

RIOTING – ASIAN YOUTH

It is amazing to see so many people (even the most cynical ones) coming to the defence of rioting Asian youths. And what's more surprising is how the sympathisers justify the mindless violence and reckless behaviour of the wild youth led by a bunch of drug-pushers and petty criminals. It has been a hayday for the authority and police bashers. However, to be fair and just is a praiseworthy quality, but the real test comes when you have to do justice to other groups of people (in this case the police, authorities, and white communities).

"You who have faith! Show integrity for the sake of Allah bearing witness with justice. Do not let hatred for people incite you into not being just. Be just. That is closer to God-consciousness". (Surah Maida, Ayah 8)

The burning of cars, throwing petrol bombs at the police, setting shops on fire is criminal and 'Fasad Fil Ardh' spreading mischief in the land which is akin to killing people. The Quran gives a stern warning to such 'Mufsideen' mobsters and gangsters (see Surah Maida Ayah 33).

The high unemployment levels, poor educational attainments, racism, Islamophobia, poor housing and health provisions and BNP provocation may have been the contributory factors but they do not justify violence. This is a democratic society where issues are debated openly thus in the same way Muslims are free to voice their opinions openly so are other groups.

Whether this is right or wrong is not the focus of this article - but the problem with the 'Asian' community is that it has no spokesmen, no representatives and above all it has no clear identity. It is a 'lost' community, leaderless and without a voice. These riots highlighted the disenfranchisement, apathy and disunity of the community, its problem is not only outside it but within also. The police are not a problem and less so, BNP and the NF (which can be easily ignored as barking dogs). Behind the riots is the question of identity and behind the question of identity lies the issue of sincerity and genuineness – do we really know who we are or where we want to be?

My approach to the evaluation of the riots is from the Islamic perspective which emphasises responsibility rather than rights. What are our responsibilities towards others? Not only what are our rights from others? I will come back to this later on. I believe a large proportion of the fault lies in the 'Asian' community Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. They have not done enough for establishing economic enterprises, social institutions and educational and recreational centres. What has the community done itself to improve the educational attainment of its children? Where are the tuition centres? Where are their role models? Where are their teachers and social workers?

But on the other hand the local authorities in these Northern towns have spent millions of pounds over the decades promoting multiculturalism, giving halal meat to 'Asian' children, interpreters, Urdu teachers etc...

Unfortunately the community has not matched this with equal zeal and enthusiasm. It has stood still as a spectator waiting for handouts - the community has not been a player community, sadly the 'Asian' community has no future plans no vision, it's a boat drifting in the open sea but the rudder is broken, the passengers are dazed after drinking sea water for a long time, there is no strategy. It is easy to blame others for one's own shortcomings and local authorities and police are easy scapegoats. "No burden bearer can bear others burden" (Surah Maida, Ayah 166) is the Quranic reply to that!

Hold it for a moment, before you offer your Fatwa that I am a grass working for the police or the authorities. I am also one of these 'Asians' in the same boat. My aim is to be introspective and discover our inner weaknesses so they can be reminded and see this community waking up from its long slumber. I want to see it as an active community, full of dynamism and vigour.

There will be people in the 'Asian' and the white community who will be wringing their hands and saying "See we've been telling you that what these Pakis need is assimilation! They need to be more like us!"

These assimilations offer a policy which has not worked either, as is clear from the example of Afro-Caribbeans in the UK and the Blacks in America. Assimilation is when the minority relinquishes its culture, religion and language in favour of the dominant majority. This will not create peace and harmony in the society. Why? Since both parties will be renegading their own fundamentals, the 'Asian' by abandoning their religion and the British ignoring their basic principles of democracy and freedom of thought. Both expect to be hypocritical. Therefore assimilation is not workable.

The alternative to assimilation is pluralism where the minority maintains its culture and faith and co-exist in peace with the majority. This is closer to the Quranic concept – "For you, your way and for mine" (Surah Al-Kafirun, Ayah 6).

Diversity and tolerance are being preached. The Quran is encouraging people to be genuine about their faith yet respectful of others. Any dampening of true diversity and difference will only brew hostilities, undercover frustration and unmet expectations. In practical terms the way forward is let 'Asians' be 'Asians' and the English be English. The need is to establish strong institutions, schools, mosques, community centres, welfare, social organisations, businesses, charities and professional organisations.