HINDU PERCEPTION OF ISLAM
IN MODERN TIMES

ABSTRACT

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Perceptions about 'others' are formed at various levels through several means. This work deals with image of Islam as discerned and envisaged by Hindu writers comprising of historians, philosophers, religious doctors, anthropologists, vedantists and even zealots of Hindutva and propaganda literature. The writings are selected to present the several possible shades of Hindu understanding. The methodology of content analysis is applied. These sources and the views of the authors are discussed in a systematic way. The personal interpretations of the researcher are avoided and quotations of authors are given as it is. The analysis is presented in a way so that unqualified charges of some authors are answered by the writings of other Hindu writers. Reflections are deliberated at the end of every topic to evaluate the assessments of the writers.

The first chapter encapsulates evaluation of the fundamental beliefs of Islam. Discussion begins with the findings on the concept of God. All the authors have utilized creed or *Kalkma-e-shahada* as the evidence for their analysis. Few authors have employed attributes of God and Quranic verses too. The authors have undertaken comparison of monotheism with their own beliefs. The majority of authors have recognized that Islam presents an idea of universal God and not as the God of Muslims alone.
However, a few of them have serious defects in their understanding about this concept of God in Islam.

Concept of Prophethood and specially the Prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) is scrutinized through oriental works of his biography. Due to the absence of this concept in popular Hindu culture, authors have reacted in assuming this office in variety of ways. The personality of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) too oscillates between various propositions of admiration and condemnation. Many of the Hindu charges against Prophet are direct adaptation of Oriental works. The primary understanding that prophet was the last and final messenger of God and not the originator of Islam has been overlooked. However the distinct feature is that majority of them have praised the character of the Prophet (SAW), including those who criticized his teachings.

The findings on Quran as a divine revelation assumes divergent views. The enquiries are carried out about Quran’s arrangement and contents. Few Hindus attempted at the complete or partial translations of the Quran. The Hindu interactions and experiences of life-hereafter is disoriented. More importance is given to the description of Hell and Heaven than to the essence of Akhirah.

In the second chapter the views of Hindus on the forms of worship: prayers (Salāh), charity (Zakah), fasting (Sawm) and pilgrimage (Hajj) are discussed. An enquiry into Tasawwuf or mysticism too is carried out.
Authors have utilized several sources. Prayers in Islam are found to be of varied shades, one is of benefits and the other of demerits.

_Zakah_ is understood to be not mere charity but a right of the needy. However, some of the authors have assumed it to be a tax as well.

Fasting or _Sawm_ remains divergent in Hindu understanding. Many authors have committed unqualified assertions regarding _Hajj_. Many misunderstood and equated it with idol worship.

Authors have approached various sources for the understanding of Tasawwuf and exhibited a keen interest about it. They discussed the origin of Tasawwuf and its place in Islam and have also found the elements of Tasawwuf and compared it with Vedanta philosophy. The role of Sufis in propagation of Islam in India has been deliberated upon. The influence of Tasawwuf on Bhakti movement in particular and on Hindu thought in general are discussed too.

Third chapter discusses values in Islam comprising of Moral and Social values of Islam. In the sphere of morals and ethics in Islam, the Hindu understanding is varied. One group found that the application of morals in Islam encompasses all the communities including animals and birds, while the other group charged that Islam’s ethics are sectarian and lacking in Universal appeal.

They compared Islamic ethical values with those valued in Hinduism and western thought, few also compared it even with ascetic thoughts.
In the realm of social values, the authors have discussed equality and brotherhood. Here too they did not debate about its presence in Islam but on its scope and application. The authors are divided on the issue of tolerance in Islam and have analyzed Quranic verses, hadith, biography of the Prophet and even the history of Muslims to discern the place of tolerance in Islam.

Next the understanding about slavery in Islam remains divided. Few authors have mixed the women in Islam with position of Muslim women. Many authors have produced extensive works on the issues. The authors have employed approaches of research, comparison and even criticism. The fourth chapter on Muslim relationship with non-Muslim examines the Hindu view of Muslims, issue of Kafir and finally about Jihad. Authors have discussed the advent of Muslims in India, and then subsequent rise. The treatment of Muslim rulers of India towards the Hindu population is also discussed.

All the authors declared in unison that the relationship between Hindus and Muslims are strained, even those who acknowledged that in the past the relationship was based on mutual tolerance and peaceful co-existence too voiced the presence of misunderstanding between Hindus and Muslims. The authors understood the term 'Kafir' as derogatory. Except for a minority, the authors missed to attempt at the understanding of the over all meaning of jihad without construing it to be fight or war alone.
In the fifth chapter, contribution of Islam and Muslims to Indian culture specifically and to the world in general is expounded and agreed upon by all the authors. The influence of Islam is investigated in lingual, social, political, financial and cultural spheres. The authors only disagreed about contribution of Islam in the Hindu religion.

The result of this investigation appeared to be a spectrum of Hindu perception about Islam. This spectrum varies in its colours and hues and includes even combinations. The causes and the reasons of these diverse notions are also discussed.