

No Thought Crime

According to international norms, everyone has the right to express his views in a peaceful manner, says MAULANA WAHIDDUDIN KHAN

Salman Rushdie is once again in the news. Born in India and now settled in the UK, he has been invited to the Jaipur Literature Festival that is being held from January 20 to 24. On hearing of this, a Muslim religious organisation reacted by issuing a statement demanding that the government of India should not allow Rushdie's entry into India. According to them, he has committed blasphemy in his book *The Satanic Verses*, and his visit to India will hurt the sentiments of Muslims here.

According to my way of thinking, the demand by this Muslim group is completely uncalled for. They have the right to stop Rushdie from coming to their own campus, but they have no right to ban his entry into Indian soil.

Follow The Constitution

India is a democratic country which is guided by a secular constitution and Muslims should know the framework of the Indian Constitution. Any demand that is alien to this constitutional framework will undoubtedly be invalid and unacceptable to the Indian government.

Moreover, this kind of demand is un-Islamic. It is against the Islamic spirit. If Muslims want to represent Islam, they must take the visit of Rushdie as an opportunity to invite the British author to enter into a dialogue, so that they may discuss the controversial point with him, and try to impress upon him their point of view. This visit to India by Rushdie gives them the chance to remove any misunderstanding of Islam by presenting their case before him in a rational manner.



There is a very relevant verse in the *Quran* on this subject. It reads: "If any of the non-believers seeks your pro-

According to international norms, everyone has the right to express his views in a peaceful manner. Muslims also have right to put their point of view before Rushdie, just as he has the right to express his views — both have an equal right.

Spirit Of The Age

It is not good for Muslims to go against the spirit of the age. If they do so, they will only harm the religion of Islam. They will prove by this act that George Orwell was right when he said that Islam believes in "thought-crime", although Islam is completely free of this blame.

If Rushdie has published a negative book, Muslims by their negative reaction are giving the false impression that Islam does indeed believe in "thought-crime". I would, therefore, like to reiterate that Muslims should take this opportunity to have a dialogue with Rushdie and try to present the Islamic point of view to him rationally, so that he may understand the true picture of Islam. ■

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Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
on speakingtree.in

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tection, then let him come so that he may hear the words of God, then convey him to a place of safety" (9:6).

What The Quran Says

The verse focuses on a very important Islamic principle, that Muslims should welcome everybody. According to this principle, Muslims should organise meetings with the British author. They should put their point of view before him in a rational manner, then try to present to him their point of view and their objections to his writings.

If Rushdie is not convinced, they should make *dua* for him and according to the Quranic teaching, see him off amicably, without rancour.

We are living in an age of freedom.

