Whatever assumptions and misconceptions about Islam prevailing among most of the people around the world today are due to lack of proper knowledge. Anti-Islamic ideology through propaganda and prejudiced media through twisted, and sometimes, fabricated news items/stories are relentlessly conspiring to defame Islam for their ulterior motives. Consequently people tend to assume that Islam is a religion associated with aggression, dogmatism, cruelty and terrorism. The truth is diametrically opposite. This misconception might also be a result of erroneous, inapt practices on the part of some Muslims, Muslim-rulers/political entities owing to selfish, worldly interests. This paper is an attempt to highlight a few important characteristics of culture and ideology of Islam. The primary sources to know about Islamic ideology are two. One is The Qur’an and the other is the guidelines given by the prophet Mohammed (pbuh). The trends set by the four Caliphs subsequent to Mohammed’s (pbuh) rule and the detailed guidelines (the fiqh) framed by the erudite scholars of Islam (Imams) for practical purposes and to facilitate the enforcement of Islamic laws are the secondary sources.

The first misconception about Islam is that it is a ‘religion’ of Muslims. Neither is it a mere religion nor is it of Muslims alone. Islam is more than a religion; it is an ideology, a comprehensive system of life dealing with all walks of life. To call it a religion of Muslims alone is a misleading idea. Islam is for all mankind irrespective of time and place. The Qur’an addresses all human beings. The prophet has been sent as a messenger to the whole universe. To consider Muhammad (pbuh) merely a spiritual leader of Muslims is to rob him of his magnanimity and to belittle the expanse and amplitude of the message he disseminated.

Islam professes that all human beings are children of a single pair of parents i.e Adam and Eve. Therefore all are brothers and sisters. “O mankind we created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know
each other (not that you may despise each other)” (The Qur’an: 49:13). Prophet said: “No Arab is superior to non-Arab and no white is superior to a black.” We must abstain from all sorts of discrimination, hatred and animosity. The creator, Lord, sustainer and Ruler of all human beings is the same i.e. Allah. In all walks of life man must be obedient to Him only.

There are three important components of Islamic faith. 1. Oneness of God. 2. Prophet-hood and 3. Life after death.

1. Oneness of God: (Monotheism): “Say: He is Allah, the one, the eternal, absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him. (The Qur’an: 113:1-4).

   God is Omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. All prayers, sacrifice and prostration must be for Him only. Men must live their individual or collective lives pertaining to each and every branch of human life including social, economic and political issues in accordance with the guidelines given by Him only.

2. Prophet Hood: To acquaint man with His likes and dislikes what is permissible and what is prohibited God has chosen a few persons to appoint as His messengers. They are men like us, but endowed with divine guidance. Holy books like The Torah, The Bible and The Qur’an are revealed upon them. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (Peace be upon them) are God’s prophets who showed right path in their times. A Muslim must respect all the prophets. Muhammad (PBUH) is the last prophet of God. He’s mission is similar to that of Moses, Jesus or any other prophet. The system of life he preached replaces all the teachings of previous prophets. The life and the tradition of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are ideal and guide-lines for all the mankind including the ones who would be born till the dooms day.

3. Life after Death: This earthly life has been given to men to put them to test whether they do right or wrong. There exists an unending life after this earthly life. On the Day of Judgment all human beings who have lived on this earth from the inception of human life to the dooms-day will be resurrected. Those who have done right in this earthly life will be rewarded by heaven and the wrong doers will be punished in hell. Therefore man has to make preparations to get
success in that eternal life after death by doing good deeds which please God.

The philosophy and ideology of Islamic system of life can be understood by objectively and meticulously perusing the following branches of its system.

1. **Educational system:** Islam gives priority to education. It is obligatory on the part of every man and woman to acquire education. Knowledge, wisdom and sagacity are desirable qualities for a Muslim. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says that an erudite person is better than one thousand worshipers. The Qur’an puts a rhetorical question: “Are those who know and those who do not know equal?” (The Qur’an: 39:9) One can understand the importance of education in Islam by studying the policy of Muhammad (PBUH) in releasing the war prisoners. The war prisoners were released after they gave education to certain number of illiterates in the Islamic state. There is no prohibition on woman as far as learning is concerned. History tells us about the achievements of Muslim scholars in the fields of Chemistry, Mathematics, Astronomy and Medicine.

2) **Moral code of conduct:** Islam gives utmost importance to values. Good conduct will be the heaviest element a pious person finds in his balance while his deeds are weighed on the Day of Judgment. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said “The better among you is the one with good moral values”. Vulgarity, nudity, extra-marital affairs, gambling and drinking of alcohol are prohibited. Hoarding, bribery and corruption are cognizable offences.

3) **Family system:** Though joint family system is not encouraged in Islam, rights and duties of each individual towards others are well defined. Children are strictly warned not to be harsh on parents. Old parents must be taken care of by their children. “Heaven lies under mother’s feet”, and “Father is one of the doors that leads to Heaven”. Parents are advised to educate and train their children. “The most valuable gift a father can give his children is the best education and training.” Elders are respected and the young are dealt with affectionately. Orphans must be well treated. Prophet said “The homestead in which an orphan is nurtured is the best house.” The poor relatives must be given their due right.
“It’s not righteous that you turn your faces towards the East or the West, but... gives his beloved money to his relatives and orphans and the needy and for the ransoming of the captives and who observes prayers and pays the poor-due...” ((The Qur’an: 2:177)

4) **Social System:** To establish an amicable and co-operative human society is a priority in Islam. The one who eats full while his neighbour sleeps hungry cannot be a Muslim. The one who inflicts his neighbour by his words and deeds does not remain a Muslim. Beggars must not be turned down. Giving alms and charity is a must. Natural resources like water must not be stopped from reaching others. It is necessary to pay visit to the sick and ailing. Hospitality for guest is an admirable quality.

5) **Economic system:** Islamic economic system strives for eradication of economic inequalities. It opposes economics based on interest. Usury is a taboo. Zakat (tax) is collected by Islamic government from the haves and a fair portion of that revenue is judiciously distributed among the have-nots through welfare schemes. Scholarships, pensions to the deserving and aids to windows, physically challenged and old persons who do not have care takers are generously given. ‘Jiziya’ (Tax) is collected from the non-Muslim citizens as they do not pay Zakat but avail themselves of amenities and get benefits of welfare schemes.

6) **Political system:** Democracy is the heart of Islam. The Caliph is elected by the citizens. The caliph does not frame any constitution but rules over by enforcing the divine civil and criminal laws which ensure peace, progress and justice. Power is decentralized. Governors are appointed to govern the provinces. Rulers are not permitted to spend extravagantly from the public fund. The office bearers are accountable to the commoners. Right to information was in force. Transparency in all matters is maintained.

7) **Judiciary:** The wellness of any system is gaged by the judiciary system in that society. It should be free from political impact. It must not discriminate between the rich and the poor. In Islamic system courts were established in all provinces and judges are appointed. During the regime of Caliph Umar one non-Muslim woman from Egypt complained that the ruler of her area dismantled the house and annexed it to the Mosque. On enquiry the governor
of the province Amr ibn ul Aas explained his side: ‘the existing mosque was insufficient as the number of devotees was growing day by day. The woman was offered more than the market price for her land. She did not accept it. So, in view of public interest, her house was acquired and the mosque was extended on that land and the price of her land had been deposited in the government treasury so that she can withdraw it at any point of time.’ Siding with the woman, the caliph ordered to demolish the new part of the mosque and to rebuild the house as it had been before.

Another grave misconception which is propagated by the west and America is the association of Islam with terrorism. Terrorism and Islam are poles apart. Islam means Peace. The Quran says. “If any one slew a person – unless it be for murderer or for spreading (grave) mischief in the land-it would be as if he slew the whole people (in the world). And if any one saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people” (The Qur’an. 5:32). In war Islamic armies are strictly instructed not to harm women, children and the old aged. Instead of revenge Islam promotes forgiveness. “Great is he who forgives his enemy even when he is capable of punishing his enemy.” The word ‘Jihad’ is highly misinterpreted by the western media. Actually, Jihad means continuous struggle for the promotion of good and eradication of the evil.

Another issue on which the modern world is contemptuous of Islam is the place of woman in Islam. Before the advent of Islam in Arabia the position of the fair sex was appalling. Girls were buried alive as soon as they were born. Islam emancipated woman in all respects through the following provisions:

i) Freedom: Girls have freedom to receive education as boys do. A girl cannot be married off to anybody without her consent. As man has liberty to divorce, woman is also allowed to take qula (divorce) if she dislikes her husband who is cruel, unjust or impotent. A widow or a divorcee is allowed to re-marry if she wishes.

ii) Equality: There is no gender disparity in Islam. “If any do deeds of righteousness- be they male or female, they will enter heaven,” (The Qur’an: 4:2)
iii) Economic empowerment: Woman receives money in the form of bride price (Mahar). She gets bread and butter from either father or husband. She has lawful share in the property. “There is a share for men and a share for women whether the property, small or large” (The Qur’an:24:30)

iv) Dignity: Mother’s place is higher than father’s. Heaven lies under mother’s feet. Woman is the ruler/queen of her husband’s homestead. Veil is only a protective tool for her from the mischievous staring eyes. Thus Islam gives dignity, respect, protection, and appropriate place to women.

Present day world is grappling with the problems of environment. Islam does not ignore the issues of environment. It orders its followers or citizens of Islamic state to judiciously use the natural resources. Prophet (PBUH) says “Even if you sit on the bank of the river you must take a limited quantity of water for the ablution. Trees must not be felled even in war, though they are advantageous for enemy forces. About plants and trees prophet Mohammed (PBUH) says: “One who plants a tree and does farming if human beings and birds get benefit of his endeavour, such a person will get reward from God. The one who transforms a barren land into a fertile one shall also be rewarded”

Space constriction, here, does not allow dwelling upon various other issues pertaining to Islamic culture and ideology. Therefore, the discussion is concluded by highlighting only some of the important points. By noticing the Islamic ideology which is human friendly and beneficial to the disadvantaged sections of the society, the eminent scholars have come out with astounding admissions. One or two are quoted here.

“Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other. Nothing is superfluous and nothing is lacking, with the result of absolute balance and solid composure” (Leopold Weiss)

“The principle of universal brotherhood and the doctrine of equality of mankind which Muhammad (pbuh) proclaimed represent very great contribution of Muhammad to the social uplift of humanity” (Prof. Ramakrishna Rao)
Works consulted:

1. *The Holy Qur'an*, English Translation, Revised and Edited by The Presidency of Islamic Research, IFTA, Saudi Arabia, [Figures in brackets refer to the chapter no. and verse no. respectively]


