measure the income of this class, though no independent opinion about Muslim middle class could be formed due to the lack of specific data.



A view of the speakers

accept it. According to Ghazali, *Ilm-e-Kalam* did not form a part of *Imaniyat* (faith) and the confusion was created due to the paradigm shift. Ghazali considered *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) as the fundamental branch of knowledge, he concluded.

Salahuddin Shabbir from Gaya College, Gaya opined that *Jism* (body), *Rooh* (soul) and *Aql* (intellect) played a pivotal role in understanding things. Allah is the fountain head of *Rooh*. He held that Sufis never separated *Tariqat* (mystic way of life) from *Shariah* (divine law).

In his presidential remarks, Prof. Syed Jamaluddin, director of the historical research projects, IOS, observed that sufism was the

Dr. Amir Ullah Khan, member of the board of governors at the Digital Empowerment Foundation, Gyan Shaala and Welham Girls School pointed out that some compelling data on socio-economic condition of the Muslims was available. He admitted that there was leadership vacuum among Muslims. A general decrease in the Muslim middle class had been noticed.

Professor in the School of Development studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, Abdul Shaban, observed that there were several areas that needed to be discussed by the academics. He viewed the absolute as declining and moving to relative poverty. This was due to the existence of lower classes in middle class. Referring to the role of bourgeois class, he said that this was important for the enlightenment in Europe. Role of this class was also evident in India. Instead of consumption-based Indian society was asset-based. That was the reason why the economists adopted consumption-expenditure-based approach. Various criteria had been used to estimate the middle class with one of them being developed by the Nobel Laureates, Prof. Abhijeet Banerjee and Esther Duflo. Asset-based approach postulated that it was pucca houses that determined the status of the middle class. In 1990 telephone became important to measure the middle class. Commenting on the growth of middle class, he said that in 1998-99 its size stood at 20.2 per cent but rose to 44.6 per cent in 2015-16. Thus an increase of 24.4 per cent was witnessed during the period. It worked out to about 1.4 per cent incremental increase every year. According to the available data, Muslim middle class constituted 21.1 per cent in 1998-99 which rose to 41.6 per cent in 2015-16. It was an incremental increase of 1.28 per cent every year. Hindu upper castes accounted for 19.5 per cent in 1998-99 which rose to 44.5 per cent in 2015-16. This represented an incremental increase of 1.56 per cent

every year. He said that Muslim OBCs constituted 18.6 per cent as middle class in 1998-99 and 44.5 per cent in 2015-16, registering an incremental increase of 1.62 per cent every year. Similarly, Muslim upper castes constituted 22.3 per cent in 1998-99 and this rose to 39.6 per cent in 2015-16, registering an incremental increase of 1.08 per cent every year, he noted.

Dr. Abdul Shaban observed that while Haryana, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh were worst performing states, Bihar and Assam were low in uplifting the community to the level of the middle class. Attributing the low percentage of middle class among Muslims, he said that it was due to the marginal number of salaried class. This could be well understood by the fact that their share in government job was around 4-5 per cent. By and large, Muslims were engaged in self-employment, micro, small and medium businesses and enterprises. He identified seven major occupations in which Muslims were engaged. Urbanisation played an important role in the formation of the Muslim middle class. Besides, the penetration of formal education contributed to rise in the percentage of the middle class. Muslims were moving to urban areas in search of better life and employment. He said that Muslims did not have a share in large enterprises, though they benefited from economic liberalisation with low-mobility middle class. Compared to the north, south Indian Muslims were well-off. He suggested some of the measures, including emphasis on education, financial support for business, women's empowerment and progressive leadership within the community could change the current scenario.

Former member of the national statistical commission, PC Mohanan, commented that the middle class was a brand but nobody knew what products it had. He asked to look at the consumables the middle class consumed. The available figures could

be segregated to understand what the position exactly was. There was a correlation between education and the middle class. He concluded by saying that after Covid-19, phenomenal growth in the sale of smartphones had been witnessed, and there were certain dimensions to what one believed was the middle class. Distinguished fellow at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RISDC), Prof. Amitabh Kundu, held that it was the total value of assets that characterised the middle class. The middle class was a way of life and the idea of its measurement was shifting to assets. Thus the value of assets was important for measuring the middle class. The middle class might be higher for a community but it did not define the entire middle class community. On the basis of assets, one could articulate the middle class as a community. The middle class was basically a sociological and cultural group. Naming internationally acclaimed economists—Prof. Amartya Sen and Prof. Abhijeet Banerjee, he said that the arrogance of certain economists destroyed the concept. He hailed Shaban and Sattar's perspective on the growth of the middle class in India, and termed it as a departure from the usual narrative on the concept.

Dr. Mahabir Singh Jaglan, professor of Geography at Kurukshetra University, spoke on the geographical distribution of the middle class. He said that the share of the Muslim middle class in various economic activities was low. In Haryana, Mewat had the largest concentration of Muslims, followed by Yamunanagar with 12 percent concentration. He sought to know if higher concentration of Muslim population made the community more vulnerable to its ghettoisation.

In answer to a question, Shaban said that the bourgeois contributed to the growth of economic development. He observed that consumer expenditure did not take into account

the deprivation of Muslims. High consumer expenditure did not mean the community was well-off. Referring to the geography of riots, he said that they took place more in the north. Both indigenous and exogenous factors were responsible for Muslim concentration areas in Mumbai. If the members of one community mingled with the people of other communities, they would benefit. But this might not be possible in clusters, he added. Prof. Kundu opined that Muslims had less access to health services, good jobs, credit facilities and TV than the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

In his presidential remarks, the secretary general, IOS, Prof. Z.M. Khan, held that the gender development issue was also very important and must be taken care of. It must also be seen whether the Muslims were playing the same role as they were expected to play. He made special mention of the prevailing political environment in which the deprivation of Muslims was practised and a propaganda against them unleashed.

IOS online lecture on “Human Development based on Wisdom and its Correlation with Modern Science”

An online lecture on “Human Development based on Wisdom and Its Correlation with Modern Science” was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies on September 4, 2021. The lecture was delivered by Dr. Thuppil Venkatesh, CEO and director of Foundation for Quality India.

Delivering the lecture, Dr. Venkatesh said that human beings were constantly involved in building their society across the globe from the

time immemorial. While society in true sense was the blend of information, knowledge and wisdom, which were transient part of the process to accomplish the three virtues, viz., the combination of information gathered on day-to-day basis with individual and cumulative experience, acquired knowledge, accumulated and applied for mutual benefit which gradually developed, and the timely application of evolved wisdom applied from time to time for the betterment of everyone. He held that human development had four stages. The four stages of human development based on science were, development of brain, mind,

the importance of water, he said that it was the most essential component of human development. He said that it was the brain’s development that created good mind. If one had a developed mind, he could make anything. The complexity of the mind could not be determined by medicine. This was so because different people had different minds. According to him, human activity was the second stage of human development. He listed six activities in a human being that were unique. This could be better explained by the fact that a grandson/granddaughter might not have the same traits as his or her grandfather. This could apply to friends as well.



Dr. Thuppil Venkatesh delivering his lecture

personality and self. The first stage, he said, was the physical development of human body. It started with a small fetus which was developed in the womb. It took months to fully develop. What was required for a healthy body was good nutrition and good water to the pregnant lady. Music too played a positive role in the development of the body.

Dr. Thuppil Venkatesh observed that calm and quiet atmosphere too was a contributory factor to the development of a healthy body. In the process, skin of the new born was growing along with the growth of brain. From the time of inception, brain developed and any damage to it could not be regenerated. Underlining

Explaining personality development as the third stage of human development, he said that this had two components – the way one covered himself, like clothes and the way of talking. While the clothes reflected the impression and the opinion about one’s clothes, the way of talking gave some idea about the personality about his ancestors. He opined that knowledge made one develop his personality. Wisdom led to humility which came from simplicity, mind and personality, he noted.

Commenting on the fourth stage of human development, Dr. Venkatesh, said that it was social development, which also included introspection. He observed that one should have intent instead of intention. In this respect, introspection was very important. Similarly, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development played a big role in the overall development of a human being. Information and knowledge were used for the development of mind. Man was made of emotions and that was the

reason why it led to collapse in some cases. He said that spirituality was beyond religion, and to sustain oneself, some spirituality was a must. He enumerated the activities that nurtured human development. There were playing a fair game - only learning, earning and returning. He maintained that quality learning was important but it could not ensure 100 percent achievement. Earning was essential to sustain family but there should be no illegal earning. By return, he meant return of what one owed to others to the right person before the final return. Answering the question as to how the entire concept of human development impacted societal development, he said that it contributed a lot to the way one could see the world as a beautiful place to live. He ended the discourse by urging not to argue but discuss.

welcomed the distinguished guests and speakers and the audience from all over the globe.

Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam, in his opening remarks, congratulated the IOS Chennai Chapter on organising a multilingual, international webinar on the life and contributions of a great scholar of Tamilnadu.

He pointed out that Muslims have been raised as the best of communities (Khaire Ummah), and the message of

address, traced the history of development of Institute of Objective Studies as a think tank. Its performance and achievements have gained national and international recognition. The IOS is in consultative status (Roster) of Economic and Social Council of United Nations, he informed the audience.

The holy Qur'an has to be translated in vernacular languages so that its message is understood, which is the real purpose of its revelation. In this context, Moulana Abdul Hameed Baqavi's contribution of translating the holy Qur'an in Tamil language, facing multifarious challenges from many quarters is truly commendable, he added.

Presidential address was followed by three speeches in Urdu, Tamil and English. Moulana



A view of the speakers

Activities of the IOS Chapters

CHENNAI CHAPTER

IOS Chennai Chapter organises an International Webinar on the "Life and Contributions of Hazrath Abdul Hameed Baqavi (Rah)"

Institute of Objective Studies, Chennai Chapter resumed its activities by conducting a trilingual International webinar on the "Life and Contributions of Hazrath Abdul Hameed Baqavi (Rah)" on Saturday, 23 October 2021 at 6.30 p.m. Organised in association with the Global Tamil Muslim Media (GTM), USA, and live-streamed on YouTube, the program was well-attended and attracted audience not only from India but from USA, UK, Middle East and Far East Countries.

Mohamed Haneef Katib, Coordinator, Chennai Chapter

dignity of mankind has to be communicated to the entire humanity. In this global challenging environment, when the humanity is faced with discrimination, inhuman behaviour, racism and other challenges, we should, as a chosen ummah, stand up to uphold the Qur'anic values of brotherhood, justice and equality.

He paid his tributes to Abdul Hameed Baqavi and said that the moulana was not only an outstanding scholar, but also a freedom fighter, a reformer and a notable leader of his times.

He also suggested that seminars be held on the Constitution of India and its protection by inviting prominent secular leaders and distinguished scholars in political science and law.

Brother Ibnu Soud Shahabdeen, President, All India Milli Council, Tamilnadu Chapter, in his presidential

Mufti Roohul Huq, Member, AIMPLB, speaking in Urdu, traced the biography of Moulana Abdul Hamid Baqavi from his birth to his early education at Madrasa Baqiatul Salihath, Vellore, to his accomplishment as a translator of the holy Qur'an in Tamil. On 19 February, 1929, the first volume of the holy Quran was published for the first time in the history of Tamilnadu.

Hazrath Moulana Mohammad Khan Baqavi, a renowned scholar and translator in his speech in Tamil, noted that though Muslims lived in Tamilnadu for over 1300 years, no scholar had attempted to translate the holy Quran in Tamil language. This honour was bestowed by Allah on Moulana Abdul Hameed Baqavi. In addition to the above distinction, Moulana joined the Khilafath Movement spearheaded by Ali Brothers, along with Mahatma Gandhi.

He was involved actively in the Indian freedom struggle. He was a true reformer, and on one occasion, spoke for over two hours so eloquently in favour of liquor prohibition that the Late Rajaji who was presiding over the session concluded it, remarking that Moulana's speech was sufficient as he had covered all possible aspects of the subject. The learned speaker concluded his speech addressing the ulema of today to learn from the life of the legendary Moulana so that they are also remembered by the coming generations just like Moulana Abdul Hameed Baqavi.

Sister Fathima Muzaffar, a renowned social activist and member of the Women's Wing of All India Muslim Personal Law Board, competently compered the session, and thanked Allah SWT for being blessed to be born as the granddaughter of Hazrath Moulana Abdul Hameed Baqavi. Highlighting briefly the contributions of Moulana Abdul Hameed Baqavi, she said that he was a multilinguist and was proficient in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Tamil, Malayalam and French. He interpreted the speeches of Moulana Abul Kalam Azad in Tamil whenever the legendary leader visited Tamilnadu. He completed the holy task of translation of the holy Qur'an in 2 volumes over a period of 30 years.

The program came to an end with a vote of thanks.

KOLKATA CHAPTER

IOS Kolkata Chapter organises Panel Discussion on "Economic Empowerment of Muslim Women: Issues and Opportunities"

Summary

This panel discussion organised by the Institute of Objective Studies,

Kolkata Chapter, on October 30, 2021, looked into the need of Muslim women to be economically empowered. The panelists, mostly women of repute, representing different walks of life and society, spoke freely on the hurdles before the society towards economically empowering Muslim women. Ms. Madiha Ahmed, a socio-cognitive development specialist, emphasised that women must be empowered from

nature of the topic. He clearly emphasised on the need of such a discussion at this hour and this discussion shall pave the way for several others in the time to come.

Initiating the discussion, Ms. Madiha Ahmed spoke about the role of family in empowering women, substantiating it with references from her personal life. She emphasised on the word 'ma' and pointed out the significance of this particular word in an individual's life and the role that a mother plays in shaping the lives of her children. According to Ms. Ahmed, empowerment amongst women comes from this very figure.

During the course of her discussion on personal

experiences and how she has risen above all to achieve where she presently is, Ms. Ahmed stressed on the point that before looking for external resources and factors that could lead us to empower women, one must consider two very important internal factors. First, the search for an identity, which should be seconded by mothers taking the challenge for change.

After a befitting prologue to the discussion, Mr. Muhammed Shahjahan anchored the discussion further with his perspective. He began with a famous quote from Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man, in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife", and redirected the discussion to its roots, stating that it is here where the 'pride' lies and so does the 'prejudice'. He drew the panelists to imagine 'a single woman' in possession of a



A view of the panel discussion

within their family first. This point were reiterated by all other panelists with substantial experiences from their personal lives. The panelists spoke on other issues like the hurdle of social norms of dominant patriarchy and that from the religious perspective. Mrs. Rukhshi Elias, founder of Taajira-The Businesswomen, laid emphasis on the importance of identifying skills and connecting women to each other and groups through social media platforms. The panelists shared their opinions on the opportunities for women in the 21st century. The following is the report of the proceedings.

Moderator: Mr. Abdul Basit Ismail, Coordinator, IOS Kolkata Chapter.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Abdul Basit Ismail underlined the context and background of economic empowerment of Muslim women in India. He outlined the shape of the discussion because of the sensitive

‘good fortune’ and emphasised how a shift in thought is essentially important for the empowerment of women.

Drawing references from the World Development Report 2012 by World Bank Group, he presented the grim reality of gender biasness and how gender equality is inextricably linked with economic development. Referring to another work by World Bank Group ‘Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity’, he brought out the nature of constraints women continue to face globally and how this could give a clear picture of a more tragic state for Muslim women. He described Muslim women from the social perspective and how this calls for a stringent adherence to social norms by the women. He mentioned that these norms derive their stimulus from the religious constraints and this is the reason why talks on economic empowerment of Muslim women by so-called liberals meet strong criticisms from the more orthodox groups, and as a result they never materialise.

He expressed “it’s time to talk about men and women together” and emphasised on the need for our religious leaders to talk in public and invalidate the supposedly rigid socio-religious norms mandated upon women and concluded that if achieved, it would be a strong step towards a progressive society with economically empowered women.

Prof. Ghazala Yasmin led the panel to an insightful discourse when she spoke about the policies of the central government, and compared the plight of Indian women to their counterparts in foreign countries where they hold a greater population in different fields and are able to show their skills and prove how economically empowered they are. Heading as challenging a department as Journalism in higher education, she is well aware of the inhibitions, myths and notions of girls taking up this field and the social disapproval that comes with it. She, however, felt encouraged by the fact

that there has been a considerable change in the perspective, and with a discussion of this nature, it will further advance the community towards a more rational approach when it comes to giving choices to women in terms of making a career.

She stressed upon the need to value our own resources and opined that one must look for the resources and opportunities oneself. The community must rise above the perceived notions and stereotypes. She stressed on giving up the victim-feeling and rise to the occasion in search of an empowered identity.

Speaking on the opportunities for women in the 21st century, Mrs Rukshi Kadiri Ilyas, stressed on the fact that women need to identify a skill within themselves. One of the gifts that the 21st century world has placed at the disposal of people is the power of social media, and this can be a great opportunity to use it as a platform to connect people to the skills women possess. This, in turn, can be monetised to empower the women on the economic front. Citing instances from her initiative ‘Taajira-The Businesswoman’, she presented how an idea of this sort can foster success stories for many because this is exactly what she has been experiencing at Taajira.

According to her, there are three kinds of people in the society, viz. thinkers who promulgate the idea, people with solutions—the scholars and researchers, and those like Mrs. Ilyas who work for the solutions. It’s time that the thinkers join hands with those who have solutions who, in turn, must unite to strengthen those who work on the solutions. This calls for local-level social groups who could help create awareness and take women in progressive and protective folds to help them achieve financial independence.

Empowerment must start from villages or from the backward class of the society. This significant statement

by Prof. Shabina N. Omar added a new perspective to the discussion. It is the rural areas that need our attention because it is here where there is a lack of education and awareness and where economic empowerment is mostly felt and needed. She shared her personal struggle with the society on the socio-religious front to infer three significant things that factors for the oppression on women – adversity, patriarchy and the lack of self-confidence. She opined that one must “recognise the adversities and negotiate with them, smash the patriarchal belief and develop self confidence in order to become economically empowered”.

Lending her agreement to Mrs. Ilyas, Prof. Omar advanced it further by laying emphasis on the idea of creating opportunities and connecting skills to empower women. This, she stressed, could be achieved not by education alone but by following it up with a vocational training. Only after one can strengthen the cause, further help, support and show solidarity, which could be on the lines of ‘each one help one’.

She felt strongly disappointed at the community’s approach of being judgmental and recommended a change in attitude, which is more sensitive and understanding and where one is led to stop judging and start thinking. The change in attitude is needed in both men and women to bring a harmonious living in a progressive community where one feels proud to say “Beside every successful man and woman, there’s a woman and a man respectively.”

‘As a journalist, it is a great opportunity for me to speak as I am always on the listening side,’ stated Mr. Mohammed Safi Shamsi. In his opinion, economic empowerment of women cannot be thought of as an isolated entity. It has to be discussed in the context of the societal situations. He seconded Prof. Omar’s view on the patriarchal orientation of society, and added that this alone is not the only issue but there are psychological issues

as well. There's rigidity against views that seek reform, as a result of which, a change in perspective cannot be envisaged so easily.

Through various observations that he shared on the floor, he tried to establish that we have created layers within the society on the basis of language and the background women come from. Absence of awareness with regards to policies related to gender equality is another hindrance towards women empowerment. He tried to hint at both the policies of the government as well as those that are essentially religious which are often misread and misinformed. He strongly called for a gender neutral ecosystem, use of technology and general guidelines for women which are integral towards fostering a community with economically empowered women. However, he mentioned that the entire effort could still be proved futile in its realisation in the absence of a vision.

He continued that there must be a vision for opportunities, and that one must not rush after jobs but explore the opportunities well. He also stressed on the fact that we must draw parallels before women so that they may have choice over a role model for themselves. His concluding remarks drew references from the findings of World Development Report, 2012.

Being a civil servant, with a wide range of experiences that she has gathered by virtue of several postings in her tenure, Mrs. Nuzhat Zainab was very candid in her opinion. She shared her experiences of working with bidi workers in South 24 Parganas and stated that it was mostly women at work rather than men but the problem was that they did not have any role in deciding where their hard-earned money should go, which was entirely decided by the men at home. So, it is not only important to connect women to work to financially empower them but also empower them in matters of taking decisions without which this whole discussion on empowerment is meaningless.

He referred to Prof. Omar's view on thinking of empowerment from rural lines, where it is mostly needed. Of course, the task would not be an easy one as there are various fronts on which the work has to be done, but she was of the opinion that this should be an important component of the objectives of empowering women on the economic front. She also suggested if the spectrum of the discussion could be broadened further to include the experiences of women from the non-Muslim community to draw parallel and analyse what could more feasibly be planned to realise the objective of the discussion.

Ms. Shabana Ejaz's personal story of the struggle and hardship and the consequent success in journalism, surfaces the social disapproval of a girl's choice of a career for herself, particularly that of a Muslim girl. Change in the mindset from irrational to one that is broad, accommodative, and rational is what, according to her, a fundamental aspect in the economic empowerment of Muslim women.

She proposed that measures should be adopted in creating groups at local levels with the sole motive of creating awareness among women on their civil rights, religious rights and the opportunities before them that they can utilise to empower themselves.

From the discussions and opinions shared by most of the panelists, it was clear that patriarchy is a major roadblock in developing a progressive mindset but Mrs. Saira Shah Halim added a twist when she said, "Patriarchy is deep rooted and it's not only men but also women who practise it". Under the circumstances, the purging will involve seriously patient efforts and could span over years. The community in general must rise above their thoughts about women, which centre around marriage as the only mega event in the life of a girl and then washing hands off from the rest of her life thereafter.

According to her, economic empowerment can be achieved if one

is self-empowered and self-reliant. She also emphasised on being politically conscious of one's rights. She referred to the life of our prophet's beloved wife, Khadija (RA) as an embodiment of empowerment and tried to establish how a woman's self-reliance can lead to her economic independence.

Towards the end, through the opinions expressed by panelists, it was evident that religion has been another major deterrent in the progress of the Muslim community, particularly when it comes to the status of women. Dr. N. Sabah Ismail stated, at the very beginning, that the Almighty has created men and women to complement each other, and that by certain misinterpretation of the scriptures and under the impact of patriarchy, women have been pushed behind, obscured and oppressed for centuries. As a result, the community has rendered itself crippled which otherwise would have felt strengthened by the presence of women in the society. As a scholar, he vehemently expressed that nowhere does the Quran mention that women cannot adopt measures for her financial independence. There are, however, references that no financial responsibility has been laid upon them but that shouldn't by any means be understood as women cannot be economically empowered and that their financial independence cannot be envisaged.

He continued that awareness of the rights of women is vital for empowerment and when it comes to Muslim women, awareness in the light of the holy Quran is a must. He termed the society, where women empowerment is still a greater issue, as 'disabled' and added that both men and women have to work together. They must know their rights and this is possible only if they know the religion well through the Quran.

After the panelists had presented their views, the floor was opened for comments/questions and their clarification from the Floor.

Referring to Mrs. Saira Shah Halim’s statement that marriage seems to be the only mega even in the life of a woman, Mr. Shahjahan added that we respect the sentiments of the parents in their generous and sincere planning for their daughters and that it would only be better if they had similar sincerity in planning their career. He went on to explain the discrimination is evident in the manner of upbringing of a son and a daughter. If only the discrimination could be avoided, it would make a lot of sense towards making the girls child empowered. His question as to why should a girl be left at the mercy of their in-laws or be made solely dependent for their finances on their would-be husbands called for an introspection.

The moderator, Mr. A. Basit Ismail highlighted the questions raised by Mr. Safi Shamsi on the clarity of thought in terms of the disempowerment of women. Answering this question, Dr. Shabina N. Omar said that it is not where we want to go to but where we must start from, and it will begin when we stop telling our girls what to do, and start telling our boys to behave; start sensitising boys on women’s issues, respecting them, and giving them voice and agency. Concluding this, Mr. Ismail said that it is important for the present generation to set examples of parenthood to pass on for the generations to follow.

Mrs. Mehpara Sharique, Supervisor, primary section at Jibreel

International School, expressed that she had a lot of things to take away home from the discussion but her major takeaway was that we need to sensitise our boys and the community towards empowering women. Another guest visitor Mrs. Majda Amolya, head of the pre-primary section at Jibreel International School shared her story of how she had let her daughter feel empowered when she allowed her to take the first flight of her life all by herself and emphasised the need for parents to show the same kind of confidence in their daughters as they often show towards their sons. Adding to their remarks, Mrs. Benazir Banu, a senior teacher and a colleague to Mrs. Sharique and Mrs. Amolya, said that we all can make significant contributions towards the questions raised in the panel discussion today, keeping in mind that charity begins at home.

On behalf of the Institute of Objective Studies, Kolkata Chapter, Mr. Afnan Akhzar presented the official vote of thanks to all the panalists and guests.

Conclusion

The Institute of Objective Studies, Kolkata Chapter deliberated on the issue, a rather sensitive issue. The Chapter believes that this is a beginning to a series of discussions and is keen on taking this movement forward.

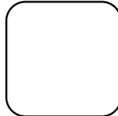
In the end he presented the resolutions as follows:

- There should be an awareness programme among the older groups in their role as parents, guardians or elderly to help them know why it is important for them to support and encourage the girls of their family.
- There should be an awareness programme for girls and women to help them know their rights and opportunities.
- There should be a series of progammes planned and conducted for men and women both on religious front to help them reconstruct their thoughts in the light of the holy Quran.
- A series of talks with responsible locals should be planned for various localities towards creating local social-help groups for easy access of women.
- Mass discussion and orientation programmes should be planned to sensitise youth over the issues of behaviour and approach towards girls/women.
- A series of academic discourses should be planned to gather adequate data so that appropriate measures can be taken to make the measures adopted towards economic empowerment of women more effective.
- To have a women’s team at IOS Kolkata Chapter to further the cause.

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