India built by all religions since centuries: Islamic scholar

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By Quaid Najmi
Mumbai, Oct 28 | India has always evoked images and ideas of a thriving pluralism and peaceful co-existence, in which

people of all communities have unitedly built this country over the centuries, according to prominent Islamic scholar Prof. Zeenat Shaukat Ali.

"This country is not about a single language or ethnicity or religions, but is united by a shared history, traditions, cultures all of which are sustained by a plural, secular and a vibrant modern democracy," said Ali, who is Professor of Islamic Studies at Mumbai's famed St. Xaviers College.

"Study our glorious history… Can any single religious or ethnic group claim the monopoly of building it to become the modern global power that it is? People of all communities have contributed to its progress and all are proud of it," she pointed out.

Ali said India as we see it today is the positive outcome of the confluence of a rich Hindu civilization and Muslim aesthetics, flavoured by many other religions which came and flourished here peacefully, "something that is not seen anywhere in the world".

That 'idea' was carried forward by the great founding fathers of the Indian Republic who bequeathed us with a Constitution that ensures Justice, Equality and Fraternity to all Citizens, and that cannot be just withdrawn by a particular political group or ideological entity, these are not sustainable in the long run, said Ali.

On the current challenges before the Indian Muslims, she said the community needs to "correct the misconceptions against insidious accusations of 'Islamophobia' that is used as a tactical method of warfare against them globally".

"When outrage against violence needs unequivocal condemnation, silence against the malaise spells disaster… See how Muslims are treated in many non-Muslim nations, even in some advanced countries," said Ali, who is Director-General, World Institute of Islamic Studies for Dialogue, Gender Justice, Peace and Non-violence, known as WISDOM Foundation.

Hailing from a progressive Khoja Muslim family, she emphatically said that Islam is 'a religion based on reason and compassion', the inclusive values need reinstating without indulging in petty arguments.

"Muslim religious and political leaders must campaign for these with inter-religious and intra-religious dialogues, help rid the impressions of being obdurate or outdated, impress upon the need for a modern education for the community…" Ali declared.

On the current rise of a 'brand of religious-political identity', she says its extremely disconcerting, but fringe elements don't survive long when confronted with truth. India is our beloved home and home it will remain.

"The time has come for Muslims to rise and shine, all over the world… and they will win the respect they deserve," Ali said optimistically.

Ali penned two pioneering books – "Marriage and Divorce in Islam: An Appraisal" in which the foreword was written by former Vice-President Justice M. Hidayatullah, and "The Empowerment of Women in Islam" with an introduction by former Chief Justice of India A. M. Ahmadi.

Another book, "Winning The Peace: A Quest" had a foreword by former Union Minister Salman Khurshid who released it along with another former Union Minister Farooq Abdullah. Her book "Healing Memories – A Dialogue among Civilizations" has a foreword by the international scholar HRH Prince El Hassan Bin Talal, among many others.

An Islamic authority, Ali pens articles and opinions for Indian and international publications, besides attending and addressing conferences and seminars around the world on a variety of subjects.

Her parents, Gulam Ali Khairaz and Sheereen, both Ulemas and intellectual secularists, imbibed Islamic values in her at an early age, while her late husband Shaukat Ali encouraged her to complete her major education post-marriage in the 1980s.

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Source: