

Hate mob clearly can't think

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Article

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ONE recent event incited riots yet again. This time it had to do with the knighthood of a controversial author. That he had created a controversy and the fact that Salman Rushdie was knighted seems to be one and the same for a small number of Muslims.

The fact that there have been others who are also controversial and have been knighted did not catch the attention of these groups.

No doubt some of them are less well-known, but the principle is the same. Namely, to knight or not to knight is a sovereign prerogative of the nation concerned. It is not an international recognition and as such need not overtly concern any outsider.

After all, there is no obligation to address the recipient by the title bestowed upon him or her, if one chooses not to.

In other words, to protest or, worse still, to riot is a misplaced action. The question is this: Why did some Muslim communities react the way they did?

This needs to be raised now so that Muslims are not constantly subjected to harassment each time a nation decides to do something that is not to their liking. Otherwise, this would eventually render the community to be somewhat like a Pavlovian dog that "salivates" at will.

In today's globalised world, there is always room for disagreement about just anything. For example, someone recently found it fitting to re-sort to name-calling of Nobel Laureates as "idiots".

They include some literary figures such as British playwright Harold Pinter (who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005) or Portuguese novelist Jose Saramago (for Literature in 1998) or Gunter Grass (for Literature in 1999).

Others like Joseph Stiglitz (for Economics in 2001) and Rigoberta Menchu (awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1992) have also not been spared. Neither is world-famed linguist Noam Chomsky.

Allegedly, all this because the name-caller regards them as supporters of the so-called "ill-conceived political myths" of selected Latin American leaderships [*Foreign Policy*, May/June 2007].

In this case, like any, this is just another opinion expressed by someone who is not even near any Nobel Prize winner's list. So why over-react? More so, if one realises that what is regarded as important by someone or in some places may not be the same to another.

Take for instance the decision by the British Charity Commission to change the legal definition of religion. As a result, it now recognises more movements and these are entitled to the same privileges enjoyed by mainstream faiths like Christianity.

According to *The Times* (June 23), those who "worship multiple gods, or none at all" could now be a "registered charity". They can be atheists, pagans, witches, Rastafarians or satanists. It makes little difference once they are legally regarded as a charity in Britain.

So it is conceivable that, in time to come, a highly successful satanist may be recognised for his outstanding contributions that would warrant him a knighthood.

Must we, who are not the followers of satanism, take to the streets and riot? What is vital to remember is that this "Sir Satan" will be a British thing. We should not allow it to bother us at all. Similarly, in the case of Sir Salman.

What is more, "God" has been the subject of much discussion among the elite. One of the most current vocal opinions appears in Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion* (2007).

His views have come under fire from many sectors of society. Though some consider it excessively antagonistic, there have been no riots yet.

Dawkins feels religion should not be exempted from criticism. "There's an urgency to deal with religion as it has political power and influence—it's important that it stops getting a free ride," the Oxford professor said.

Still, he admits the book was not meant to convert the devout. Rather, it is for those "who are vaguely religious" and atheists.

Although criticising religion from various aspects, he is happy for those who believe in God. But at the end of it, when asked if he has ever been wrong, he replied: "Yes, of course I have." He adds that he is open-minded and would love to know answers to all sorts of questions.

So this is where the Muslims should be concentrating their energy on: Providing answers to questions that people need to know.

They should provide convincing arguments and evidence when trying to correct views that are perceived as wrong. In some sense, Dawkins was not entirely wrong when he reeled off a list of things that religious people are not expected to do.

Among them: The burning (or banning) of books, threatening authors, violating human rights and disrupting research (such as stem cell research) within the context of a modern democratic society.

As for now, these are the very things that confuse the situation even more in trying to convince one's respect for religions with the behavioural antics inherent in some followers, often the fanatical ones.

Needless to say, rioting over every trivial thing would only worsen the confusion. Doing so, contributes nothing to clarify the issue.

Instead, it reinforces the already poor perception that those who believe are incapable of navigating issues of great importance in a society that increasingly values argumentative knowledge more than high-handed physical arrogance.

And it is not a coincidence that the former approach sits more comfortably with the teachings of Islam, and even the practices attributed to Prophet Muhammad.

Therefore, it is time that the Muslim community, especially those innately prone to a knee-jerk sort of reaction, did some real hard thinking.

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