

How well do you know your Muslim neighbour? **by Vivienne Stacy**

Her background - When Parveen and her children left the Pakistani capital, Islamabad (the city of Islam) the winter sun was bright. The damp cold of London in November expressed her mood until she saw her husband waiting with other friends from the Asian community to receive her, everything seemed strange- no call to prayer at the five time set times - dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset, late evening. the nearest mosque was ten miles away so it was difficult to send the children for Arabic instruction in the Quran. Fortunately there was a Pakistani shop near the house on which her husband had just secured a mortgage with his savings from his five years of work in U.K and so she could easily get spices, meat slaughtered in the ritually required way, and brown stone ground flour to make chapattis. Gradually she settled down but found it difficult to speak English, although she understood some. Her husband was not keen for her to go out much without him and she felt too insecure to do other shopping alone.

Her Status - Parveen had grown up in an orthodox Muslim (Sunni) home in Pakistan, her father, a wealthy land-owner had two wives. Since the family laws of ordinance of 1961 women's right had been improved and without permission from the courts a man could not take a second wife. Her father, of course had married both women before 1961 and tried to treat them equally according to the Quran injunction. Some Muslim scholars maintain that no man can treat two women equally so the Quran was really teaching monogamy. Certainly in many Muslim countries reforms have been passed enhancing the status and rights of women. Most Muslim nations accept the United Nations Charter on human rights.

However, there is a resistance to such reforms from some fundamentalist groups in Islam. For example, I have before me a booklet given to me in Murree in Pakistan in June last year. it is entitled "statement of 209 *Ulama* of Pakistan on the Muslim family laws of ordinance 1961 (evaluating its religious and social aspects)", the booklet calls for the repeal of the Muslim family law of ordinance because "most of its provisions are clearly repugnant to express injunctions of the holy Quran and the traditions". The booklet is published by the Jama'at- Ulama religious leaders.

I-Islamic a party founded in 1941 by Sayyid Abu's 'ala Maududi for the revival of Islam. He is one of the Muslim scholars listed to visit U.K in April to speak in London on the Muslim faith, at a series of meetings arranged by the Islamic Council of Europe. Perhaps the question of the position of women in Islam highlights the concern of Islam to show itself relevant to the modern world.

Her Beliefs: Parveen will probably feel more at home in April when the public will be able to admire carpets, manuscripts, ceramics, textiles, glass and precious objects from so many Muslim lands at the world of Islamic festival. She will be able to explain her heritage a little in her broken English to the friends she is gradually making. There was the school teacher who called to say how well her daughter was getting on at school. The teacher knew some Urdu so they had a really good chat. The teacher asked about life in Pakistan. Parveen was also able to tell her about the five pillars of Islam- the practices which are more difficult to observe in Britain. In Pakistan on hears the creed in Arabic each morning at dawn from the village mosque. "There is no God but God and Mohammed is His Prophet". The teacher explained that she is a Christian and believes in one God, too, but in Jesus as his supreme revelation - the word made flesh. Parveen outlined the pillars. Briefly stated they are:

1. Recitation of the creed compare John 17 v. 3
2. Prayer- the saying of specified prayers at the five set times a day with the prescribed ablutions beforehand, the correct positions for prayer and the correct direction- towards Mecca.
3. Fasting- during the hold month of Ramadan- the month in which the holy book called the Quran came down from heaven and was given to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.
4. Almsgiving- a Muslim is required to give 2 1/2 % of his income for religious purposes and to the poor.
5. Pilgrimage- every Muslim who can afford it and is well enough is required to make the pilgrimage once in his lifetime at Mecca, the religious centre of Islam in Saudi Arabia.

Besides these religious practices (pillars) Parveen also holds certain basic theological beliefs- the six articles,

1. God
2. The angels of God
3. The books of God
4. The prophets of God
5. The day of resurrection and judgement, and
6. The predestination to good and evil.

Her Problems: Parveen is obviously quite lonely- her limitation in English is a problem her husband and children are out most of the day. She appreciated it when her English neighbour calls in for a chat and tells her about the English way of life. Mrs. Jones plays bingo every afternoon- she does not understand much of what Parveen tries to say, but Parveen appreciates her motherliness and interest, she misses her own mother. She explains that she is not really too well but could not possibly go to a hospital attended by men as well. Her daughter is now growing fast and Parveen thinks she should go to a single sex school. She is able to explain these problems to the motherly Mrs. Jones with her daughter's help.

Through the winter months Parveen gets to know Mrs. Jones well and is surprised that she, a person so nice and kind does not attend any place of worship or read the Bible. Then there are those terrible posters about the latest film. It is difficult to understand the British; Parveen thought England was a Christian country- apart from the teacher no one even mentions religion or seemed to have any personal faith. There is a large church at the corner but only about twenty people go to it on the Christian holidays.

Woman to Woman- what a pity no Christian woman called on Parveen to welcome her to England, or to help her with her English conversation or to enquire how she is getting on, to talk about the ordinary things of life and then to win her friendship and confidence. Parveen sometimes feels afraid- perhaps her husband is getting tired of her, perhaps the jinn (evil spirits) will make her baby ill, perhaps she will recover her full health if she reads the Quran more. she has started to wear her amulet again- it has verses from the Quran inside it- there is no one to remind her that God wants His words in our hearts rather than round our necks.

She has heard about the Bible but no one has ever shown her a copy. She did see a small part of it in a booklet with the English one side and Urdu on the other side. (Luke in English and Urdu, published recently by the British and foreign bible society, London), but she was afraid to buy it. When it was Christmas the English people she saw did not seem to want to include any of the Pakistanis in their celebrations. When the Muslims in the town were celebrating their big festival after the month of fasting no-one called with good wishes except the school teacher. The teacher explained a little about the good news for modern women- good news about Jesus the Messiah but how can it really be good news in England when hardly anyone wants to share it. Parveen puzzled over this. The teacher was different from her bingo playing neighbours- she felt close to her because she believed in prayer and in God- perhaps she was like that because she had never married- but these English housewives do they believe in good news about Jesus, if so, they do not seem bursting to share it.

