

INDIAN MUSLIMS AND MODERNITY

December 27, 2008, IPF Conference Hall

Chaired by: Shri Baldev Bhai Sharma, Editor, Panchjanya Weekly

Speakers: Shri Qamar Agha, Senior Journalist and Visiting Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia

Shri Priyadarshi Dutta, Writer and Researcher



The value and freedom of culture is sustainable as long as it provides space for self-criticism. The rigid adherence to the fundamentals of religion without any scope for internal debate and discussion is bound to create a narrow world view. The inner strength of any great religion can be nurtured well by constant interaction with the outside world rather than shying away from it. It is important to mention here that the thread of modernity in the Muslim community was first woven by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan but later leaders did not show the same alacrity in carrying forward the illustrious legacy of Sir Syed. Although some people have strong reservations about the ideological credentials of Sir Syed, there is no denying the fact that he was the pioneer of the process of modernity in his community. However, the result has not been encouraging. Therefore, keeping the unity and integrity of the country uppermost in the curricula of the Foundation, the India Policy Foundation took up the issue of Muslim modernity, by emphasizing the inclusive character of the Indian nation. The seminar was the result of such reflection.

Sh. Qamar Agha said Muslims in British India were unable to comprehend and take advantage of new technologies and advanced ideas that the British had introduced. There was a knee-jerk reaction for anything and everything. He asserted that Muslims have largely ignored the tradition of Ijtehad or reinterpretation of the Quran, according to the changing times. As a result, whereas Hindus and Christians have moved on with the times, Muslims have generally been left rooted in the past.

Sh. Baldev Bhai Sharma stressed the importance of the discourse on modernity reaching the Muslims so that Muslim society can reinvent itself with the times and progress as a whole in this modern era. The talk was attended by about 75 people, who enriched the discussion with their probing questions and insightful thoughts.



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Among the participants were Prof. Ashwini Mahapatra from JNU, Prof. Rajvir Sharma from Delhi University, Sh. Ashok Tandon, Director, MCRPV Noida Campus, Sh. RNP Singh from India First Foundation, Sh. Praveen Dabhalkar from Vivekananda International Centre, social worker Sh. Milind Oak and many students from Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia Milia Islamia. Prof. Sanjeev Tiwari, lecturer in political science, presented the vote of thanks.

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