



# Interview

With:

**Prof. Irfan Ahmad Khan**

Professor Irfan Ahmad Khan is a visiting professor of Islamic Philosophy in the School of Religion here at the university. A native of Aligarh, India, he is a former professor of philosophy religion at Aligarh Muslim University in India. Prof. Khan has been active in student Islamic movements and Islamic Research Circles for 35 years. Recently, David Aossy interviewed the Professor in Iowa City about the Islamic resurgence and problems facing our Ummah.

**AR:** World wide it appears as through there is a resurgence of islam especially among the youth. Do you agree with this outlook and if so what factors do you attribute this resurgence?

**Prof. IAK:** Definitely I credit youth for the awakening, they are the first who should be awakened. A lot of credit also goes to the western world itself, they have awakened us. The situations in the western world as well as the communist block set us to thinking about islam. For a long time, the Muslim have been in a deep slumber but now they are coming to understand that they must stand up and reunderstand Islam and rediscover themselves and we must proceed toward our real goal.

There are historical factors for the resurgence but even in the absence of these historical factors, the spiritual factors themselves and the Koran itself are mainly responsible for the resurgence of Islam because the moment you return to

the Quran you are awakened.

**AR:** What do you believe the status of Islam is on a global scale with respect to other ideologies such as communism or christianity. Are we gaining a competitive edge? Is Islam headed in the right direction?

**Prof. IAK:** I think Islam is still misunderstood by Muslims as well as non Muslims, the world today still sees Islam more like the religion of a certain group of people who just happen to be Muslim. I don't think the world is yet prepared to see Islam as the solution to its problems, whether spiritual, social or political. I think a lot of work must be done in that connection. First of all the Muslims themselves must reunderstand islam and the Muslims must present from their practical lives an example of Islam itself. It is becoming more and more clearer everyday that Islam is needed, that the world ideologies today whether communism or capitalism or anything else have failed to solve our problems. I feel the real solutions if the human problems will emerge from the light of Allah's book and the light of prophet s.a.w Sunnah. But I think it is something that must be shown and demonstrated theoretically and practically by the Muslims and the Muslim scholars in a better way than it has been done. That is, the Muslims must show the world what an Islamic community is and how it works. I think much more work is required in trying to advance in the right direction.

**AR:** Do you believe the media's projection of Islam is distorted and how do you think this affects the "western" outlook on Islam in general, and what do you think can or should be done about it?

**Prof. IAK:** I think that it is quite clear that the media is distorting the view of Islam, and everyday whatever you see on the TV or even in the newspapers is a very distorted view of Islam.

The source of this distortion, I believe is deep rooted in the western mind and western hearts, some sort of misunderstanding and even hatred is certainly there.

But as to how we must react to it, it still appears to me as if we must work on two plans. Number one those people

who live in the western world must demonstrate what Islam is through their conduct. People believe in actions more than they believe books. So even if there is an organized effort to distort Islam in the minds of people, if they see the true Islam through the behavior of the Muslims then ultimately we will win.

Simultaneously, effort must be made to show Islam and so called "Muslims" are different. I mean to say that "Muslims" may fail to be good Muslims. We must then of course show that the Muslims are not as bad as the people show them to be. So we have to work on these plans and then gradually a better picture of Islam will evolve.

**AR:** Many Muslims that I have spoken to personally including a large portion of Iranians, insist that the present government in Iran is unjustly harsh towards its citizens concerning things, dress and make up, and is in general intolerant towards more moderates "Islamic movements". Do you have any comment on the Khomeini administration either for or against?

**Prof. IAK:** I haven't had a good study of what has been going on in Iran, but I think what is required is to develop a balanced view concerning not only Khomeini, but what is happening throughout the Islamic world.

Sometimes we place a person or people very high and then we believe they will not make errors. So some people will go to defend Khomeini up to any point. We know however no man is perfect and we know that no man can be like a prophet and the society that we build up today will have its shortcomings.

So we have to be self critical, there is nothing wrong with being self critical in fact that is the way to improve.

The people who are feeling those problems in Iran understand them much better than we do, so some people place people or regimes so high that they do not want to hear any criticism against it. And yet others have nothing good to say for these situations. We however should develop a balanced view point and be able to see the good and the bad. The Iranian Islamic Republic has achieved something, there is at least a general awakening among the people. The whole society has been moving toward Islamization. The Islamic

movement must be appreciated. Yet may be still much is yet to be done. So I would say both parties, those who raise it to high and those who view it negatively must take a more moderate viewpoint toward the Khomeini regime.

AR: On a more local scale, you have been in Iowa City for a couple of months now and you have become familiar with our jamaah and our resources and facilities. How do you think we can better ourselves as a community?

Prof. IAK: Alhamdulillah, there is a very nice group of students here, some Arab speaking, Malaysian speaking, American and there are some Urdu speaking students too.

Schools are always a good place to be together and learn in Islam. It makes me very happy when I see the way the Malaysian students are devoted to Islamic studies and how they hold their meetings very often. And alhamdulillah I saw some Arabic speaking brothers who discuss Quran in Arabic. It appears to me however that some sort of English programs are necessary because there are occasions when persons who belongs to different ethnic groups should be together.

Maybe it is possible to choose an issue of a political or Quranic nature and have a discussion in English between all the brothers for example. You are here together in a learning institution and the best way as Muslims to be together is to study Islam, to learn more about Islam, also be together in sharing or helping each other in different aspects too. But it still appears to me that better Islamic programs are required in which different ethnic groups are together and learn from each other.

When I gave the khutba I was very happy to see a large turnout of brothers. I would recommend however that we try to see who are the missing persons, then go out to them and bring them to our juma'at, and we should also try to improve the quality of juma'at itself so that it becomes an occasion of inspiration that binds the brothers together.

Also a reception program for newcomers would be very helpful. But generally, while it is good to have programs within one language group, I would encourage that combined programs be developed.

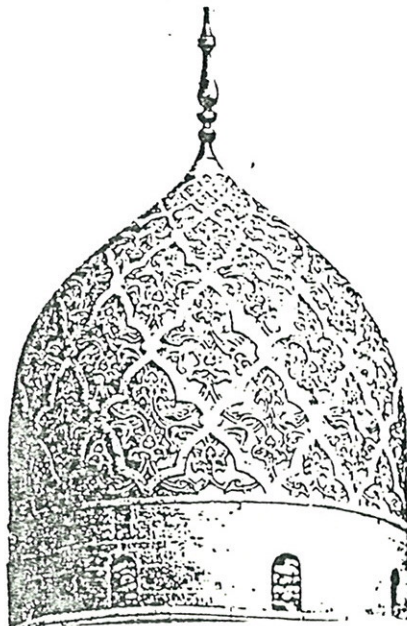
AR: As students our schedules are often hectic and money is tight. Do you believe the Islamic role of a student differs from that of an established family man and woman and if so how?

Prof. IAK: I think so. I think we have

**"...those people who live in the western world must demonstrate what Islam is through their conduct. People believe in actions more than they believe books. So even if there is an organized effort to distort Islam in the minds of people, if they see the true Islam through the behavior of the Muslims then ultimately we will win."**

to serve Islam under the situations which we are facing as students, so we have all the academic responsibilities of a student and we should try to be a real good student. The Muslim students should try to "shine" as students and try to have excellent grades always and to try and learn as much as possible.

But while we are learning western sciences some time should be committed to learning Islam, the Quran, the Hadith and the problems which we are facing today, these should be part of a student activi-



ties also. The student community has its demands too. You do not have to go to Cedar rapids or Waterloo, but here on the campus there are things which we have to share. We have to come closer together help each other and see how we can form a beautiful Islamic Society of students here at the University.

So all these responsibilities are there and should be done while we are students. So while we study and while we are students we should also try to do our best as an islamic worker.

AR: Do you have any advice to offer us as students as how we might approach the problem of dealing with our surroundings in this non islamic environment.

Prof. IAK: I wonder this kind of question is asked because I see in America that Muslims are always concerned with the "unislamic environment" and always concerned with how to live in this environment. I think this is some situation with the faith because they come from houses where maybe they think that there is an islamic environment and they get here and the environment is different. I do not agree that this environment is something to be worried about, but rather it so appears to me that Islam develops better in an unislamic environment.

For example, the prophet started in an unislamic environment. We should not be afraid of an unislamic environment, you should know how to interact with the people and how to relate to them and even learn from them and also how to spread Islam to them. So we should not be scared.

If the society has certain values which we cannot appreciate, if they have things which are very much anti Islamic then this will be a permanent source of awakening for us, and a reminder for us. And we should be strong enough and resistant enough to avoid any seductions and this should make us more concerned with our duty rather than getting lost in this environment.

So being in an environment like this is not unnatural it is a human environment and we should know how to interact with human beings and when you are not interacting with human beings satan is interacting with them. So more than satan you've got a right to guide the human beings. Even while they are being guided

(Continue to page 10)

by satan they have good things to offer. So be ready to learn from them and also be ready to give them good things.

So just take it easy and be at your guard but don't be too much afraid of this environment, just be natural, we have to learn to live and develop ourselves Islamically in a human environment.

Back home none of us can say there is a perfectly islamic environment in fact there will probably never be one, but still we have to try to have a continuous effort to Islamize ourselves and our people and our environment, and we have to learn to live with people whose values are different from ours.

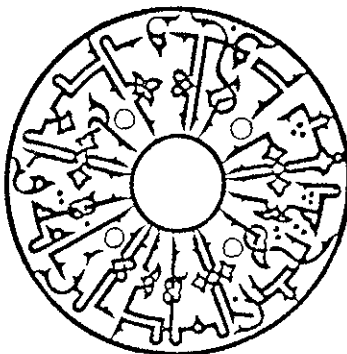
**AR:** Can you offer a personal opinion as to how we as students living in America might approach the problem of spreading Islam to non Muslims in America?

**Prof. IAK:** It is our duty to take Islam to all human beings. But look, before we take it to all human beings we have to understand Islam. We have to reunderstand it. We have to live it. And we have to be very very natural in our efforts. We have to learn how to relate to our neighbors. The person who live beside us is our neighbor. The person who is in our class is our neighbor, the person who goes to our school is our neighbor, so we have to learn how to relate to them. We have to know how to help them when they're in need we have to interact with them. And all this is to be done in a very natural way.

We become Muslims because its our duty to become Muslims and we must be nice to the people because God wants us to be nice to the people, and then the first to be done is to remove the hatred, the alienation and the feeling of strangeness. We are strangers, Muslims and others are strangers. We are scare of them and they are scare of us, at least sometimes.

If we relate to them in a natural way and they relate to you in a natural way, while you hold fast your values, then insyaAllah there will be growth. Then the next step is you will try to understand them and they will understand you. In-

stead of being too prompt to give them Islam or instead of being so much in haste to make them Islamic by criticizing their religion or trying to make them inferior to you, you have to be nice and



natural with them.

For example, question them as to what they believe, why they believe. Then, let them question you on what you believe, why you believe, what is your way of life, what are your norms, what are your values. Then, let them see your life and your book etc. So, really it is a step by step process.

Sometimes we believe that the best way of doing da'wah is holding a debate, I don't agree. I would recommend that mutual respect is required. Never pose yourself as if you know more of Christianity than they do or more of Judaism than they do, even if you do. You must give them the right to interpret themselves. Then, you will have the right to interpret yourself. Because if you say you know more about Christianity than they do and more about Islam than they do, they would say the same thing.

So, question them naturally and let them question you and develop a friendship, learning from each other. Where ever truth is, truth will con-

(Continue from page 7)

him too. Whichever travellers of this path, from the living and the dead, he finds sympathy with his own condition; he should seek their companionship. Those who can be brought to this path as companions, or with whom it is possible for him to keep in step, he must seek their company on this journey. As for those whose past lives and deeds serve as an inspiration to him, (past Prophet's, the Sahaba, scholars and Islamic workers). He must develop mental and spiritual relations with them. Thus surrounded by the company of the living and the dead, he will never feel lonely, depressed or disheartened. InshaAllah if we are sincere in reforming our ways, let us start at once and continue this tremendous task of self-purification and reaching for all the beautiful traits Allah(swt) has graciously embedded in the character of true Muslim.

quer. Open yourself practically and ideologically to the people. Where ever beauty is love will come, and where ever truth is the believe will come. So, move in a nice way and in a natural way and insyaAllah you will conquer.

Islamic Society of Iowa City

**LOGO**

**COMPETITION**

**ALL BROTHERS AND SISTERS ARE WELCOMED TO PARTICIPATE IN DESIGNING ISIC LOGO.**

**SEND TO:  
BRO. AHMAD ZAIN  
BRO. SHAHRIR**