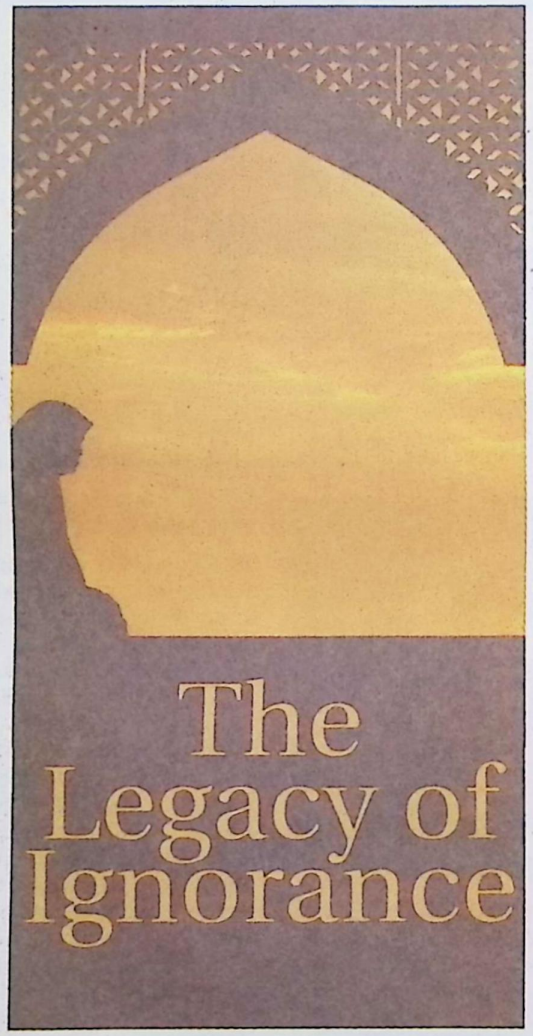
The Legacy of Ignorance



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Many people have heard the saying "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing". In fact it is a misquote of the original line from a poem "An essay on criticism" by the British poet Alexander Pope.

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
and drinking largely sobers us again.

There is even a Bangla saying — "olpo bidya bhoyonkor". This kind of insufficient knowledge or lack of understanding is one of the root causes of misconceptions, whether it is to do with other countries, cultures, religions or even a particular incident or situation. We hear something from someone, read an article in the papers or see media coverage of an event in the news and are often quick to judge and frequently condemn. A lot of the time it is without knowing the full facts or having an in depth understanding of the situation.

Recently, I have been asked in various shops, where I am from. When I tell them I come from Bangladesh, they look surprised and ask me if I am Muslim. Not that it happens to be any of their business what religion I may follow, I still politely tell that them that I am indeed Muslim. Once again they seem surprised by this and point at my head and state the obvious that I do not wear a hijab. I try my best to politely explain to them that not all Bangladeshi women, in fact not all Muslim women wear hijabs. It is a personal choice and does not make us any less 'Muslim' than someone who chooses to don the hijab or niqab. It is probably not my place to give them a crash course on the status of women in Islam. I refrain from informing them that since the inception of the religion, women have had the right to own and inherit property, marry according to their own free will, get divorced if necessary, enter into employment, receive an education and be treated as an equal to their male counterparts. Instead I smile at them and leave in a slightly frustrated frame of mind.

Misconceptions about Islam or Muslims in general have over the last decade or so become widespread especially after 9/11. Islam is perceived by many as a violent, barbaric and backward religion. Each terrorist attack carried out by some Islamic group chips away at the credibility of Islam as being a practical, progressive and peaceful religion. The recent attack in the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi leaving over 68 people dead and many more injured and missing is yet another tragic example of a group of militants, al-Shabaab in this particular instance, using Islam for their own agenda. I wonder how many people will register that this reprehensible act was carried out in retaliation to the events in Somalia since 2011 where around 4,000 Kenyan troops were dispatched across the border with the sole intention of hunting down and destroying al-Shabaab, and actually has virtually nothing to do with religion per se. What will be remembered is that 'Islamist gunmen' massacred innocent people, yet again. No amount of shouting from the rooftops will convince everyone that this kind of terrorist attack is not condoned by the majority of Muslims around the world and is against the teachings of Islam.

Thanks to groups such as al-Qaeda or al-Shabaab, Muslims around the world have become vilified and hated. In my opinion, these types of organisations that use religion to perpetrate acts of terrorism are anti Islamic in nature as they go against the teachings of our religion. I don't believe it says anywhere in the Quran that blowing up innocent people or even yourself is acceptable. What worries me is that it perpetuates the miscon-