

THE tragedy of 9/11 had its impact on the Muslim communities in Europe as well. They now suddenly appear to be outsiders. There are persistent reports about the harassment of Muslims as well as physical attacks on individuals, mosques and Islamic schools. There are concerns about the growing size of the Muslim communities in Germany, France, Belgium and Britain.

In Europe, with a population of about 20 million Muslims, Islam has come to be regarded as the second religion. It needs to be noted that there is not one but many Muslim communities in Europe. In Britain, which has around 1.6 million Muslims, Pakistani Muslims form the largest group followed by the Bangladeshis. In Germany and the Netherlands, Turkish Muslims dominate. The Netherlands also has a considerable number of Moroccan and Surinamese Muslims. In France there are around 4.5 million Muslims and like Spain and Belgium, most of them are from Maghreb (mainly Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria), with small Turkish and African minorities.

Over the past three decades, Muslim factor has become increasingly visible in Europe's public life. Mosques, 'halal' food, Muslim customs and ways of dress are increasingly common. It is difficult to know the accurate number of Muslims living in Europe, because the estimates of the legal immigrants vary and little is known about the size of the illegal ones.

Some estimates indicate that Muslims may outnumber non-Muslims in Europe by 2050. One reason for such a happening can be attributed to the low birth rate within the European population and rise in the ageing population. Of late, a broader Muslim identity has emerged within Europe in the wake of issues like the Gulf war, the Rushdie affair, the situation in the Middle East, the head scarf issue, race riots in Britain and more recently the war against terrorism.

There have been three main models by which the EU states have tried to deal with the migrants in general. First, there is the guest worker model, under which the migrants are seen to have temporary presence as has been the case in Germany and in Austria and Switzerland in some modified form. Second is the assimilation model. France is the primary example of such a coun-

try. Third is the ethnic minorities model, in which there is room for the preservation of cultural identity. This model is followed in the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries and the UK.

The Europe's Muslim scenario is rapidly changing and it will be important to observe how the growth of Muslim communities in the continent takes place. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the situation in the Middle East will definitely shaping the Europe's new perception. However, the 9/11 has not given rise to a new variant of an old anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe, but there has been less focus of attention on cultural and religious factors and more on political ones. Also as a reaction to increasing multiculturalism in Europe, in the past couple of years, there has been a visible rise of the far right parties at the national level.

The recent European parlia-

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mentary elections also witnessed an increasing support for anti-EU and other far right parties in Europe. This is attributed to anti-immigration policies. Their share of power at the national governments has also increased in the countries with migrant Muslim population like Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, Britain, France, Norway and Denmark.

The issue of head scarves became important in Europe in the last decade or so, largely because of the way it developed in France and later in Germany. Head scarves have never been an issue in Britain and the Netherlands, as there is a more liberal approach to accommodate Muslim women in workplaces, as well as special considerations for children in schools.

There is need to integrate the Muslims within European society in a democratic fashion. The challenge of terrorism can be successfully met by avoiding a rise in the ranks of disgruntled Muslims. This can be done by providing for Muslim representation at the political level and creating more space for the Muslims in the parliaments as well as at the local levels.

In both Britain and Netherlands, Muslims are represented at the highest levels. The Germans have not encouraged the minorities to be active in politics even at the local level. Until recently the Turkish minority was entirely excluded from German citizenship. The Netherlands, by contrast, gave immigrants the right to vote and to stand for offices as early as 1986, and it has been easier to obtain Dutch citizenship than German one.

More dialogue is required to understand the mindset of the Muslim migrants in Europe and to make them feel part of European society rather remain as outsiders. There is need to discuss the status of the Muslims' human and religious rights to make certain that the war on terrorism will not be used as a cover for anti-Muslim abuses.

The problem is that most of the Muslims have the lowest incomes and the largest families. Although they are not very well represented in European politics and social setup, a number of Muslims, mostly business entrepreneurs in Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany are participating in political activities in order to become part of the European society as well as to project their concerns and problems. The media can play an important role in the integration of the Muslims in European society.

But an effort has to be made by the Muslims themselves for better integration through political participation, creating a better understanding of the societies they live in as well as efforts by the Muslim scholars in Europe to initiate some kind of a dialogue process with their counterparts and to disown the actions and opinions of the extremists.

As European governments step up their efforts to root out the extremists from their societies, the future holds one of the two possibilities: either the continent's 20 million Muslims will integrate smoothly into their countries' economic and political life; or they will remain on the margins, disaffected and potentially dangerous.

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