

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

islām -  
muslims -  
india

# **ISLAM - MUSLIMS - INDIA**

**LOK VANGMAYA GRIHA (PVT.) LTD., BOMBAY**

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*We have great pleasure in presenting this book to the Indian public. In recent times a great offensive has been launched by rank communalist forces in India as a part of their all-out attack on the peaceful, democratic, progressive and secular Government of India. Both Hindu chauvinists and Muslim fanatics have joined hands in this nefarious game.*

*It has, naturally, become imperative to foil this game in the interests of peace, democracy, freedom and secularity. We have no doubt that these thought-provoking essays will go a long way towards realising this aim.*

Bombay,  
15th June, 1975.

—Publishers.

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2	2	in historic surround-	in different historic surround-
17	33	3000 miles	300 miles
44	23	encumbent	incumbent
45	35	anlytic	analytic
51	10	historial	historian
54	15	estimate	esteem
59	11	loyel	loyal
71	33	religions	religious
116	36	bought	brought
119	3	<i>Times of India</i> on Sept. 16, 1973.	<i>Clarity</i> , Bombay, on November 28, 1974.
121	13	as	at
125	11	conceived	considered

## P R E F A C E

This book is a collection of essays written on different occasions for various periodicals. Though the articles included herein are on different subjects, there is a common thread running through them and that persuaded me to collect them in a book form. The theme of these essays is connected in one way or other with either Islam or the Indian Muslims. I have a definite outlook about Islam, its origin and development which, for lack of any better term, I prefer to describe as unorthodox Marxist. I refuse to accept the straitjacket of any single ideology to explain historical events and therefore, I am persuaded to believe that a very careful analysis of all the relevant factors is highly necessary to unravel the 'mysteries' of history although some of these facts may not straightaway fit into our ideological schema. I have, to the best of my ability, tried to follow this course of intellectual integrity despite emotionally satisfying strong pulls to the contrary. This, I am aware, would displease many friends; they may even think of condemning me for this 'rank heresy'. But, I wish to impress on my readers that not a word has been written with any malafide intention. Nothing that does not intellectually convince me has been put on the paper. My paper on 'The Origin And Development of Islam' is unpublished so far and contains all the major points of my thesis on Islam which, in due course of time, I propose to expand in a book form.

The essay on 'Muslim Personal Law' was originally written for a book, 'Readings in the Uniform Civil Code' being edited by Dr. Agarwal of Department of Law, Bombay University. I am of the view that certain much-needed reforms in the Muslim Personal Law are possible, nay, desirable, in order to uphold the spirit of justice embodied in the Islamic value-system. Most of the Muslim countries including Pakistan have already done so. The Muslim intelligentsia in India, outside the orbit of vote-seeking machine, can play a very effective role in this direction.

Most of the essays have been written on different occasions and hence certain amount of overlapping is inevitable. I seek the reader's indulgence for this, especially since, at times, even the overlapping statements are not identical but express the ideas on one point more fully than the other, so that they may even serve to clarify one another.

My article on the genesis of communalism seeks to explain the enigmatic fact that while the orthodox Mullahs of Deoband became allies of the Indian National Congress, the Western educated Muslim elite championed the cause of separatist Muslim politics. Dr. Iqbal, a celebrated poet, is acclaimed as the doyen of Muslim thinkers in India. In my paper on Iqbal, I have pointed out the limitations of his thought system and tried to show that despite his deceptive revolutionary phraseology, he could not liberate himself from the strait-jacket of orthodox Islam. Even his reinterpretation and reconstruction of religious thought in Islam did not go very far. He cannot, precisely for this reason, inspire the new generations of Indian Muslims. In 'The Philosophic Trends in Islam', I have attempted to trace the history of philosophy in Islam, its various trends, and the influence of Greek thought on it.

I wish to warmly thank my friend Dr. Zoe Ansari — a man gifted with keen intellect, and who means much more to me — for having taken the trouble to read the manuscript, for offering his valuable suggestions and for writing an introduction to this book.

Bombay,  
20th March, 1975

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

## FOREWORD

### A TORCH-BEARER ON THE WAY

Religion is originally born of certain rock-like faith, individual or collective, as the case may be. However, it is not always motivated by faith in as much as it is mere mechanical reflex action of a conditioned mind. The faith always becomes, even if it be blind, a vital source of strength for religious as well as non-religious actions. It is faith in reason and observed data that has made miraculous progress in social as well as physical sciences possible. Faith, if based on scientific approach, would be more amenable to change. Devoid of change and re-interpretation, it petrifies and degenerates into dogma, and in this form, instead of being a source of strength, does irretrievable harm. Again, it was faith based on their scientific observations that enabled Galileo and Copernicus to face religious persecution with unflinching resolve. The entire history of civilisation stands testimony to the fact that religious faith, after having served its social purpose and giving lead to its believers, turns into detrimental fetters for those very people in the changed circumstances. It is a grim warning to all those who dogmatise their faith in the garb of religion and oppose scientific scepticism as being irreligious.

Religion, as hitherto known to us, is a combination of faith and tradition, and is a way of life. To many people it is revealed and is, therefore, holy and beyond any realm of doubt. It is a pack of unquestionable doctrines conveyed to man by a superman called prophet or an apostle. It ensures salvation and provides a higher pattern of life. To others, religion being a perfect blending of physical and metaphysical thought system, is, in fact, an ideology that grows from earth, based on temporal and moral needs of people in a given historical situation, which in turn is the sum total of modes and relations of production, struggle, conflict and interrelationship of material as well as intellectual nature. When the material and historical condition of a parti-



cular society is no more able to maintain the 'status quo', a crisis becomes imminent, which, in the long run, throws up an eminent personality who leads the society out of the morass onto a revolutionary millenium. The ideology propounded by him translates people's aspirations into deeds, social and collective action and takes them into a new realm of social relationship hitherto unrealised, but dreamt of by them. The chariot of history thus moves on through untrodden grounds and into the realm of new ideas and ideologies.

The essays on Islam and Muslims — particularly the Indian Muslims — in this book, represent this dynamic and dialectical point of view. It happens to be a maiden venture of a young and enthusiastic Marxist intellectual attempting to explain the origin and development of Islam and also the various problems being faced by the Indian Muslims today. He is trying to explore his way, as any pioneer generally does, through the thick wood of fantasies and fictions, traditional faith and contemporary facts and tries to pave his way. Like an explorer, he moves on, with a bold question mark, undaunted, through the haze of inhibitions, prejudices, holding aloft the candle of Marxist-scientific thought. Along this way he stumbles upon cruel realities — a logical culmination of his scheme of thoughts. At times, his predecessors appear to have shown the way, but he moves along an uncharted course too. Even the heavenly prophets have recognised such tiresome but thrilling quest for truth as nothing short of an exalted form of worship. If such endeavours to discover and interpret the hidden material and intellectual threads of a religion or an ideology cease to continue, it would turn into a decadent system devoid of any dynamism. This is the point which the author intends to underline with his analyses.

A contemporary Egyptian thinker and an authority on Islam, Mohammad Qutub, while discussing Islam vis-a-vis Communism, in his latest work, *Islam - the Misunderstood Religion*, throws up the following challenge :

“The fallacy and weakness of Communist view of human history is amply proved by the fact that it fails to offer any

adequate explanation of the great revolution brought about by Islam in Arabia, for it cannot point out any change in the means of economic production in Arabian peninsula or even in the whole of the contemporary Islamic world that might be referred to as having caused the emergence of the Holy Prophet in that part of the world bringing with him a completely new system of life.”

In our country also, some out-spoken partisans of the Jamaat-e-Islami, have been propounding the same point of view quite often. These few pages on the origin and genesis of Islam represent the earnest endeavour to find out the change in the mode and relations of production, the dialectics of material and mental situation in the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic world and the action and reaction of this religious-cum political movement and precisely is the fitting retort to the challenge thrown by the Egyptian thinker Mohammad Qutub and his followers and supporters of this point of view in India.

Notwithstanding the fact that these articles were penned separately and on different occasions (hence the unavoidable repetition of some ideas) they supplement each other and demonstrate his analytical approach. These essays clearly indicate the author's grasp over the subject and maturity of his opinion. He is not only concerned with the classical polemics of the subject but with its practical aspects as well. The first article which embraces all the dimensions of a complete thesis in its contents, should be read in conjunction with the seventh and ninth articles, which together spell out different aspects of the Islamic movement.

Seen from this angle, the following pages are neither addressed to nor meant for those for whom religious faith is the last word and even a hair-like deviation from the already laid down course amounts to rank heresy. Nor are they meant for those pseudo-intellectuals who possess final, irrevocable and ultimate answer to each and every question ever raised by human reason. The author does not seem to either intend to offend or appease anyone. He steers clear of emotions and tries to un-

ravel facts tearing asunder the thick curtain of mystery and religious beliefs. He uses the accumulated wealth of knowledge in order to enrich our understanding of the present and assessment of the future. One may differ from the author's point of view or the conclusions drawn by him but it is difficult to suspect his intentions, his insight into the subject, his mental equipment and his bona fides.

Asghar Ali, as he is known among his friends, was born in a conformist and conservative family of a Dawoodi Bohra Amil (provincial preacher of the faith) and was brought up in Arabic and Islamic learning — its theology and mythology both. At home they spoke Gujrati while the language of intellectual and political expressions was either Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu) or English. He was the youngest son and aspired for higher learning in secular subjects though the family had no such tradition. After completing higher secondary, he undertook further studies in natural science and graduated in civil engineering from Indore. He studied German in the Bombay University. Mr. Engineer has been deeply interested in classical as well as modern philosophy and political economy. He settled down in Bombay where he met many like-minded and enlightened friends many of whom were committed Marxists. He critically re-evaluated his own religious beliefs and soon left them behind in his incessant quest for truth—a term which, according to him, is value-loaded, elusive and incapable of being encapsuled in any fixed set of ideas. He is opposed to dogmas whether religious, social or political and his restive mind keeps on searching for ever new ideas and ideals. His extensive reading keeps him well-informed and imparts sharper edge to his critical attitude towards religious as well as socio-political dogmas. He attended and conducted many Marxist study circles from which he gathered more light than heat. He continues his journey along the high road of historical materialism which, to this day, remains a key for both of us to explore enigmatic problems of social, religious, political and historical nature. His analysis of socio-economic formations of the pre-Islamic period demonstrates his grasp of historical materialism.

For the last few years, he has been contributing valuable articles on philosophical, historical, literary and other social subjects to the esteemed English and Urdu periodicals of India. His recent book reviews in the *Times of India* have won him a coveted place among Marxist critics. The large number of references and quotations in the book are intended to corroborate his thesis and not to impress the readers with his undoubtedly enviable erudition. I, for one, know fully well that he has gone through the original sources, time and again; the basic documents have been providing him with the first hand knowledge which is more comprehensible to him than many of his Western counterparts.

Some of the main points deserving special attention from the readers of Shri Engineer's thesis on Islam can be summarised as under :

1. It is an erroneous impression that the Prophet and the Quran were product of Bedouin society and that Islam advanced that society towards feudalism. Before Islam's advent, Mecca was a powerful centre of international commerce and the tribe of Quresh had the monopoly of trade in alliance with certain lesser tribes. There was no agriculture whatsoever and consequently feudal relations of production did not exist there. Commercial operations encouraged individualism vis-a-vis tribal morality, and tribal structure was in the process of disintegration. Tribal morality was being neglected by the prosperous merchants causing distress among the downtrodden.
2. The Bedouin morality was based on what could be described as tribal humanism. Tribal democracy, individual freedom and equality were jealously guarded. Among Bedouins collective property was the norm.
3. The Bedouins drew their sustenance by raiding caravans. The concepts of nation or state or ruler and the ruled did not exist.
4. Islam widened the basis of tribal humanism, equality and fraternity. The Islamic morality militated against too much concentration of wealth, usury and hoarding while giving sanction to private property. It worked out best

possible compromise between slaves without any social and political rights, nomadic Bedouins and mercantile bourgeoisie in need of state security for its commercial operations and widening its sphere of influence for greater profits.

5. The Youth which had greater awareness of extraneous and social factors were more amenable to adopt Islam; the migrants from Mecca therefore were mostly below forty and this movement had the support of the middle class in addition to that of the dispossessed.
6. There is a marked difference between the Meccan and Medinese verses; the former are terse, more vigorous and full of intimidations to those who accumulate and hoard and the latter are sober, gentle and legislative. Medina had a different class composition; it had Jews who monopolised business as well as agriculture (cultivating palm dates). The power equation differed from that of Mecca. The Prophet of Islam perceived this reality and forged one community out of Jews, pagans and Muslims cutting across tribal bonds. The genius of the Prophet lay in his ability to weld all groups tribal as well as regional into one whole and give it an ideology with international trappings.
7. This movement arising from Arabia spread into two directions; towards the centre of prosperous, shrewd and powerful Umayyads in Damascus and Iranian artisans and workers in Kufa and Basrah. The Persian have-nots ultimately defeated the Umayyads and wrested political power from them. Mecca as a centre of power gradually lost its importance in Muslim politics. The conflict between Arab and non-Arab interests ultimately split into religious schism of Sunnis and Shias.
8. The conquests and expansion of trade led to greater available surplus which made it possible for the Muslim theologians, jurists and philosophers to indulge in speculative thought systems. The pinnacle of religious, social and natural sciences among the Muslims therefore, coin-

cided with the pinnacle of political power. By the time of Ghazali, the Muslim power was under eclipse and that is why he laid greater emphasis on rigid faith and vehemently opposed liberal philosophical thoughts. The *reason* was thus subordinated to dogma.

9. The Muslim Personal Law is not eternal and sacrosanct but temporal. The temporal and regional influences affected its codification. The refusal to amend or change it militates against the concept of Islamic justice. Shah Waliullah of Delhi, a great Muslim Sufi saint, himself has emphasised this.
10. The political consciousness of the Indian Muslims owes a great deal to the Muslim Ulama who were much nearer to the downtrodden and dispossessed among the Muslims and knew their plight. Despite their backward religious orientation, they were politically progressive and anti-imperialist.

Though the author has not devoted an exclusive article on post-1857 Muslim politics, his scholarly analysis of the communal conflict has brought to the fore hitherto unexplored points and his balanced views on the subject have made valuable contribution which many other books on this subject have been unable to make. It is because the undercurrents of Indian medieval history have not been rightly interpreted. Dr. Mohammad Ashraf had begun this task and Asghar Ali Engineer is continuing it.

The anthology of these essays is not merely of academic interest but is also of practical significance. The three essays are at least of direct relevance to contemporary India and have been, in all probability, inspired by such a need. I differ from the author's opinion about 'Monogamy' and 'The Ferment Among the Bohras' as well as their accent. Though, at the same time, I must admire the author's diligence and hard work on the discovery of historical continuity as regards the Muslim Personal Law. He is more likely to be condemned than appreciated for his views. This is the fate of all those who think independently of dogmas and carve out their own path.

These few lines are going to the press at a time when Pakistan — a so-called Islamic republic carved out at the cost of Indian Muslims — has declared one of the most militant, ambitious and educated Muslim sects as non-Muslim minority. The future analytical studies would discover those material and mental interests working behind this religious fanaticism. This tragic event should make those intellectuals sit up who think that the Islamic world is experiencing a new awakening based on broadened vision and new outlook. The success of oil politics has created a potentiality for social and moral renaissance among the Muslims. If it is so we may have to bridge many gaps between religion, faith and scientific quest.

Bombay,  
1st March, 1975.

DR. ZOE ANSARI

## Chapter 1

### ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM

The religion of Islam, as an ideological movement, needs to be studied—if one subscribes to the theory that the socio-economic formations of a period replicate themselves in an ideological movement—in its proper background. It is also necessary to correctly understand and analyse these socio-economic formations. Maxime Rodinson rightly points out in his book, *Mohammed*, “There are those whose enthusiasm has rendered them incapable of seeing anything in the development of ideas beyond complete, perfect and well-ordered systems appearing mysteriously in place of others of the same kind. What I am trying to show here is that an ideology was, on the contrary, built up from the elements imposed on a man by his situation and adopted by a society by reason of its situation.”<sup>1</sup> There has hardly been any attempt in India, or, for that matter, in any other country, by Marxist intellectuals to thoroughly analyse the available material on Islam — which is by no means scarce — and set this one of the most significant religious movements in its proper perspective. Whatever has so far been written on Islam from Marxist point of view is rather unimaginative and mechanical application of Marxist concepts. Marx himself was quite aware of this danger. In 1877, he wrote the following to an editor of a Russian journal: “(My critic) feels himself obliged to metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into an historic-philosophic theory of the *Marche Generale* imposed by fate upon every people. Whatever the historic circumstances in which it finds itself, in order that it may ultimately arrive at the form of economy which will ensure, together with the greatest expansion of the productive powers of social labour, the most com-



plete development of man. . . .” He further continues, “Thus events strikingly analogous but taking place in historic surroundings led to totally different results. By studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them, one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by the universal passport of a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of quoting the passage from Marx at length is to emphasise the correct understanding of Marxist methodology and to avoid the usual pitfall of mechanical application of historical materialism. It is a great pity that some of the leading Marxist intellectuals from amongst Muslims in India and abroad have dwelt on a mistaken notion of comparing Islam with communism, or, with socialism, for that matter. This is what Marx has described as supra-historical approach. I propose in this article to examine those socio-economic factors which, with reasonable certitude, can be said to have decisively influenced the birth of Islam.

Arabia is the south-western peninsula of Asia, the largest peninsula on the map of the world.<sup>3</sup> Geologists are of the opinion that the land once was the natural continuation of the Sahara (now separated from it by the rift of the Nile valley and the great chasm of the Red Sea) and of the sandy belt which traverses Asia through central Persia and the Gobi desert. With the exception of the mountains and highlands the land consists mainly of desert and steppe. The steppes are plains between hills covered with sand and its bosom contains subterranean water. Agriculture is very scanty and is possible only in oases. This scanty agriculture can provide sustenance, at a subsistence level of course, to a very limited number of people. It just could not have provided—it is important to note—enough surplus for flowering of any brilliant civilization.

Within Arabia, three zones can be distinguished that differ widely from each other in social structure and in political and economic organisation: the Arab East which includes Syria (embracing present-day states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel), and Iraq; the countries of the Nile which means Egypt

and the Sudan; and the Arab West stretching from Libya to the Atlantic and including the present-day states of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. Egypt alone, in this group, has always been and still is, the peasant civilisation. (Although it may not have been a feudal civilisation in the customary sense).

Southern Arabia has had its own distinct features. In fact the division between the South and the North was very deep-rooted indeed. Joel Carmichael says in his book *The Shaping Of The Arabs*, "The division may be rooted in the factual situation of the nomadism of the peoples of the north and the sedentary and agricultural condition of the south. This division was felt to be so strong indeed, that it served the fourteenth century Arab historian Ibn-Khaldun as the frame-work of his whole view of world history, which he conceived of as the result of the reciprocal interaction between the Bedouin and the city dwellers."<sup>4</sup> In southern Arabia there was a highly developed civilization, Sabaeen, Minaean, and Qatabanian, based on agriculture and spice traffic; and trade with the outside world brought prosperity to its people more than a thousand years before the Christian era. The Arab kingdoms in the south dammed the water courses, built castles and temples, and developed agriculture of their country to a remarkable degree. They pushed their trade centres far into the north.<sup>5</sup> In historical times waves after waves of Arabs have come up from southern and central Arabia and found their way into the settled lands of the fertile crescent, urged on by poverty and hunger. Settlements and oases can support only a limited number of inhabitants; the pasturage of the steppes can support only a limited number of camels and herds, and when that number is exceeded a war of conquest or annual raids on the settlements are the only alternatives to starvation.

The great conquests of Islam of the north-east and the north-west countries with the help of the Bedouins of the desert represent a similar phenomenon of increasing pressure on the land resulting in mass migration towards the north. This had repeatedly happened in the history of the Arabs. Whenever

some calamity afflicted the south, people migrated towards the north in search of livelihood. The breaking of the great dam of Ma'rib is one such occasion which has been immortalised in the Islamic literature. Al-Isfahani, who devotes the eighth book of his annals which was finished in A.D. 961, to Himyarite kings, puts this event four hundred years before Islam. But, it seems, Yaqut comes nearer the truth when he ascribes it to the reign of the Abyssinians. The breach, it appears, was then restored. But the final catastrophe alluded to in the Koran (34 : 15) may have taken place after 542 and before 570 according to Philip K. Hitti.<sup>5</sup> This breach dealt a severe blow to the sedentary civilisation of southern Arabia. Prof. R. A. Nicholson says, "Mention has frequently been made of the bursting of the Dyke Ma'rib, which caused an extensive movement of Yemenite stocks to the north. The invaders halted in the Hijaz and, having almost exterminated the Jurhumites, resumed their journey. One group, however — the Banu Khuza'a, led by their chief Luhayy — settled in the neighbourhood of Mecca."<sup>7</sup> In his correspondence with Marx, Engels has also taken note of this fact. Says he, "This artificial fertilization of the land which immediately ceased when the irrigation system fell into decay, explains the otherwise curious fact that whole stretches which were once brilliantly cultivated are now waste and bare (Palmyra, Petra, the ruins in the Yemen, districts in Egypt, Persia and Hindustan); it explains the fact that one single devastating war could depopulate a country for centuries and strip it of its whole civilization. Here too, I think, comes in the destruction of the South Arabian trade, before Mohammed, which you very rightly regard as one of the chief factors in the Mohammedan revolution."<sup>8</sup>

This massive movement of population towards Hijaz, central Arabia and the north had its own repercussions on the economic situation. However, there were other complicating factors which also seriously disrupted the set pattern of that region's economy. Due to constant friction between the Byzantine and Persian empires the trade routes were in a state of flux so to say. It was ultimately, doubtless, the evolution of the trade routes that brought about zigzags and unpredictable fluctuations in the

history of the Arabs. In the second half of the sixth century A.D., for instance, the Euphrates Persian trade route, which had hitherto benefited by the commerce between the Mediterranean and the further east lands, was encumbered and made dangerous by the constant friction between the Byzantine and Persian empires with concomitant tariffs, political rivalries and general chaos. Egypt too was in a state of disarray, and, consequently, it could not have provided an alternative route. Businessmen, thus had to take recourse to another difficult, although more peaceful route, leading from Syria down through western Arabia to the Yemenite ports that served the Indian trade. Yemen itself fell under foreign rule and by this time Palmyra and Nabatea in the north had quite disappeared. This was the right time for Mecca to fill this socio-economic vacuum.

Mecca had doubtless arisen because of its location along the spice route leading from southern to northern Arabia; it was probably a way station, favoured as the hub of lines leading to the Mediterranean, the Persian gulf, the Red sea through Jidda, and overseas to Africa.<sup>9</sup> At this point it is important to note that the country of Arabia mainly could be divided into two parts: a) the urban and b) the nomadic. Mecca was one of the most important urban centres where complex commercial operations were carried out. The people who inhabited these urban areas were originally of nomadic stock. The urbanisation of the Bedouins (Arab nomads) has also had a long history. Faced with acute economic crisis or long spell of drought, they would migrate and invade the fertile areas further north. Thus, Engels in a letter to Marx, refers to this when he says, "With regard to the great Arabian invasion of which we spoke previously: the Bedouins made periodic invasions, just like the Mongols, the Assyrian Empire as well as the Babylonian was founded by Bedouin tribes, on the same spot where later the caliphate of Baghdad arose. The founders of the Babylonian Empire, the Chaldeans, still exist under the same name, Beni Chaled (Beni Khaled?), in the same locality."<sup>10</sup>

Mecca, thus, was fast developing into the most important commercial centre. It had grown into the intellectual and poli-

tical leader of Western Arabia. Writes H. A. R. Gibb, "A busy and wealthy commercial town, almost monopolising the entrepot trade between the Indian ocean and the Mediterranean, it recalls Palmyra without the flashy Greek veneer. Its citizens, while preserving a certain native Arab simplicity in their manners and institutions, had acquired a wide knowledge of men and cities in their intercourse, commercial and diplomatic with Arab tribesmen and Roman officials."<sup>11</sup> The nomadic tribal structure, under the pressure of the new commercial pattern of life, was disintegrating and a new relationship, cutting across the tribal barriers was evolving. The understanding of this phenomenon is essential to grasp the significance of the movement which emerged in the shape of Islam. Shortly we would take an account of this significant factor. Let us first understand the tribal scene which made no mean contribution to the Islamic ideology, although, it was, in no sense, its desiderative expression.

Ibn Khaldun, a versatile genius and a very perceptive and analytical historian of 14th century Arabia, has devoted a whole chapter of his *Muqaddimah* to the Bedouins and their characteristics. He compares and contrasts them with other tribals and their ways of life. According to him, "...the Bedouins are a savage nation, fully accustomed to savagery and the things that cause it. Savagery has become their character and nature. They enjoy it, because it means freedom from authority and no subservience to leadership. Such a natural disposition is the negation and antithesis of civilization. All the customary activities of the Bedouins lead to wandering and movement. This is the antithesis and negation of stationariness, which produces civilization... Furthermore, it is their nature to plunder whatever other people possess. Their sustenance lies wherever the shadow of their lances falls. They recognize no limit in taking the possessions of other people. Whenever their eyes fall upon some property, furnishings, or utensils, they take them... Furthermore, every Bedouin is eager to be the leader. There is scarcely one among them who would cede his power to another, even to his father, his brother, or the eldest member of his family."<sup>12</sup>

The Bedouins are largely dependent on camel and for that they move around more and have to make deeper inroads into the desert in search of pasturage as the hilly pastures with their plants and shrubs do not provide enough subsistence for camels. Thus they become eminently suited to cross—otherwise impossible to negotiate—deserts. For long distance trade caravans passing through deserts of the Western Arabia, the Bedouins — a hardy race — were the only suitable people. According to Prof. R. A. Nicholson, “The tribal constitution was a democracy guided by its chief men, who derived their authority from noble blood, noble character, wealth, wisdom, and experience. The chiefs, however, durst not lay commands or penalties on their fellow-tribesmen. Every man ruled himself, and was free to rebuke presumption in others. ‘If you are our lord’ (i.e. if you act discreetly as a sayyid should), ‘you will lord over us, but if you are a prey to pride, go and be proud!’ (i.e. we will have nothing to do with you).”<sup>13</sup> Loyalty in the mouth of a pagan Arab did not mean allegiance to his superiors, but faithful devotion to his equals; and it was closely connected with the idea of kinship. The family and the tribe, which included strangers living in the tribe under a covenant or protection — to defend these, individually and collectively, was a sacred duty. Honour required that a man should stand by his own people through thick and thin.<sup>14</sup>

Let us now turn to the city of Mecca which is the cradle of Islam. Mecca lies in a gorge in a range of mountains running parallel to the coast, the mountains being black and yellow, bare, rocky with no scrap of soil and sharp and jagged. The valley has been carved out by the wadi, by particularly violent rainstorms which, at times, cause heavy flooding. However, these rainstorms are erratic and last for a short while. Here, as at many other places in Arabia, no agriculture is possible. The valley of Mecca is arid and barren. Long before the Christian era, two considerable trading centres had evolved viz., Macoraba (i.e. Mecca) and, some distance North, Yathrippa (Yathrib). Mecca was also a sanctuary of longstanding, probably because of the famous well of Zamzam which supplied the settlement

with water. Mecca became a trading centre, probably as a result of its admirable situation at the junction of a road going from north to south, from Palestine to the Yemen, with others from east to west, connecting the Red Sea coast and the route to Ethiopia with the Persian Gulf. This trading centre was a safe haven from the devastating blood-feuds between various tribes as the custom did not permit molestation in this sanctuary. Merchants got security from the ravaging plunders of the Bedouins.

By the end of the 5th century A.D., a strong man called Qusayy gained control of the town and the temple. He belonged to the tribe of Quraysh, an assemblage of various clans which, through him, supplanted the Khuza'a. Probably Qusayy brought back from Syria the cult of the goddesses al-'Uzza and Manat, and combined it with that of Hubal, the idol of Khuza'a. The traditional legend tells us that the four chief sons of 'Abd Manaf, one of Qusayy's sons, had divided among themselves the areas where trade could be developed. One went to Persia, another to Ethiopia, third to the Yemen and the fourth to Byzantine Syria. The tribe of Quraysh did everything to promote the commercial development of Mecca and in course of time became the most dominant tribe so much so that it thought it to be its prerogative to rule after the death of the prophet by coining the tradition that the caliph could come only from amongst the Quraysh though this militated against the concept of equal rights accorded to all the Muslims irrespective of their tribal associations. The later Kharjite movement was, among other things, inspired by the egalitarian ideals of the Bedouins. It was a revolt against the monopoly of power by the townsmen in general and the Quaraysh in particular. Thus by about the sixth century, the tribe of Quraysh was successful in establishing their commercial hegemony. Their caravans travelled far and wide to the cardinal points of international trade.

Important merchants of Mecca had grown extremely rich and controlled the commanding heights of the mercantile economy. The city of Mecca had grown into an important centre of international trade. The merchants from different nations gathered at Mecca to launch new enterprises. It had

also gathered a vast body of craftsmen who depended on the rich merchants of Mecca for their livelihood. According to W. Montgomery Watt, "Mecca was more than a mere trading centre, it was a financial centre. . . . But it is clear that financial operations of considerable complexity were carried on at Mecca. The leading men of Mecca in Muhammad's time were above all financiers, skilful in the manipulations of credit, shrewd in their speculations, and interested in any potentialities of lucrative investment from Aden to Gaza or Damascus. In the financial net that they had woven not merely were all the inhabitants of Mecca caught, but many notables of the surrounding also. The Quran appeared not in the atmosphere of the desert, but in that of high finance."<sup>15</sup>

In our study it is important to note that the city of Mecca did not have any traditional organ of government, bureaucracy or standing army. In fact, though the tribal structure was disintegrating, the nomadic influences were quite strong. The only organ of government in Mecca was the senate or mala'a. The senate mainly consisted of representatives of the various clans. Another important thing to note is that the council was only a deliberative body and had no executive of its own. Moreover each constituent clan was theoretically independent and therefore, was not bound by any of its decisions. The only effective decisions were the unanimous ones. No taxes were levied or collected. One of the important contributions of the prophet was to develop state machinery which, of course, remained in primitive shape during his life-time. The Arabs, as pointed out above, even in the primarily commercial city of Mecca, were, although partially, under the influence of certain tribal institutions. The commercial oligopoly did, at the most, tolerate institutions like mala'a (senate). It was quite averse to the institution of kingship, as any commercial society should be. Feudalism and kingship can develop only in an agricultural society.

The surplus in the trading city of Mecca came not from agriculture, but, from long distance commerce. Consequently, the socio-economic formations of that society were completely



different from those of an agricultural society. Mere mechanical application of Marxism has caused much confusion about the origin and development of Islam. The absence of solar calendar in Islam can also be explained on this basis. Changing seasons and information of the rainy season are of integral significance in an agricultural society. In any agricultural society the seasons are integrally linked to the calendar months as the sowing, ripening and harvesting depends on certain seasons. Seasons are, in turn inextricably linked with solar movements. In a non-agricultural society like that of Mecca, solar calendar does not fulfil any economic function and, therefore, it is not felt necessary to develop it. The lunar month is easy to observe even with naked eyes and does not entail astronomical calculations. The fact that in the lunar calendar, months were not linked with seasons was not of much economic significance in a desert country or commercial society like Mecca. Certain months, in whichever season they fell, were declared sacred and the sanctity of these months was strictly observed. This strict observance of the sanctity of these months was an economic necessity as all the intertribal hostilities completely ceased during these months and the people gathered at Mecca for annual pilgrimage. This also resulted in brisk commercial activities. Hence the importance of pilgrimage to Mecca before and after the Prophet.

After the monumental conquests of agriculturally rich foreign lands, the centre of power gravitated to Syria (during Umayyad caliph Mu'aviya's time), and later on to Baghdad (during Abbasid's time). Both of these cities were in fertile region and were closer to the Byzantine and Sassanid empires respectively. After the shift in power centre, Mecca lost its importance as a centre of trade and was relegated to a secondary place while retaining religious sanctity. Coming back to our point, immediately before the prophet of Islam appeared on the scene, the tribal pattern of life in Mecca was undergoing important changes under the strains and stresses of commercial life. The tribal solidarity was paling into insignificance and the norms of tribal life were being fast neglected by the affluent and powerful merchants. The large body of the craftsmen who were

needed by the prosperous merchants, the poor of the tribes and slaves (mostly of foreign origin) were subjected to new and untold economic hardships and nursed a sense of grievance against the dominating tribes. Thus says H. A. R. Gibb, "But there was a darker side to the prosperity of Mecca. It displayed the familiar evils of a wealthy commercial society, extremes of wealth and poverty, an underworld of slaves and hirelings, and social class-barriers. It is clear from Mohammed's fervent denunciations of social injustice and fraud that this was one of the deep inner causes of his unsettlement. But the ferment within him did not break out in the preaching of social revolution; it was thrust instead into a religious channel and issued in a deep and unshakable conviction that he was called by God to proclaim to his fellow-citizens the old warning of the Semitic prophets: "Repent, for the judgement of God is at hand."<sup>16</sup>

There are many verses in the Koran wherein the evils of riches have been denounced. "Let no misers who hoard the gifts of Allah think that their avarice is good for them; it is nothing but evil. The riches which they have piled shall become their fetters on the Day of Resurrection. It is Allah who will inherit the heavens and the earth. He is cognizant of all your actions."<sup>17</sup> Again in another verse Allah warns, "As for the unbelievers, neither their riches nor their children shall in the least protect them from His scourge. They are the heirs of Hell, and there they shall remain for ever. The wealth they spend in this world is like a freezing wind that smites the cornfields of men who have wronged themselves, laying them waste. Allah is not unjust to them; they are unjust to their own souls."<sup>18</sup> Many such verses could be cited to show Mohammad's concern for the underdogs of his society. The tribal structure, as pointed out earlier, was disintegrating under the strain of a fast-developing commercial society and individualism was acquiring more importance as it should in a commercial milieu of Mecca. The newly emergent pattern of individualism is obvious from the behaviour of various individuals as recorded in the history of Islam.

Tendency to individualism and away from the tribal solidarity was fostered in Mecca by the circumstances of commercial life.

Though public order depended on the clan system, yet in general a single family, even an individual with his dependents, could constitute a viable unit. So we find frequently men acting in opposition to their clans. Abu Lahab adopted a different attitude towards Muhammad from most of the rest of Hashim... Muhammad's earliest followers became Muslims despite the disapproval of their clans, and even of their parents. Business partnerships, it is important to note, seem sometimes to have cut across clan relationships.<sup>19</sup> Further, Montgomery Watt has very aptly observed, "At the same time there was an interesting new phenomenon in Mecca—the appearance of a sense of unity based on common material interests. It was this rather than the fact that they all belonged to Quraysh that led the Ahlaf and the Mutayyabun to compose their quarrel. It was this again that led to the forgetting of rivalries and the formation of a 'coalition government' after the defeat at Badr. The significance of this is that it marks a weakening of the bond of kinship by blood, and reveals the opportunity for establishing a wider unity on a new basis. If we are to look for an economic change correlated with the origin of Islam, then it is here that we must look... In the rise of Mecca to wealth and power we have a movement from a nomadic economy to a mercantile and capitalist economy."<sup>20</sup> From the Marxist point of view, it is important to understand these significant changes taking place in the social and economic structure of the society which was emerging on the scene.

The breaking up of the tribal system threw up its own problems. It gave rise to conflicts and tensions which, till Mohammad's rise to prophethood, were largely unresolved. In a pastoral or nomadic society, tribal collectivism and its unwritten, yet rigidly observed code of conduct, prevent conflict between individuals, though intertribal conflicts generate prolonged spells of bellicosity and war. The tribal literature, therefore, abounds in proud descriptions of honour and glory of the tribe in trouncing its rival tribe. Such a society does not produce great plays or epic poetry due to absence of individual conflict which is so necessary for producing them. The pre-Islamic Arabic poetry also sings the tribal glory and ex-

presses the ethos of bravery, generosity, honour and genealogical superiority. The Arabic poetry naturally lacked the drama of individual conflict in Jahilliya period. But due to the establishment of mercantile society, individualism was fast appearing on the scene. Mohammad had to tackle this 'malaise' of individualism in the back-drop of a disintegrating tribal society. What has been very aptly described by Montgomery Watt as tribal humanism<sup>21</sup> was the effective religion of the Arabs of Mohammad's day, though it, too, was declining. This is the religion we find in the poets of Jahilliyah. For the poets, what gives life a meaning is to belong to a tribe which can boast notable deeds of bravery and generosity, and to have some share in these oneself.

From this standpoint, the realisation of human excellence in action is an end in itself, and at the same time usually contributes to the survival of the tribe, which is the other great end of life. This is humanism in the sense that it is primarily in human values, in virtuous or manly conduct (*Muruah*), that it finds significance. But it differs from most modern humanism in that it thinks of the tribe rather than the individuals as the locus of values. For Mohammad the most important religious problem was this breakdown of tribal humanism, in face of the more individualistic organisation of society. Mohammad's genius saw the dawn of a new era based on relations which transcended tribal relations in an urban milieu like that of Mecca which, by then, had already been catapulted into an international centre of trade. Mohammad evolved a concept of *ummah* i.e. a community which transcended all tribal barriers. Tribal barriers in Mohammad's time had become a stumbling block for the forward march of the commercial society of Mecca. When Mohammad migrated to Yathrib (Medina i.e. the city of the prophet), he drew up an outline of agreement between various tribes, Emigrants, Helpers and Jews.

This very remarkable document, which bears testimony to Mohammad's political genius, has been preserved for the posterity by Ibn Hisham in his biography of Muhammad, pp. 341-344. This document for the first time introduced the

concept of Ummah i.e. community among the Arabs. It was a very tactful and cautious reform and nothing short of the beginning of the revolution. Muhammad did not openly strike against the independence of the tribes, but he destroyed its power structure, in effect, by shifting the centre of power from tribe to the community. Although, to begin with, the community included the Jews, Pagan Arabs as well as Muslims, he fully understood, what his opponents failed to see, that the Muslims were the most active, and must soon be the most predominant, partners in the newly founded state.

In the early phase of Islamic movement, it is important to note certain essential points about the supporters and opponents of Muhammad. It would be interesting to know that the young Islam was essentially a movement of young men as pointed out by an Egyptian writer, 'Abd al-Muta 'al as-Saidi.<sup>22</sup> The great majority of those whose ages have been recorded were below forty at the time of migration (hijra). These persons were converted at least eight to ten years before it. Though Muhammad's exhortations to the rich not to hoard or be arrogant about their wealth appealed to the downtrodden and the slaves and orphans etc., his supporters did not come only from this class. They were not all down-and-outs, scum of the population with no strong tribal affiliations. In fact many of them belonged to the leading tribes. As in our own time, middle class intelligentsia, being conscious of social and political processes, but nursing a sense of deprivation, plays an important role in social transformation, so did it happen with the followers of Mohammad who also belonged to the middle stratum of the Meccan society which had developed, to a fairly good degree, antagonistic class relations. These people belonging to the middle echelon were quite conscious of the prevailing disparity between them and those at top and were beginning to feel that they were underprivileged in the society dominated by the rich and powerful merchants.

But this does not mean that Mohammad had no followers from amongst the downtrodden or the poorest section of the society. There were a number of slaves of foreign origin who

had been persecuted by their masters and who saw a glimpse of a chance of their liberation in the proclamations of Mohammad to set the slaves free. There also were lowly-paid craftsmen who either had foreign origins or belonged to those tribes which did not enjoy any prestige for having no monopoly of trade. In one Surah, the God declares, "Have you thought of him who denies the Last Judgement? It is he who turns away the orphan and does not urge others to feed the poor. Woe to those who pray but are heedless in their prayer; who make a show of piety and give no alms to the destitute."<sup>23</sup> In the Meccan period, a number of such verses can be found exhorting the rich merchants to feed the poor or not to hoard wealth. In another Meccan surah called 'The Slanderer', Mohammad says, "Woe to all back-biting slanderers who amass riches and sedulously hoard them, thinking that their treasures will render them immortal! By no means! They shall be flung to the Destroying Flame. Would that you knew what the Destroying Flame is like! It is Allah's own kindled fire, which will rise up to the hearts of men. It will close upon them from every side, in towering columns."<sup>24</sup>

Such verses reassured the oppressed people of some chance of bettering their plight and they threw in their lot with Mohammad. When the dominant class of merchants in Mecca started persecuting Mohammad's followers, some of them who belonged to one or the other tribe took shelter with their tribes; but those who did not belong to any of these tribes in Mecca or who were slaves of foreign origin found the going very tough. When persecution became intolerable, Mohammed had to order his followers to migrate to Abyssinia. Why did Mohammad choose Abyssinia? Could he be trying to attack Meccan trade as he did later from Medina? Or was he trying to develop an alternate trade route from the South to the Byzantine empire, out of reach of Meccan traders, to break the monopoly of the Meccan capitalists? One can only hazard the guess. Even if Mohammad had any such designs, it did not work out that way or nothing of the sort was intended.

Now let us examine the motives of Mohammad's opponents. Were his opponents enraged by his sacrilegious attacks on the pagan gods? This does not appear likely. Anything coming

nearer to religion was, what I have described above, 'tribal humanism'. Though tribal humanism had lost its appeal in urban centres like Mecca, where individualism was striking its roots in the soil of mercantile capitalism, the pagan cult of Al-Lat, Al-'Uzza or Manah had not gripped the minds of Meccans either. These deities, as all available evidence points out, originally belonged to the agricultural communities of the north and were transplanted, in all probability, through trade contacts, to the urban centres of central Arabia wherein around seventeen percent of the population lived. These goddesses (daughters of Allah as the Arabs of Jahilliyah believed) belonged to fertility cults. Herodotus mentions goddess Al-Lat under the name Alilat among the Nabataean deities. Manah, as an independent deity, her name, associated with dhu-al-Shara, appears in the Nabataean inscriptions of al-Hijr. Thus it can be seen that the merchant capitalists of Mecca, having no roots in the fertility cults of agricultural civilization, had no great attachment to these deities whom they formally worshipped, but never made them a matter of deep spiritual experience. Why then the opposition to Mohammad? In the opinion of H.A.R. Gibb, "The resistance of the Meccans appears to have been due not so much to their conservatism or even to religious disbelief (though they ridiculed Mohammad's doctrine of resurrection) as to political and economic causes. They were afraid of the effects that his preaching might have on their economic prosperity, and especially that his pure monotheism might injure the economic assets of their sanctuaries. In addition they realized more quickly than Mohammad himself did that their acceptance of his teaching would introduce a new and formidable kind of political authority into their oligarchic community."<sup>25</sup> Any mercantile community is generally averse to accept pre-eminent position of any one individual, or allow him to assume unrestrained authority. If the powerful merchants of Mecca had accepted Mohammad's claim of prophethood, prudence and wisdom, they would have had to concede — what would have amounted to — a position of absolute power to him. How could they refuse to abide by his injunctions once they accepted his august office of prophethood?

The senate (mala'a) was the best possible organ where the merchants could have equitable distribution of power. It is interesting to note that there was no word for 'king' in current usage in Arabic language at that time. The word 'malik' was used only for foreign kings or despots like those of Byzantine, Sassanid or Ghasanid rulers.

There is one more instance also which shows how Arab merchants of Mecca were quite averse to being ruled by any single powerful individual. The incident of Uthman b. Huwayrith, as developed by Lammens, makes interesting reading. Uthman, a merchant, entertained some ambitions of his own to achieve pre-eminent position with the help of a foreign power, in this case Byzantine. He adopted Christianity and received some measure of support. This was, perhaps, part of the Byzantine reaction to the Persian conquest of the south. But soon the wealthy merchants of Mecca became suspicious. The overt act which, it appears, led to the wreck of 'Uthman's scheme was his denunciation, as inspiring to kingship, by the person of his own clan of Asad, al-Aswad b. Al-Muttalib. 'Uthman ultimately failed in his design. It is also important to note that the Arabs were quite conscious of their strong position as suppliers of goods which were very much in demand in Byzantine. Mohammad grew to maturity in such an atmosphere of high politics and had to be very cautious in his moves to trounce his enemies at their own game. Mohammad's political acumen ultimately led him to victory whereas his lesser enemies failed. This was one of the important reasons why merchants of Mecca, who were normally indifferent to religion, became inveterate enemies of Mohammad.

Now the question may arise as to why Mohammad received enthusiastic support in Medina (Yathrib) when he was faced with so much opposition in Mecca? Yathrib (Jathrippa of Ptolemy), lay some 3000 miles north of Mecca and, in a way, was much more favoured by nature than its southern sister. This city lay on the spice road, which connected Yaman with Syria. It was a veritable oasis where date-palms were cultivated. Jewish inhabitants, the banu-Nadir and banu-Qurayzah had converted it



into a leading agricultural centre. These Jews, judging from their Aramaean vocabulary used in their agricultural life and their proper names, appear to be Judaized clans of Arabian and Aramean stock,<sup>26</sup> though the nucleus may have been Israelites who fled from Palestine at the time of its conquest by the Romans in the first century after Christ. The two leading non-Jewish and Arabian tribes were the Aws and Khazraj, who, it appears, originally came from al-Yaman. Medina, moreover, was not a city of our usual conception. It was rather a series of settlements scattered over an oasis, or tract of fertile country, of perhaps some twenty square miles surrounded by hills, rocks, and stony ground—all uncultivable. The agricultural operations, however, did not yield much surplus. It was sheer subsistence agriculture. Though Medina partly benefited from the trade caravans, it did not have a wealthy and powerful group of merchants as the town of Mecca had. So there was less individualism than in the Mercantile atmosphere of Mecca. Whereas there (i.e. at Mecca) various tribes entered into alliance to guard their material interests (the Ahlaf and the Mutayyabun had composed their differences in Mecca), at Medina the two principal tribes were fighting fierce battles against each other. Due to absence of commercial activities on as large a scale as in Mecca, the tribal bonds were stronger and blood relationship valued much more than in Mecca. The concepts of valour, prowess and honour of one's tribe led to prolonged warfare which had exhausted either parties and were in need of an arbiter who enjoyed unstinted support.

Medina, in a way, suffered from the same malaise as Mecca i.e. incompatibility of sedentary life with that of nomadic one but its symptoms were different as tribal solidarity was still intact due to lesser degree of mercantile activities. Mohammad thus found willing supporters in Medina who welcomed him as the saviour from the basic malaise of their society. Mohammad had a unique opportunity to translate his ideas into practice. He displayed his political genius by drawing up an agreement between various tribes, Jews, Muslims and pagans as already discussed above. This agreement, while ending intertribal warfare, enabled Mohammad to assume a position of supreme importance,

something he was denied by the wealthy oligarchs of Mecca. In Medina there was no such group to challenge the supremacy of Mohammad. By the new agreement which Mohammad drew up, a community came into existence which transcended all the conventional blood or tribal barriers. This was the need of the hour as the tribal relations of production and existence were becoming an intolerable strain on further progress. The nomadic or pastoral life was being transformed into an organised urban life.

It should, however, be clearly borne in mind that in these urban areas there was no institution of landed properties. Even in Medina which was a veritable oasis, agriculture had not developed to an extent to give rise to individual ownership. The cultivable lands were collectively owned. In Mecca too, there was total absence of landed property. Some Meccan magnates did own land in the neighbouring oasis of at-Taif. But this was more of a summer resort for them due to its much better climate. The Meccan merchants constructed villas for vacationing in summer. Banu Thaqif lived in Taif and their distinctive feature was that they lived on cereals whereas other Arabs were content with dates and milk. In view of the absence of any landed property or individual ownership of land for agricultural purposes, it would be wrong to see early Islam in feudal setting as has been so often done. It is wrong and erroneous application of Marxist methodology. Equally wrong it is to see a replica of socialism in Islam as many Muslim intellectuals connected with the communist movement have so often done for reasons of political expediency or lack of proper understanding of the origin and development of Islam. This is not to deny the fact that Islam did play a progressive role in as much as it dissolved the relations based on pastoral and nomadic life and led to a higher form of civilization which was urban and mercantile in character.

It would be equally interesting to examine the international situation and political high drama at the time which bore its unmistakable marks on the emergent movement of Islam. Before we examine this, it would be relevant to have a word about Christianity which was the official religion of the Byzantine

empire — one of the most important powers Islam had to reckon with. Christianity, which subsequently became the religion of the Roman empire, was, to begin with a religion of those who were brutally oppressed and mercilessly exploited by the tyrannical rule of the Roman emperors. As Engels rightly points out, "Religions are founded by people who feel a need for religion themselves and have a feeling for the religious needs of the masses."<sup>27</sup> This applies very aptly to the genesis of Christianity. Of all the people in the Roman provinces, the lot of poor freemen and slaves who themselves were once freemen or sons of freemen, was the worst. The situation for them was hopeless. They saw no possibility of rescuing themselves from the iron clutches of the Roman tyrants. For them the flight from disheartening external world into internal world was inevitable. Among them the hatred of their condition of life was very strong. Thus it was in the midst of this general economic, political, intellectual and moral degeneration that Christianity appeared on the scene. It provided solace to the discordant and dispirited humanity in the subjugated Roman province. Christianity did not spark off revolt against the Roman tyrants; instead, it attempted to provide solace against the unbearable external conditions — a balm for the injured souls. In times to come, it evolved its concocted dogmas based on Oriental religious ideas, Greek rationalism and the Stoic doctrines. In this form it became palatable to Rome itself against whom it was originally intended to protest. Emperor Constantine saw in the adoption of this religion the best means of exalting himself to the position of an autocrat of the Roman world. A religious challenge was thus conveniently blunted by the Roman emperor by incorporating it in his imperial system. It totally failed as a challenge to the Hellenic domination of the east.

Islam, on the contrary, was the religion of the dominant and powerful mercantile bourgeoisie of Mecca. The Meccan merchants had their own ambitions and wanted to steer clear of both the major powers i.e. the Byzantine and the Sassanid empires. Their main objective was to carry on their trade maintaining their independence. They largely succeeded in preserv-

ing their independent position, aided no doubt, by an impenetrable desert which foreign powers dreaded. Moreover, the Byzantine greatly depended for luxury items on the Meccan merchants. "The objects of trade from East to West were Indian and Chinese goods, the products of Iraq and Iran, and those of Yemen and Hadramaut. The first included live animals and birds (as curiosities), furs and hides, Kashmir wool, musk, ivory (mostly from Abyssinia), pearls, mother of pearl, precious and semi-precious stones, lac (red dye), and, most important of all, silk. Among vegetable products were pepper (very important), ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, spikenard, nutmegs, indigo, a little cotton, and precious wood (ebony, rose wood, sandal wood). All these were high priced luxury articles, which would carry heavy transport charges and tariffs."<sup>28</sup> The traders of Mecca were quite conscious of their important role, and, there was an undercurrent of an ideology which, to satisfy the aspirations of these merchants, could create an effective system of security to carry on the trade peacefully. Thus, unlike Christianity, their ideology could not have been an ideology of the suppressed people to find solace from the unbearable conditions of life. Quite naturally, therefore, whereas Christianity as a reaction against Hellenism failed, Islam proved successful. Prof. Toynbee very aptly remarks, "Again, the intrusion of Hellenism upon the Syriac world in the train of Alexander the Great presented a standing challenge to the Syriac Society. Was it, or was it not, to rise up against the intrusible civilization and cast it out? Confronted with this challenge, the Syriac Society made a number of attempts to respond, and these attempts all had one common feature. In every instance the anti-Hellenic reaction took a religious movement for its Vehicle. Nevertheless there was a fundamental difference between the first four of these reactions and the last one. The Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Nestorian and the Monophysite reactions were failures; the Islamic reaction was a success."<sup>29</sup> He further says, "The Emperor Heraclitus himself was condemned not to taste of death until he had seen 'Umar the Successor of Muhammad the Prophet coming into his kingdom to undo, utterly and for ever, the work of all the Hellenisers

of Syriac domains from Alexander onwards. For Islam succeeded where its predecessors had failed. It completed the eviction of Hellenism from the Syriac world. It reintegrated, in the Arab Caliphate, the Syriac Universal state which Alexander had ruthlessly cut short, before its mission had been fulfilled, when he overthrew the Persian Achaemenidae. Finally, Islam endowed the Syriac Society, at last, with an indigenous universal church and thereby enabled it, after centuries of suspended animation, to give up the ghost in the assurance that it would not now pass away without leaving offspring; for the Islamic Church became the chrysalis out of which the new Arabic and Iranic civilizations were in due course to emerge."<sup>30</sup> Though Prof. Toynbee — a bourgeois historian — makes a statement with a penetrating insight, he does not give any indication about the reasons which brought about this revolution in the eastern Hellenic society.

As already explained, Christianity—though a religious protest movement of the underdogs of the Roman eastern provinces — was, in times to come, itself hellenised with the admixture of Greek rationalism, doctrines of Stoic philosophy and native eastern nomadic or pastoral cults. In this form, it was embraced, in order to pacify the brewing discontent among the vast multitudes of slaves to whom this religion tremendously appealed, by the Roman emperor Constantine himself. The Christianity now onwards came to be identified with the oppressive rulers themselves and lost its anti-exploitative sting, whatever it had. It could only talk of 'Kingdom of heaven' to dawn in a remote future. Here and now only sufferings for the faithful in order to redeem themselves from the sinful life. Islam, on the contrary was the ideology of the powerful and ambitious mercantile bourgeoisie for whom the fruits of their endeavour should be realized here and now, within the frame-work of historical praxis. Moreover, Islam, cutting across narrow tribal bonds as it did, provided a rallying point to all the Arabs — nomads as well as townsmen. Thus Carmichael perceptibly remarks in his *The Shaping of the Arabs*, "Thus it was not Islam that brought about the folk migration, originating for quite independent reasons that united them under Islam. The expansion of the Muslim Arabs was the culmi-

nation of a long drawn-out development. What Islam changed was simply the slogan under which the general fighting was conducted, or rather, it gave this general movement a simple slogan capable of drawing all Arabs together in opposition to the great empires, which thus, after mistrusting the small buffer states of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmides, finally found themselves face to face with a far more numerous confederation of Arabian tribes temporarily unified by the simple tenets of primitive Islam."<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note, in this connection, the role played by the two buffer states of Ghassan and Lakhm in defending the interests of the two empires along whose respective borders they came into existence. About the middle of the third century of our era, Arabia was enclosed on the north and north-east by the rival empires of Rome and Persia, to which Syrian desert stretching right across the peninsula, formed a natural termination. In order to protect themselves from Bedouin raiders, who poured over the frontier-provinces, and after laying hands on all the booty within reach vanished as suddenly as they came, both powers found it necessary to plant a line of garrisons along the edge of the wilderness. In this way, the tribals were held in check, but as force alone seemed an expensive and inefficient remedy it was decided, in accordance with the well-proved maxim, *divide et impera*, to enlist a number of the offending tribes in the imperial service. Regular pay and the prospect of the immediate plunder — for in those days Rome and Persia were almost perpetually at war — were inducements that no true Bedouin could resist. The inhospitable desert of Arabia hardly provided any other worthwhile means of sustenance (except to plunder the rich trade caravans or towns-people living in urban centres). This plunder, known as Ghazva (i.e. raid), on account of its sheer economic necessity, became institutionalized. Even Mohammad made use of this to bring his recalcitrant enemies to their knees. This raid on a Meccan caravan returning from the Yemen, took place in January 624. This raid on a caravan has been much maligned by the opponents of Mohammad. Some of the Western writers have gone to the extent of calling him a

mere brigand pretending to be a prophet. They in fact try to understand Mohammad in contrast to the mystified character of Christ who surrendered himself to the Roman tyrants and sacrificed his life on the cross. Mohammad, it must be clearly understood, was a prophet as well as a statesman trying to build a state power out of the tribal wilderness in Arabia. He used the strategy of attacking a trade caravan (which was by no means unusual in those days as explained above) to strike a blow at the Meccan merchants and provide much-needed sustenance from the booty so gained to the Meccan emigrants as well as consolidate his position in the Medinan society. All these objectives were splendidly achieved by this raid and Mohammad, as a master strategist, made his presence felt. This was the beginning of the founding of an Islamic state which culminated in elevating Mohammad to the most pre-eminent position of an unchallenged ruler — something unheard of in Arabia of his days.

Coming back to the international scene, we observe that both the great powers of the day tried to woo some nomadic Bedouin tribes to protect the boundaries of their respective empires from the most dreaded raids of the Bedouins. To penetrate right into the heart of the desert to subjugate the Arabs was beyond their wildest dreams. The method both the empires employed was to support a prince on the borders between the Desert and the Sown and to see that he was strong enough to prevent the nomads from raiding the settled lands. The dynasty of Ghassan, bordering over Byzantine empire and receiving support from it, adopted Christianity. But, and it is important to note, they did not adopt orthodox christianity which was the religion of the Byzantine rulers. They rather preferred native variety called Monophysitism. Orthodox Christianity maintained an ambivalent attitude towards Monophysitism i.e. at times compromising and at times persecuting the Monophysite heretics. The persecution was scaled up if the loyalty of the prince became suspect. Thus religion was inextricably involved with politics and the significance of this was not lost on the shrewd Arabs of Mecca who wanted to maintain their distance from the overlordship of the Byzantine rulers. Lakhmidian kings were downright

enemies of the Byzantine and they, therefore, preferred a form of Christianity which was totally unpalatable to the Orthodox i.e. Nestorian or East Syrian Christianity. To assert political supremacy, the Byzantine overlords on the one hand and the Sassanids on the other, persecuted the ruling Arabs of the buffer states and thus created their own enemies. Thus writes Alfred Guillaume, "From the sixth century onwards the history of the Arab west is one long series of persecutions in the name of orthodoxy, culminating in the alienation of the Arabs and the downfall of the Greek empire in Syria. As Monophysites the Arabs steadily refused to accept the doctrine of two natures in Christ. The persecutions which these unhappy people suffered were sometimes worse than their treatment by the Muslims in subsequent years."<sup>32</sup>

When in 563 A.D., the famous Arab chief went to see the emperor of Byzantine, he carried a declaration of his faith in a written letter. The one sentence therein is characteristic of the Arab defiance and hints at the beginning of Islam. That sentence reads: "The Trinity is one Divinity, one Nature, one Essence; those who will not accept this doctrine are to be anathematized!" When two bishops refused to sign the declaration of faith he brought, Harith replied with the ominous words: "Now I know that you are heretics. We and our armies accept this doctrine, as do the orientals." Comments Alfred Guillaume, "Here plainly is a claim to a native Arab Christianity stripped of the subtle refinements of the Greek theologians, and an explicit claim to the right to defend that faith by the sword."<sup>33</sup> Thus we see that Christianity was either not acceptable to the Arabs or they accepted it in a form different from that of the Byzantine orthodox Church. This was the direct result of political collision and the pride the Arabs had in their nativity although they were subservient to the Byzantine rulers. Moreover, Christianity, even in its native Monophysite or Nestorian form, could not make much headway except in those areas which were in the sphere of influence of the two great empires. Christianity with its elaborate rituals originated in a slave-holding agricultural society and, therefore, had hardly anything appealing to the Arab ethos.



The Arabs were either nomads or townsmen. The nomadic people were, naturally, in pastoral stage, and in inhospitable desert, largely dependent on raids for their survival. The townsmen too, by and large, were unacquainted with agriculture, and depended on international commerce for their livelihood. In view of this, any religion originating in agricultural milieu would not hold any attraction for them. Neither would it fulfil any economic function. Propitiation of dieties, human sacrifice and ecstatic rituals would not capture the imagination of desert nomads for whom the only reality was the monotony of the desert; neither would it appeal to townsmen engaged in business or a variety of crafts. What would appeal to such townsmen was to emphasise notions of duty to be performed with strict regularity (as they are accustomed to this kind of psychology in their business and crafts operations and that also fulfils economic necessity), idea of recompense and simple doctrines. The freedom-loving nomads would not like this pattern of life which ideally suited the commercially-oriented townsmen. Mohammad had, therefore, great difficulty in making these tribal nomads conform to his religious doctrines and force them to follow any regular pattern of life.

But Islam, no doubt, fulfilled one vital economic necessity for them; they were united by its few simple doctrines and this unity bore them rich dividends in the form of outward expansion and rich booty in the wake of foreign conquests of wealthy empires. They paid lip service to the rigid doctrinaire and disciplinary life required of them by Islam. Their material instincts always revolted against discipline and although they became Muslims en masse, the majority of them neither believed in Islam nor knew what it meant. Often their motives were frankly utilitarian. The conquering Arabs, as the popular myth has it, never presented the alternative of Islam or death. Far from it. They were more interested in levying capitation tax i.e. Jazya which gave them economic relief. However, this capitation tax was far less oppressive than what was exacted by former imperial masters and as such the Arabs were welcomed by the native people groaning under the heavy burden imposed

on them by the Byzantine and the Sassanid rulers. There was no feudal system among the conquering Arabs and after the first flush of victory, they imposed very light impost in the form of Jazya. The peasants were, by and large, left undisturbed on their lands. This was a great boon for the poor peasants and they gladly agreed to pay jazya. A statement attributed to the people of Hims is representative of the sentiment cherished by the native Syrians towards the new conquerors: "We like your rule and justice far better than the state of oppression and tyranny under which we have been living."<sup>34</sup> Again, according to Philip K. Hitti, "This 'easy conquest' of the land had its own special causes. The Hellenistic culture imposed on the land since its conquest by Alexander (332 B.C.) was only skin-deep and limited to the urban population. The rural people remained ever conscious of cultural and racial differences between themselves and their masters. This racial antipathy between the Semitic population of Syria and the Greek rulers was augmented by sectarian differences. . . . But the bulk of the population of Syria remained Monophysite. Behind their development and maintenance of a separate Syrian church there undoubtedly lay a submerged, semi-articulate feeling of nationality."<sup>35</sup>

Thus the spread of Islam was brought about, not by the popular notion of 'Islam or Death', but by a variety of factors, among which, the economic one was predominant. In course of time the Arabs in the conquered territories formed an exclusive military class, living in great camps and supported by revenues derived from the non-Muhammedan population. Out of such camps arose two cities destined to make their mark in literary history — Basra on the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates, and Kufa, which was founded about the same time on the western branch of the latter stream, not far from Hira. It is interesting to note in this connection that these revenues on which the military camps depended were far more important than the commitment to faith. Rueben Levy says in *Social Structure of Islam*, "A similar conflict between the claims of faith and those of Royal treasury took place in 728, under caliph Hisham, when the Governor of Khurasan Ashrab ibn Abdullah, planned to

convert all the inhabitants of Transoxiana to Islam by offering freedom from taxation as an inducement. The Muslim missionaries who were sent out were so successful that protests were raised not only by the revenue officials, whose perquisites depended on the sums they collected but also by the local chieftans (the dihqans) who had reason to fear considerable harm to their own prestige if the democratic faith of Islam took too firm a hold on the peasantry. The arguments of the treasury officers were at last able to convince the governor that since the Arab garrisons in Persia depended on the revenues collected locally, they would soon be reduced to starvation if all taxes were remitted. He accordingly reimposed the Kharaj or land tax, on everyone who had formerly been liable to it and whether they had submitted to the test of circumcision or not. The result of this change of policy was wholesale rebellion, which for some years lost the Arabs the whole of Transoxiana except small regions about Dabusia and Samarqand. Some of the lost territory was regained for Islam — though not for the Umayyad caliph Hisham then reigning at Damascus — when in 734 the supporters of the claims of the prophet's family, the Alids, rose in revolt against Hisham and gathered adherents by promising to observe the contract made with the adherents of the protected religions (here mainly Zoroastrians), not to levy tribute on the Muslims and not to oppress anyone."<sup>36</sup> Thus the claim of treasury and political support had the better of the faith. Even the Prophet had to please the hypocrites in Medinan period by offering them material incentives (ta'lifal Qulub).

It is thus clear that Islam fulfilled a vital economic function for the conquered as well as the conquerors; for the conquerors by creating — what was lacking for the economic community of Mecca i.e. state machinery and philosophy of state — and for the conquered by liberating them from the oppressive clutches of Byzantine and Sassanid empires. But this phase was not to last very long. The conquest and possession of the vast fortunes had its own dialectics, which, very soon stripped Islam of its progressive character. The material wealth and its distribution soon created dissensions which tore the Muslim society asunder

within two decades of the death of Mohammad. Ibn Khaldun quotes Al-Masu'di who says: 'In the days of 'Uthman, the men around Muhammad acquired estates and money. On the day 'Uthman was killed, 150,000 dinars and 1,000,000 dirhams were in the hands of his treasurer. The value of his estates in Wadi l-Qura and Hunayn and other places was 200,000 dinars. He also left many camels and horses. The eighth part of the estates of az-Zubayr after his death amounted to 50,000 dinars. He also left 1,000 horses and 1,000 female servants. Talhah's income from the Iraq was 1,000 dinars a day, and his income from the region of ash-Sharah was more than that. The stable of Abd-ar-Rahman b. Awf contained 1,000 horses. He also had 1,000 camels and 1,000 sheep. One-fourth of his estate after his death amounted to 84,000. Zayd b. Thabit left silver and gold that was broken into pieces with pickaxes, in addition to the (other) property and estates that he left, in the value of 100,000 dinars. Az-Zubayr built himself a residence in al-Basrah and other residences in Egypt and al-Kufah and Alexandria. Talhah built one in Al-Kufah and had his residence in Medina improved. He used plaster, bricks, and teakwood. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas built himself a residence in al-'Aqiq, (a suburb of Medina). He made it high and spacious, and had balustrades put on top of it. Al-Miqdad built his residence in Medina and had it plastered inside and out. Ya'la b. Munayah left 50,000 dinars and estates and other things the value of which amounted to 300,000 dirhams.' (End of the quotation from al-Masu'di). Ibn Khaldun gives his terse comment, "Such were the gains people made. Their religion did not blame them for (amassing so much), because, as booty, it was lawful property."<sup>37</sup> Thus for a religion originating in a commercial town, property has to be legal. It cannot be otherwise. Nor would this religion encourage asceticism like Christianity. Free nomadic people and those living in commercial towns would not be attracted to any ascetic form of religion. Therefore Islam would have none of it. It would permit to amass fortune provided poll tax (which was fixed at a meagre 2½%) was paid. The enormous fortune collected by individuals as the quotation from al-Masu'di shows was in sharp

contrast to the stark poverty of the Immigrants during Mohamad's days.

Mohammad himself lived a very hard life and starved on many occasions. He lived in a simple house which had few rooms and an open courtyard. He held his assemblies in the mosque which was built with mud bricks and branches of palm tree. This is how Maxime Rodinson describes the Prophet's mosque, "It was a rectangular court-yard, enclosed by a wall of sun-dried bricks set on a few courses of stone. On the northern side was a row of palm trunks, set up parallel to the wall, supporting a roof of clay and palm fronds. Next to the eastern wall, two cabins were built, one for each of the Prophet's two wives. (He married the little girl 'Aisha while the building was in progress.) Carpets were laid where these cabins opened into the courtyard. The Prophet had no place of his own but lodged with each of his wives in turn. Most of his time was spent, after the Arab fashion of the time, in this courtyard; it was here that he received ambassadors, conducted business and addressed his followers. There, prisoners were confined, the sick cared for and even, on occasion, mock battles fought. There, too, communal prayers were said. The poorer companions slept there. It was, in short, both the Master's seat and a general meeting place for the whole community."<sup>38</sup> Contrast this, again, with the palace which Mu'awiyah built for himself within a few decades of Muhammad's death. In the heart of the city (i.e. Damascus), set like a pearl in emerald girdle of its gardens, stood the glittering palace of the Umayyads, commanding a view of flourishing plain which extended south-westward to mount Hermon with its turban of perpetual snow. Al-Khadra' (the green one) was its name. Its builder was none other than Mu'awiyah, founder of the dynasty, and it stood beside the Umayyad Mosque which al-Walid had newly adorned and made into that jewel of architecture which still attracts lovers of beauty. In the audience chamber a square seat covered with richly embroidered cushions formed the caliphal throne, on which during formal audiences the caliph, in gorgeous flowing robes, sat cross-legged.<sup>39</sup>

The accumulation of these vast fortunes by the companions of Mohammad as described by Ibn Khaldun above and later construction of gorgeous and elegant buildings in sharp contrast to Mohammad's Mosque and residence, was due to availability of large surplus later made possible by the conquests of foreign lands rich in resources. In the Prophet's time some surplus which became available, came from the surrendered cultivated lands of the small Medinan Jewish community and was too scanty to provide for comforts. The appropriation of vast amount of wealth as described above plunged the nascent Muslim community into civil war which began after Uthman (i.e. the third caliph) assumed the reigns of power. He was accused by the rebels to have appointed his relatives and the members of his clan to all important governmental posts. Mohammad had created a very primitive kind of state machinery as none existed before. There were, in his lifetime, hardly any state functionaries paid from the state treasury. In other words, not bureaucracy, but only highly committed followers of Islam were in charge of newly born state affairs — their livelihood being their own responsibility. There was no standing army either. The committed followers of Mohammad banded themselves together to fight whenever the occasion demanded.

But now it was different. A new bureaucracy supported by the state treasury came into existence. There were few important posts to go round and a large number of senior Companions to claim them. Moreover, some companions got rich dividends and acquired large estates. All this created dissensions and led to civil war causing much bloodshed. Two last caliphs were murdered by the Muslims themselves. The protest movement adopted two opposite channels: Shiite protest movement (Shias were supporters of Ali) and Kharijite protest movement (Kharijites were enemies of 'Uthman and Ali). Shia protest movement had its origin in towns and found its supporters among poor craftsmen, people of foreign origin and slaves. Kufa, the centre of Shia movement had half its population composed of Mawali (clients), who monopolized handicraft, trade, and commerce. They were mostly Persians in race and language; they had come

to Kufa as prisoners of war and had there been converted to Islam. However, they remained dependent on Arabs and had no hope of freeing themselves from the status of clientship. The Kharijites on the other hand represented the nomadic reaction against the aristocracy of rich town-dwellers. The Kharijites were mostly drawn from the Bedouin soldiery who settled in Basra and Kufa after the Persian wars. Far from acknowledging the peculiar sanctity of a Qurayshite, they desired a chief of their own blood whom they might obey, in Bedouin fashion, as long as he did not abuse or exceed the powers conferred upon him. Their two fundamental doctrines were: (1) every free Arab was eligible as caliph and that (2) an evil-doing caliph should be deposed. Their nomadic outlook could not accept strict discipline of urban life and government. Their slogan was *la imara* (No government) which meant anarchy of desert life. Future recruits for religio-political opposition either came from Kharijites or Shias. Some of the bitterest class wars were fought under the banner of Shi'i movement.

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## Chapter 2

### THE PHILOSOPHIC TRENDS IN ISLAM

Islam saw the light of the day in a trade enclave surrounded by the vast expanse of desert all around. The trading centre and the immortalized religious centre Mecca, though flourishing, had not achieved the measure of sophistication needed to produce or articulate philosophical subtleties. The intercourse with the Syrians and various sects of Eastern Christianity like Nestorianism and Monophysitism had made the Meccan Arabs acutely aware of the necessity for a systematic and coherent philosophy that could satisfy their spiritual aspirations. Christianity and Judaism, for reasons analysed elsewhere, did not appeal to the Arabs who had their national identity and heritage preserved along with their political freedom. Moreover, their preoccupation with commercial operations which were of complex and diverse nature, hardly left them any leisure to engage in speculative thought. The norms of trading society demand parsimonious conduct and re-investing or ploughing back all available surplus in order to earn more. This trait is specially found in earlier stages of the society. The Meccan magnates could not afford to spare much for indulging in the luxury of speculative thought.

Though there was no system of education as such prevalent in Mecca, there were some individuals who had a smattering of Christian testaments and also knew Syriac language. Waraqa ibn Naufal was one of them. Al-Waqidi, cited by al-Baladhuri (*Futuhul-Buldān*) ed. de Goeje, pp. 471-72, expressly states that in the early days of Islam only seventeen men of the tribe of Quraysh, the aristocracy of Mecca, could write; and he enumerates them by name, including amongst them 'Umar, 'Ali, 'Uthman, Ibnul-Jarrah, Talha, Abu Sufyan, and his son

Mu'awiya. Some of them who knew Syriac as stated above, did not have any acquaintance with the Greek philosophy then available in Syriac translations. Their knowledge of Syriac was limited to the day to day business transactions and drawing up of various documents related to them. Qadi Sa'id commenting on the achievements of the Arabs (before Islam) in his *Tabaqatul Umam* says, "As for philosophy and higher knowledge, the Almighty did not vest them with a thing and did not cut them out for such refinements." Thus it is clear that in the barren land of Arabia, rich speculative thought could not flower for lack of resources and the right kind of intellectual climate. It was only after a few centuries of conquests and comingling with the peoples of different races and nations coupled with the bountiful resources made available through prosperous trade and exploitation of the peasantry in fertile regions of Egypt, Syria, Persia and Iraq, that it became possible for the Muslims to philosophize and also to transform simple Islamic theology into elaborately-woven casuistry after being fused or fertilized with the Greek philosophy. But it is interesting to note that most of the illustrious among these philosophers, theologians, jurists and other religious authorities were non-Arab Muslims. Prof. Edward G. Brown in his book, *A Literary History Of Persia*, makes this point by quoting Goldziher from his book *Muhammedanische Studien* (vol. i, p. 109); "Not only in the government are the foreigners always to the front", says Goldziher in the illuminating chapter 'Arab und 'Ajam, "we find them also in the foremost ranks even in the specifically religious sciences. "It almost seems", says Von Kremer,<sup>1</sup> "that these scientific studies (reading and Exegesis of the Qur'an, sciences of Tradition and Law), were during the first two centuries (of Hijra) principally worked by clients (Mawali, i.e. non-Arab Muslims), while the Arabs proper felt themselves more drawn to the study of their ancient poetry, and to the development and imitation of the same; but, we would add even in this field they were often outstripped by the foreigners, whose men of learning in no small degree advanced this sphere of the Arabian genius by literary and historical studies on the antiquities of the Arabs, by thorough critical researches, and so forth... And this was principally the

fault of the Arabs themselves. They looked down with sovereign contempt on the studies so zealously prosecuted by the non-Arabs, considering that such trivialities were unworthy of men who could boast so proud an ancestry, but befitted only the pedagogue, anxious to gloss over with such pigments his dingy genealogy. 'It befits not the Qurayshites' — in such words a full-blooded Arab expresses himself — to go deeply into any study save that of the old histories (of the Arabs), especially now, when one has to bend the bow and attack the enemy."<sup>2</sup>

However, the Arabic language was the lingua franca and was extensively used for philosophical discourses and writings as well as other religious and secular sciences. Even the conquered nations with an old and superior civilization accepted the language of their conquerors. Arabic became the language of Church and State, of Poetry and Science.<sup>3</sup> The Arabs, it must be admitted, had established a quasi-secular role and in the chief seats of intellectual culture i.e. Basra and Kufa, Arabs and Persians, Muslims, Christians, Jews and Magians rubbed shoulders together. There, where trade and industry were thriving, the beginnings of secular science in Islam must be sought for,—beginnings themselves due to Hellenistic-Christian and Persian influences.<sup>4</sup> The Umayyads were succeeded by the Abbasids, in whose period Greek treatises on philosophy and other secular sciences were profusely translated into Arabic. The Abbasids, in their fight against Umayyads, had relied on the Persian support and its religio-political movements. They made a number of concessions to them and granted them high administrative posts. The cultural and intellectual traditions of Persia struck roots during this period. In the year 762, Mansur, the second ruler of this house, founded Baghdad as the new capital,— a city which soon outshone Damascus of the Ummayyads in worldly splendour, and Basra and Kufa in intellectual illumination. Says Dr. T. I. De Boer, "From the time of Harun at least, there existed in Baghdad a library and a learned institute. Even under Mansur, but especially under Mamun and his successors, translation of the scientific literature of the Greeks into the Arabic tongue went forward, largely

through the agency of Syrians; and abstracts and commentaries bearing upon these works were also composed.”<sup>5</sup>

The Greek philosophy had profound influence on the Islamic theology and ethical thinking. The first Muslim sect — if it can be so called — to apply Greek reason and dialectical mode of thinking to Islamic theology was known in the history as Mu'tazalite. It was, as if, Greek rationalism fused with Islamic revelational doctrines to produce a progressive thought structure among others, which were more orthodox and true to the original spirit of Islam. Wasil ibn 'Ata and 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd were two great thinkers of this school of thought, who carried an impressive aura of scholarship and learning around them. Mu'tazilites were held in great esteem in the court of al-Mamun. The two great Mu'tazilites, namely Abu al-Hudhayl Allaf and al-Nazzam, were al-Mamun's own teachers and were greatly respected by him. It would be interesting to note that al-Mamun was very liberal in his outlook. He held debates between people belonging to different religions, and he used to allow them complete liberty of thought and speech. In such debates, orthodox Ulama would not be able to defend their dogmas, whereas the Mu'tazilites, equipped as they were with the weapons of reason and dialectics, would emerge victorious and exercise their sway on the listeners. The Abbasid period, in its ascendent stage, provided enough surplus for an army of theologians to indulge in theological controversies and speculative thought. The Mu'tazilites raised specifically the following four issues, each of which has an important bearing on the problem of divine unity :

- (a) Relation of the attributes of God with His essence.
- (b) Createdness or uncreatedness of the holy Qur'an.
- (c) Possibility of the beatific vision of God.
- (d) Interpretation of the anthropomorphic Verses of the Qur'an.

Hair-splitting debates and controversies arose on these matters. The orthodox maintained that God possesses the qualities of knowledge, power, life, etc. To this, the Mu'tazilites objected : God is one, and describing His qualities in this way

ascribes plurality to Him. The lurking fear with them was that these qualities might even come to be hypostatized; should the qualities be considered as entities apart from the Divine Being, that certainly would amount to polytheism. The Mu'tazilites explained the divine attributes such as the knowing, the powerful, the living, etc., by saying that God knows, is powerful, is living, and so on and so forth, as to His being and not that He possesses the qualities of knowledge, power, life, etc., apart from his essence. Al-Nazzam, the teacher of al-Mamun, emphasised that qualities are not in the essence of God but are His essence. Thus God is omnipotent by His omnipotence, and it is His essence and not in His essence. He is omniscient by His omniscience and it is His essence and not in His essence. The Mu'tazilites were also known as the party of justice as they believed, deriving their authority from the Qur'an and also due to influence of Greek thought, that God was absolutely just and can do no wrong, though this dogma militated against the omnipotence of God. Al-Nazzam, one of the foremost thinkers of this school, taught that God can do no wrong, either in this world or in the other world, to his creatures. Whatever he does is in accordance with strict justice and for creature's own good. These theological controversies carried on by rationalist Mu'tazilites produced their echo in the orthodox school which employed these very weapons to refute them (Mu'tazilites). The dialectics in defence of orthodoxy was known as Kalam and its exponents 'mutakallimun'. The political movements, more often than not, assumed the garb of these unending controversies of which there is no occasion to speak here. Suffice it to say that these controversies came handy to the rulers for political persecution and repression.

So far we have discussed the influence of philosophy on the religious thought of Islam. Now let us come to the Greek philosophy and its manifestations among the medieval Muslims. Muslim study of philosophy began with the translation of Greek texts, especially of Plato and Aristotle, into Arabic. Unlike theologians, including the Mu'tazilites, Muslim students of philosophy did not start by assuming the truth of the revealed

text of the Qur'an. Instead they boldly set out, like their Greek predecessors, to pursue reason and logic wherever it might carry them<sup>6</sup>. However, this relentless pursuit of knowledge for its own sake led them to a dilemma. What was the relation between the truth as revealed to Prophet and the truth reached at by philosophical reasoning? Were they contradictory? Or the twain could meet and the conflict could be resolved? For public consumption, Muslim philosophers argued that the two avenues to truth could not contradict each other; in private, however, some of them thought revelation was a vulgar popularization and distortion of truth. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, referred to as Alfarabius, was one of the most outstanding and renowned Muslim philosophers, and became known as the "second teacher". He maintained that human reason is superior to religious faith, and hence assigned only a secondary place to the different revealed religions which provide, in his view, an approach to truth for non-philosophers through symbols. He also maintained that philosophical truth is universally valid whereas these symbols vary from nation to nation; they are the work of philosopher-prophets, of whom Muhammad was one. Further, he believed that prophesy, though an indispensable ingredient in man's perfection, is auxiliary to his rational faculty, being confined to the inferior faculty of representation. On the key question of the relation between reason and revelation, Farabi took a middle position. Attributing to the ancients the view that revelation imitated philosophic truth, Farabi himself argued that the true knower, like Plato's Philosopher King, must do as the prophets had done, that is, explain truth to the crowd in ways they could appreciate through myth, allegory, and symbols. Thus he assigned to philosophers a function ordinarily associated with prophets. This view greatly shocked the orthodox Muslims as it equated philosopher's knowledge based on reason with that of the prophet supposedly based on revelation. In his book, *The Attainment of Happiness*, he says, "In everything of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception or conception, religion gives an account based on imagination. In everything demonstrated by philosophy, religion employs persuasion."<sup>7</sup> Farabi, like other Muslim

philosophers, believed in the ultimate identity of Plato's and Aristotle's views. He based himself, in logic, natural science, psychology, metaphysics on Aristotle. In political science he preferred to follow Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*. MacDonald rightly maintains that al-Farabi was the very base of the pyramid of Muslim philosophy.<sup>8</sup> And, according to Ibn Khallikan, no other Muslim thinker ever reached the same position as al-Farabi in philosophical knowledge.<sup>9</sup> His system was a creative synthesis of Platonism, Aristotelianism and Sufism.

On political philosophy, al-Farabi wrote two important books namely, *A Treatise on the Opinions of the People of the Ideal City* and *Political Economy*. In the first book, our philosopher gives Hobbesian description of the law of Nature as one of the perpetual struggle of each organism against the rest; 'every living thing in the last analysis sees in all the other living things a means to its own ends' is the law of the jungle as enunciated by Hobbes. The emergence of human society, according to al-Farabi from this law of the jungle, is based on two alternatives: one more or less resembles Rousseau's theory of social contract and the other resembles Nietzsche's principle of 'will to power'. Al-Farabi rejects the second alternative and appeals to his fellow-beings to build a society not on envy, hatred and strife, but on reason, devotion and love. Only in such society, there can be any hope of realising the possibility of the ideal city of which al-Farabi gives an elaborate account. The governance of this city, in the philosopher's views, would be comparable to that of human bodily functions. The sovereign who corresponds to the heart is served by functionaries who in their turn are served by others of lower ranks. Here the stamp of medieval Muslim society on the philosopher's vision is obvious. He, like many other philosophers, takes the structure of the society of his days as almost eternal and does not believe in changing it for better and more egalitarian order.

The first period of philosophy in Islam took shape in the east between the 3rd/9th and the 5th/11th centuries. Al-Kindi, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina are the ace philosophers of this period. The main characteristic of this period is a synthesis of Neo-

platonian metaphysics, natural science and mysticism. Unlike its predecessor *kalam* — a dialectical approach to theology — its starting point is not the Qur'anic texts or its ideas, but it pursues a method of research independent of dogmas, without, however, rejecting them or ignoring them altogether. The Muslim philosophy, it must be noted, was opposed to the spirit of Qur'an — a point we will discuss a little later. Muslim philosophy developed in more liberal surroundings, where there was a desire for a less legalistic view of religion and for an Islam which would be cultural and universal in character.

Ibn Sina (370-428/980-1037) was one of the greatest philosophers produced by Islam. Widely known as Avicenna in Europe, he was an encyclopaedist, philosopher, physiologist, physician, mathematician, astronomer and poet. His thought was the climax of Muslim philosophy and he was rightly called by the Arabs as al-Shaykh al-Ra'is, i.e. 'the Shaykh and prince of the learned'. Ibn Sina rightfully gives very important place to logic in sciences, but, he also recognises its limitations. "The aim of logic", he says in his book *al-Isharat*, "is to provide us with some rules the observance of which would be a safeguard against falling into errors in our reasoning."<sup>10</sup> Reasoning, according to Ibn Sina, starts from certain terms which have to be accepted at the outset. These are the first data of experience or the first principles of understanding. The chain of deductions proceeding by known, deduced from the previously known, is not unlimited; it must have its starting point which would be the base of the whole fabric of logical structure. This starting point is to be found not in logic itself but outside it.<sup>11</sup> Ibn Sina was a born metaphysician and earned the title of "Philosopher of being". But, he was also a realist and wished to understand essences in their actualized state, so that he is just as much the "Philosopher of essence". The whole of his metaphysics is ordered round the double problem of the origin of being and its transmission to essence, but to individually actualized essence.<sup>12</sup> It must be noted that Ibn-Sina is a believer; in accordance with Islam he believes in God as the creator. He attempts to integrate dogma with his philosophical formulation. Though he does not succeed



very well, he continually works in this direction. Ibn-Sina, to express his views of Human Reason, employs allegories in the poetic tradition. Hai ibn Yaqzan i.e. the Active one, the son of the Vigilant, is one such allegorical story. It represents the ascent of the Spirit out of the Elements, and through the realms of Nature, of the Souls, and of the Spirits, up to the throne of the Eternal one. Hai presents himself to the philosopher in the form of an old man with an air of youth about him, and offers his services as a guide. The wanderer has been striving to reach a knowledge of Earth and Heaven, by means of his outer and inner senses. Two ways open out before him, one to the West, the way of the Material and the Evil, the other to the Rising Sun, the way of Spiritual and ever-pure Forms; and along that way Hai now conducts him. Together they reach the well of Divine wisdom, the fountain of everlasting youth, where beauty is the curtain of beauty, and light the veil of light, — the Eternal Mystery. Hai ibn Yaqzan is thus the guide of individual, thinking Souls: he is the Eternal Spirit who is over mankind, and operates in them.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary research has brought to light some very interesting aspects of Ibn-Sina's philosophy. In certain respects he comes very close to some of the modern philosophers. Professor J. L. Teicher of Cambridge University, for one, is of opinion that in Ibn Sina's speculative system we come across clear anticipations of some of the foremost views of Descartes, Kant and even those of Bergson's.<sup>14</sup> Descartes is certainly forestalled by Ibn Sina in his methodological doubt, the certitude of 'I think; therefore I am', and the ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God. We also find clear-cut distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason (Kant's celebrated works on the critique of pure and practical reason were, in nut-shell preceded in Ibn-Sina).

Ibn-Roshd (Averroes in Latin) was another brilliant philosopher who belongs to the Muslim Western empire of Cordova. He was born in 1126 A.D. Ibn-Roshd had unbounded admiration for Aristotle. He loses no opportunity to have a dig at Ibn-Sina, and, at times, at Farabi and Ibn Baja also. In fact he carps at all his predecessors.

In 1153, Averroes was at Marrakush. It is known, through the Commentary of the *De Caelo*, that he was engaged there in astronomical observations. He maintained that researches must be done on the movements of the planets in order to found an astronomy which would be physical and not only mathematical: "I hoped in my youth that it would be possible for me to carry out this research successfully; but now that I am old, I have lost this hope. . . ." Around 1153 he was introduced to the prince Abu Yaqub by Ibn Tofail. After a few cautionary and guarded moments, Ibn Roshd spoke freely on philosophy with the prince and won his unbounded admiration. Averros remained in favour throughout the reign of Abu Yakub Yusuf and enjoyed high status in his court. About philosopher and prophet, Ibn Roshd held doctrine analogous to that of Farabi: "The double expression of one and the same truth, in terms which are abstract and clear on the one hand, in sensitive and symbolic terms on the other, philosophy and religion will thus exist side by side, without ever clashing, since, addressing themselves to two different categories of mind, their fields will remain entirely separate." Rational approach and demonstration should remain confined to scholars only; for common man, the opiate of religion, as otherwise there will be moral chaos. The study of all these philosophic giants makes it very clear that they all tended to support the socio-political structure of their society and never thought of any transcendental order beyond their own society which could radically transform it (the society) into qualitatively better one. Ibn Tufail's *Hai ibn Yaqzan* (which anticipates later day Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) also talks of a solitary individual attaining pinnacle of rational knowledge; he does not in any way criticise the social order or his allegorical hero does not set out to build a different order of society. When these philosophers face a dilemma of revelational and rational knowledge, contradicting each other, their near unanimous solution is to choke off channels of rational knowledge as far as common people are concerned as that would be in the interest of consolidating the socio-economic structure of the society. Thus Ibn Roshd held that, "The scholars, for their part, must not 'popularize' their learning in the form of dialectical, rhetorical or poetic

writings; they must write only works of demonstration (kutub al-barahin) so that they will be accessible only to those who are capable of following such demonstration. Al-Ghazali did not follow this rule and was therefore in error, though his intentions were good. The books written by scholars must be forbidden to the ordinary man by the leaders of the community." This approach, in as much as the then social order was concerned, and unless the critique of that order was written or new social set-up conceived, was the only possible solution to avoid the wrath of common masses who, on account of low degree or near absence of rational knowledge, were under the sway of rigid orthodoxy.

Ibn Rushd, it must be admitted, defended rational thought and the various premises of Greek philosophy against the onslaught of al-Ghazali. He wrote his celebrated treatise *Tahafut al-Tahafut* — trenchant criticism of, and reply to al-Ghazali's attack on the Greek giants of philosophy.

We have so far left out a gigantic and towering personality of Muslim philosophy namely, al-Ghazali. He is a separate category in his own right. He led the revolt against reason and philosophy and asserted that the doctrines of religion are immune from philosophical reasoning — a Kantian concept in essence. Ghazali lived in a politically disturbed period and perhaps he thought it incumbent to defend religion which possibly could preserve the unity of ummah. Whatever value one may place on the thought system of al-Ghazali, his work has historical significance and merits recognition. Though he conceived his religious system only for political ends on account of the passing circumstances of the disturbed period in which he was living, yet he introduced Greek philosophy into the realm of Sunni thought (he used the concepts of Greek philosophy to defend Sunni orthodoxy and refute the heresies and innovations of philosopher — a strange paradox), through the way he developed Ash'arism and criticized philosophy. Al-Ghazali was deeply influenced by Sufism. "His criticisms of causality", says Dagobert D. Runes in *Treasury of Philosophy*, "pre-dated David Hume's parallel theories by several centuries, and he exerted great influence over William of Ockham and other Christian

philosophers. He compared the pursuit of knowledge to the process involved in digging a well : both involved probing; the desired object in both cases was necessary to life.”<sup>15</sup> Ghazali maintained, “The highest stage is reached by one to whom all truths and realities are revealed *intuitively*, who by virtue of his exalted position enjoys direct communion and close relation with the Most Holy. The real nature of this position is known only to him who enjoys it. We verify it by faith. A child has no knowledge of the attainments of an adult; an adult is not aware of the acquisitions of a learned man. Similarly a learned man is not cognizant of the holy communion of the saints and the prophets, and of the favors bestowed on them.”<sup>16</sup> The philosopher poet, Dr. Iqbal, greatly hails Ghazali as the don of Muslim philosophers mainly on account of his revolt against Greek emphasis on reason as the source of knowledge as against intuition. Iqbal held that Greek philosophy with its methodology of Aristotelian syllogism, was totally opposed to the true Qur’anic spirit and therefore, needed to be discarded. Ghazali purged Islam of contamination with Greek thought and rendered a yeoman’s service to it. Iqbal says, “It cannot, however, be denied that Ghazali’s mission was almost apostolic like that of Kant in Germany of the eighteenth century. In Germany rationalism appeared as an ally of religion, but she soon realized that the dogmatic side of religion was incapable of demonstration. . . . His (Kant’s) Critique of Pure Reason revealed the limitations of human reason and reduced the whole work of the rationalists to a heap of ruins. And justly has he been described as God’s greatest gift to his country. Ghazali’s philosophical scepticism, which, however, went a little too far, virtually did the same kind of work in the world of Islam in breaking the back of that proud but shallow rationalism which moved in the same direction as pre-Kantian rationalism in Germany. There is, however, one important difference between Ghazali and Kant. Kant, consistently with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God. Ghazali, finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience, and there found an independent content for religion.”<sup>17</sup>

Ghazali's reaction against philosophy and rational cognition (as against mere recognition of what is given) which had made dangerous inroads into religion, won him great glory. He was called 'Islam's convincing proof', 'The ornament of faith', considered a mujaddid and reckoned at par with the four Imams. In the disturbed circumstances of Ghazali's time, when Abbasid empire was shattering and there was a sense of insecurity all around, the Muslim thinkers and intellectuals found the only hope of salvation in religion, al-Ghazali having given the lead. When the Arab empire was at the height of its glory, there appeared on the scene very bold thinkers and philosophers who did not take religious dogmas for granted. They discussed threadbare, and did not hesitate to question the theological formulations. The vicissitudes of material circumstances were reflected in the vicissitudes of ideational processes. Al-Ghazali, prisoner of social and political set-up of his own time, found the way out by seating the faith on the throne back again. Desideratum of his class brooked no other solution.

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## Chapter 3

### COMMUNALISM — AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

Communalism is a malignant growth on the body politic of India. This is a very complex socio-political phenomenon manifested in myriad ways. An exhaustive study of all its manifestations is much too ambitious a task to be undertaken in a short article of this limited scope. However, an attempt will be made to explain some of its aspects which are relevant to much too often irruption of communal violence. Needless to say, communal hatred has been and would remain a powerful impediment on our way to achieve our cherished goal of secular polity.

Communalism as we understand it today is a recent phenomenon which started emerging on the Indian scene after the failure of the 1857 mutiny and it grew in proportions with the consolidation of the British rule. British machinations to divide the opponents undoubtedly exacerbated the situation. In fact this monster fattened on such draconic measures to divide and weaken the struggle of the Indian people against the supremacy of British imperialism.

But this does not absolve the Indian people of their own guilt. In fairness to the British rulers I agree with Mr. H. V. Hudson that the Britishers exploited the Indian people's will to be divided which any imperialist power would have in fact done. If the blame entirely lay at the doorsteps of the British masters, how would one explain away the communal riots which resulted in brutal savagery and massacres on an ever-increasing scale during the last decade? It could not be explained away as past legacy or temporary aberration. Its roots are far deeper and its implications much more ominous than we would like to think. Let us attempt to trace its historical roots.

Communalism, as any perceptive observer of Indian scene would realise, is a political phenomenon. It is, of course, an outgrowth of the basic structural changes in the society that took place after the mutiny of 1857. These economic and socio-political changes, in less than few decades, transformed the entire political scene in the country. Thus 1857 is a decisive year and the first land-mark in our political quest for modern nationhood. The 1857 uprising apparently failed, but, it laid the foundation of our freedom struggle which came to fruition in 1947.

The national struggle against the British imperialism made us aware of the possibility of transfer of power within the system of elective democracy. The different sections and communities of our country became conscious of their rights and the struggle for sharing power led to polarization among these communities. The struggle for commanding heights of power became intensely furious between the Hindus and the Muslims led by their feudal or bourgeois elites as they constituted the two major communities.

This conflict, in a feudal and backward country like India, invariably assumed a religious form and the elites of the respective communities wore this mask in order to hide their class interests and to appeal to the poor masses. This elite of the society kept its distance from the poor of its own community and never fought for their economic problems as they militated against their own interests. But, for political power, this elite used religious sentiments and projected itself as the champion of its fellow-religionists thus distorting the real struggle of the downtrodden masses.

Before the British hegemony was established, India was a house divided against itself. The umpteen number of feudal chieftains, nawabs and princes ruled in the different parts of the country. They were constantly on warpath with each other and deployed mercenary armies to annex neighbouring kingdoms. The loyalty of the subject peoples was oriented towards these regional rulers and, more often than not, religious differences did not mar this relationship.



Moreover, in a feudal society like India during and before the British rule, the concept of nationhood was absent. Unified administration does not mean nationhood. Common economic and political goals, and the people's resolve to achieve them, makes country a nation. Religion does not and cannot unify people for common economic and political goals. Religion was a medieval institution while nationhood is a product of modern bourgeois society. It is futile to see in medieval India a nation of our modern concept. The economic and political structure of a feudal society cannot admit of any such interpretation.

It is equally wrong to see nothing but religious conflict between native Hindus and alien Muslim invaders. The political set up and the administrative machinery of these foreign invaders grew out of the native soil. The Muslim rulers in their heyday left effective power in the hands of local Hindu functionaries like Raos, Thakurs etc. Mr. Harbans Mukhia in his valuable essay on *Communalism in Medieval Indian History* says, "Thus the lower rungs of the administration remained completely in the hands of the Hindus. It is the Hindus who thus helped the Turks establish their empire and they ran its administration for them. But for their support the Turks would not have been able to stay in India for any but a small length of time. Those Hindus became very much a part of the ruling class for they as much as the Turks were living off the surplus produce of the peasant. In fact historians like Barani and others use the term 'Hindu' only to refer to that section of the community which had become a part of the imperial ruling class as has been stated above."<sup>1</sup>

Class interests always cut across religious or ideological lines. The Muslim ruling class had more in common with the Hindu ruling class than with the vast masses of poor Muslim peasantry and vice versa. The tensions or the struggle for power among the ruling classes is given religious and communal turn by the bigoted historians who make use of history as an instrument for their own ends. I would like to quote Shri Mukhia again from his essay. He writes, "The modern historians, some times even those who were consciously secular in

their outlook, understood the terminology used by contemporary historians to apply to the whole society. Consequently the conflicts within the ruling class were understood to be conflicts at the social level. Thus Sultan Ala-uddin Khilji, who took some strong measures to suppress the rebellious Hindu zemindars (along with no less strong measures to suppress the Muslim iqtadars, including very pious people who had nothing to do with the rebellion), is portrayed as a religious fanatic who was utterly intolerant of the Hindus, although his contemporary historial, Ziya Barani, keeps wailing that Ala-uddin Khilji was a Sultan who cared not a thing for the Islamic law whether in matters of state or in his private life. Similarly the attempts by some rulers like Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb to convert some politically important individuals or families are portrayed as attempts to convert the Hindus into Muslims at the social or mass level.”<sup>2</sup>

Communal historians picked up all such instances to substantiate their charge of persecution of the Hindus by the Muslim rulers. In our frantic search for heroes during our national struggle for freedom against the British rulers, all such conflicts within the ruling class (which was of course a composite class) were glorified as the struggle of the Hindus to overthrow the slavish yoke of their Muslim masters. Rana Pratap and Shivaji were, as if, cut out to play this glorious role. It was conveniently forgotten that these heroes were fighting for feudal power so as to establish their exclusive exploitative sway over the peasantry in their own region and these powerful rebels also had Muslims in their armies. The Afghans and the Mughals could not compose their differences and many notable Afghan chiefs fought on the side of Rana Pratap against the Mughal emperor Akbar. Similarly the brave Rajputs formed the hard core of the army of the Mughal emperors. Political ambitions and struggle for power could only account for this kind of lineup which clearly cut across the religious lines.

If studied carefully, the blending of interests of the Hindu and Muslim rulers, their political alliances from time to time and the changing alignments which resulted in erupting of

tension, will emerge out clearly. This identity within the ruling class gave birth to the composite culture and various new strains in the field of religion, art and literature.

## II

If understood in a proper perspective, the pre-democratic society in India is found to be free of the abominable phenomenon of communalism in the modern political sense. The pre-British Indian society with its self-sufficient village economy which stood the test of time within its own narrow compass for centuries and remained stagnant and unperturbed in the face of social turmoils and upheavals, did not provide suitable mechanism for the germination of the seeds of communalism. The ruling classes in a feudal society do not depend, for political power, on the common masses, as it happens in a democratic polity, but, instead, rule with the sword. Religion, in a medieval feudal society, therefore, does not have to be instrumental in power politics as more often than not it happens in a backward country with a low degree of political consciousness when it opts for democracy with ballot box orientation. In such countries religious, casteist and linguistic parochialism becomes a powerful motive force enabling the economic and political vested interests to grab power under the pretext of fulfilling the urges of their respective followers.

The intense religiosity and unrelieved orthodoxy of the medieval period could not become fertile ground for nourishing and nurturing communalism in the absence of direct clash of interest between the aspirant communities for monopolising administrative and economic power. Seen in sociological perspective, the absence of opinion-mobilising machinery, competitive economic aspirations of a rising mercantile and industrial capitalist class, mass communication media and availability of service-oriented education to ever greater number of people in a pre-democratic stagnant social milieu, ruled out any possibility of sustained communal violence. In the medieval society the state had, through the agency of its coercive machinery, evolved a pattern of social integration which had basically transformed it

into a regimented society wherein the dispossessed and under-privileged strata had been suffocated and stifled and religion used to superimpose the vertically integrated pattern of social stagnation. I do not mean to plead that communal violence was totally absent in that society. The pent-up grievances did burst out and took an ugly turn as in the communal riot of Ahmedabad in 1719 A.D. But these were sporadic instances in the absence of certain socially necessary factors to sustain communal violence. Such violence militated against the interests of the ruling class and hence, was ruthlessly suppressed and positively discouraged.

However with the birth of a national movement and a national consciousness in the later half of the nineteenth century, the seeds of communalism started germinating. The Indian National Congress was founded by Mr. A. O. Hume in 1883, with the laudable objectives of fusing into one national whole all the different and, till recently discordant, elements that constitute the population of India; the gradual regeneration along all lines, mental, moral, social and political, of the nation thus evolved; and the consolidating of the union between England and India, by securing the modification of such of its conditions as may be unjust or injurious to the latter country. These objectives were laid down by A.O. Hume himself in his speech at Allahabad on 30th April 1888. Indian National Congress became the harbinger of the rising national movement. Mr. A. O. Hume was a shrewd English bureaucrat whose political antennae caught the rumblings of brewing discontent in the lower rungs of the population. He once wrote, "Do you not realise that by getting hold of the great lower middle classes before the development of the reckless demagogues, to which the next quarter of a century must otherwise give birth, and carefully inoculating them with a mild and harmless form of political fever, we are adopting the only certain precautionary method against the otherwise inevitable ravages of a violent and epidemic burst of disorder?"<sup>3</sup>

The British imperial interests needed all sorts of contrivances to keep the coming storm at bay. The divergent trends in the

Muslim politics after 1857 came handy to colonial masters in their shrewd manoeuvres. With the emergence of middle class-dominated nationalist movement which was preponderantly Hindu, two opposite trends among the Muslims came to the fore.

One of the emergent trends championed the cause of Muslim backwardness in the field of education, deplored their deprivation of the due share of administrative services and aspired for the British rulers' patronage. The other trend was the hangover of the premutiny uncompromising stance of the Muslims who had to lose everything with the steady consolidation of the British political supremacy.

The former trend was represented by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and his colleagues, who were pre-occupied with the Muslims' backwardness in education and who made sincere efforts to rehabilitate the Muslims in the estimate of the British rulers. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan wrote a book, *The Loyal Mohammedans of India* in 1860, in which he tried to establish that "the Muslims were basically loyal, that the British government should abandon their attitude of political suspicion of them and that the Muslims on their part should participate in the administration and imbibe the progressive new culture which the British had introduced in India."<sup>4</sup>

Sir Syed built up a powerful movement for the spread of education among the Muslims and succeeded in founding the Mohomedan Anglo-Oriental college at Aligarh with the support of the Muslim zamindars. To win the support of this class, Sir Syed had to compromise his enthusiasm for the rational interpretation of Islam and had to agree to introduce theology as one of the subjects in the curriculum.<sup>5</sup> This college, founded by Sir Syed, yielded a very rich crop of Muslim intelligentsia imbued with Western culture. They were mostly scions of zemindar families and middle classes and became aspirants for administrative jobs. Hindus had a clear edge over Muslims in this respect and as education made steady headway amongst the Muslims, the struggle for jobs became sharper. Sir William Hunter's book *Indian Musulmans* brought this in sharp relief.

This struggle for jobs which were fewer to go around, bred and fed the communal monster. This struggle also centred around the elective and nominated seats, in the municipal boards to begin with, and the assembly seats a little later. To substantiate this argument, I would like to quote here from Sir Syed's speech on a Local Self-Government Bill. He said, "The system of representation of the views and interests of the majority of the population, and, in countries where the population is composed of one race and one creed, it is no doubt the best system that can be adopted. But, my lord, in a country like India, where caste distinctions still flourish, where there is no fusion of the races, where religious distinctions are still violent, where education in modern sense has not made an equal or proportionate progress among all the sections of the population, I am convinced that *the introduction of the principle of election, pure and simple, for representation of various interests on the local boards and the district councils, would be attended with evils of greater significance than purely economic considerations. . . . The larger community would totally override the interests of the smaller community, and the ignorant public would hold Government responsible for introducing measures which might make the differences of race and creed more violent than ever.*"<sup>6</sup> This statement proved prophetic in the history of communal conflict between the two major communities throughout the period of our freedom struggle and, as a climax, it resulted in the vivisection of the Indian subcontinent.

Sir Syed's apprehension that the Muslims would be overwhelmed by the Hindus, with their superior economic power and greater education, led him to oppose the nationalist movement sponsored by the Indian National Congress, which appeared to him to be preponderantly Hindu and bend over backwards to solicit British support for his fellow Muslims. The British rulers, whose political barometer had registered the signs of a gathering storm, were heartened at this development. They readily lent a helping hand to Sir Syed to form 'The Indian United Patriotic Association', with the help of some Hindu rajas and Muslim nawabs. It was clearly a horde of hardened reactionaries and had a very short lease of life.

The irony of the situation turned a liberal, progressive rationalist into a politically backward-oriented man. Compelled by their class interests, the western-educated, liberal and rationalist Muslims, throughout the history of our freedom struggle, supported the cause of separatist Muslim politics. It was nothing but the politics of hard bargain for reservation in the jobs and share in the governmental power through legislative assemblies. Of course, there were scores of progressive Muslim intellectuals, who sympathised and fought uncompromising battles in support of toiling masses and opposed the reactionary character of the separatist Muslim politics.

The other predominant trend in the Muslim politics was uncompromisingly anti-British and pro-nationalist. This trend was represented by the orthodox Ulama. They were greatly perturbed by the economic ruination of the Muslim masses, spelled by British domination and stranglehold over the Indian economy. The import of the factory-made British goods uprooted the vast masses of the Muslim artisans and caused untold misery to them. This, naturally, greatly angered the Ulama, who were in close touch with them. The Muslim urban population largely consisted of artisans, weavers and workers.

The big portion of the population in Bengal consisted of the Muslim peasants. The decline of the Muslim rule and establishment of political hegemony of the Britishers over Bengal, with its attendant evil of reckless plunder, completely impoverished the peasantry. This made the Wahabi movement, which was fiercely anti-British in character, extremely popular among the poor Muslims. Prof. W. C. Smith says, "The Wahabi movement was the first organised movement of the Indian Muslims. Though it started as a religious reform movement, it developed in subsequent stages, a political, social and economic content."<sup>7</sup> This movement developed strongly anti-British character and spread like wild fire among the Muslim peasantry in Bengal, leading to violent up-risings, which were ruthlessly suppressed.

These Ulama inspired the people to fight back the British rulers and declared India as Darul-harb (house of war). With this declaration, it became a religious obligation for the Muslims

to wage war against the Britishers. In this defiant mood, they fought furiously shoulder to shoulder with the rebels during the mutiny of 1857. Thus, Hans Kohn writes, "The revolt of 1857 revealed in action, for the first time in Indian history, that a large-scale alliance between the Hindus and the Muslims against British rule was possible."<sup>8</sup>

This legacy of uncompromising anti-British stance was inherited by the Ulama, and, like their predecessors, they fought against British rule in alliance with the Congress and opposed the Muslim League which had upper class character. This became the archtypal pattern of the Muslim politics in India in the post-1857 era.

The westernised and educated liberal Muslims became instrumental in championing the interests of upper middle classes relegating the national cause to secondary position, while the orthodox ulama who felt the pulse of the Muslim masses, waged an uncompromising struggle against the British rule hand in hand with the country's towering nationalist organisation, i.e., the Congress.

While Sir Syed was going whole hog with the British rulers and admonishing Muslims for joining the Congress, Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi issued a Fatwa asking the Muslims to join the Congress. "Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi", writes Shri N. L. Gupta in *Nehru on Communalism*, "the chief spokesman of the Darul Ulum of Deoband, issued a Fatwa asking Muslims to associate with the Congress and against Sir Syed's stand against Muslims joining the Congress.

"The Wahabis of India had published a book of Fatwas in support of the Congress entitled *Nasrat al-ahrar*, comprising over one hundred Fatwas, including two from the leaders of Deoband." Thus, these orthodox Ulama, though conservative in outlook and drawing inspiration from the past for their moral, social and ethical life, were politically anti-imperialist and aspired for the total annihilation of the British empire in India.

With the rise of the Aligarh movement, British masters used Muslim separatist demands as a counterpoise to the rising tide of nationalism to maintain their paramountcy. Sir John



Strachey has this to say about the shift in the British policy : "The existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India. The better classes of Mohammedans are a source to us of strength and not of weakness. They constitute a comparatively small but energetic minority of the population, whose political interests are identical with ours."

This scramble for power of the upper middle class Muslims as well as Hindus sowed the real seeds of communal discord. Our politics was, thus, slowly but steadily communalised. Political communalism which was an unknown entity on the Indian scene struck roots for the first time in our hearts. This poison went very deep into our political soil and resulted in the aberration of our secular national perspective. The master-stroke of the British policy of 'divide and rule' paid them rich dividends for a long time.

Jawaharlal Nehru has, in his numerous speeches and writings, correctly analysed this problem. He writes in the *Brief Resume of Nationalist Movement*, "The English educated class grew slowly in the cities and at the same time a new middle class arose consisting of professional people, that is, lawyers and doctors and the like and merchants and traders. This new bourgeoisie, or middle class, was a direct out-come of the British rule; in a sense, they were the hangers-on of this rule. They shared to a small extent in the exploitation of the masses; they took the crumbs that fell from the richly-laden table of the British ruling classes." He continues further, "The Muslims were generally poorer. Most of the weavers, who had gone to the wall on account of British destruction of Indian industries, were Muslims. In Bengal, which has the biggest Muslim population of any Indian province, they were poor tenants or small landholders. The landlord was usually a Hindu, and so was the village bania, who was the moneylender and owner of the village store. The landlord and the bania were, thus, in a position to oppress the tenant and exploit him, and they took full advantage of the position. It is well to remember this fact, for in this lies the root cause of the tension between the Hindu and the Muslim." This was largely true of Punjab and East Bengal.

The class-ridden society imparted sharper teeth to the communal monster. The partition of Bengal in 1905 ran into heavy weather and scoured the very bed-rock of Hindu-Muslim unity. It raised a political storm in the country and because of the different religions of the exploiters and the exploited, it could easily be twisted to suit the communalists' designs. This shrewd political intrigue of the British rulers left very deep scars and caused permanent damage to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. Taking advantage of the near communal psychosis created by this stormy event, a reactionary clique of landed interests and growing upper class bourgeoisie led by Aga Khan, the loyal friend of Britishers, laid the foundation of the Muslim League. (This was, in fact, done at the instance of British rulers themselves. The memorandum was drafted in consultation with the British governor of U.P.). The apparent laudable pretext of Muslim interests which the Muslim League was formed to safeguard, was a convenient euphemism for the interests of this politically reactionary horde of Muslim zemindars and prestigious job-hunting upper middle class.

Dr. A. R. Desai has succinctly described this phenomenon thus : "The political awakening of the Muslim masses was canalised into the incorrect communal channel due to a number of reasons. The professional classes and the bourgeoisie developed within the Muslim community later than from the Hindu community. The former found the latter already firmly established in government services, as also in key positions in trade, industry and finance. They needed the support of the mass of their community in their struggle with the Hindu rivals for jobs and industrial and trade interests. They misdescribed this struggle between the sections of the same classes, as communal, as those between the Hindu community and Muslim community."<sup>9</sup>

The vast masses of poor and exploited peasantry in East Bengal, Sindh and Punjab consisted mainly of Muslims, and the landlords were invariably Hindus. The ironical situation could easily lend itself to a communal twist. The Moplah rebellion which broke out in 1921, is a case in point. "The Moplah rebel-

lion was," writes Krishnan on page 266 of his book, "in the main, a movement of Moplas against Hindu moneylenders and landlords, and against the government."

The demands of the Muslim League always centred around assembly seats and reservation of jobs. It never participated with full enthusiasm in the struggle against the British imperialism and never pressed for even adult franchise. This betrayed its upper class character. It remained a conservative party away from the high sea of the mass struggle.

Its counter-part the Hindu Mahasabha had a similar class composition, and in the Hindu minority provinces, i.e., Bengal, Sindh and Punjab, it voiced similar demands in favour of the Hindu upper classes. In fact, the communalists, though they may be of different religious persuasion, speak the same language and serve the same interests. Though the Hindu Mahasabha could conveniently masquerade as 'super-nationalist' party by virtue of being a Hindu party, in essence it was an anti-national force retarding the efforts for freedom from the clutches of the British imperialists. It was the fount of Hindu reaction deriving its political inspiration from the feudal elements.

Its demands in the Hindu minority provinces make an interesting comparison with those of the Muslim League in the Muslim minority provinces. This very pattern of demands brings in sharp focus the essential character of communalism as the sheet anchor of the vested interests. It is equally interesting to note that both the communalist parties failed to make a sizable dent in those provinces wherein their fellow-religionists were in a majority.

The communalist parties, it is important to note, never participated in any genuine mass movements. During the height of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements, these parties took the back seat. Gandhiji brought the political struggle to a new pitch and gave it a mass orientation. Communalists naturally had no place in this political movement of the masses.

But, after Gandhiji suddenly called off the movement in 1922, after the Chaurichoura incident, a political vacuum was created, which was fully exploited by the Hindu and Muslim

communalists. They emerged to the fore-front and communal violence broke out. Many major riots took place during the later half of the twenties. The united struggle of the masses had been the best deterrent against outbreaks of communal carnage. The rioting again stopped during the first half of the thirties, when the mass struggle touched a new high, and the Hindus and the Muslims fought unitedly to throw off the yoke of foreign imperialism.

Till 1938, the Muslim League was not a mass party. It had no economic programme worth the name to attract the impoverished Muslim masses. Its leadership was composed of urban professional classes and consequently was more interested in reservation of jobs and assembly seats rather than in the economic struggle of the downtrodden and toiling populace.

The other Muslim political organisations like Jamiat ul-Ulama, Ahrar party, the All-India Momin Conference etc. by and large represented the aspirations of the Muslim masses and these organisations were staunch opponents of the Muslim League politics and did not shun from public polemics against the Muslim League. The Ahrar party was very militant in its fight against the League. In 1937 elections, the Muslim League was completely trounced. The defeat was so disastrous that it could manage to get only less than 5 % of the total Muslim votes.

The Congress won with thumping majority. The overwhelming victory of the Congress and the poor showing of the League in the 1937 election took the wind out of the sails of the League propaganda that it was the sole representative of all the Muslims. The Congress-League alliance was also strained. The Congress went back on its pact with the Muslim League to take its two ministers in the provincial cabinet. This provided the league leadership with a propaganda lever, which it was very apt to exploit.

The League now realised its isolation from the masses and was shocked out of its sheer complacency. It decided to woo the Muslim masses and in the absence of any concrete mass-oriented economic programme, it used all the petty short-comings of the Congress ministry. Coupled with its subtle Goebbles-like propa-

ganda machinery, it succeeded in arousing the Muslims in minority provinces against the Congress.

The Congress Ministry in U.P. introduced a bill to abolish zemindari system. This bill was piloted by Rafi Ahmed Qidwai. This was a storm signal for the Muslim jagirdars. They now joined the Muslim League en-masse. The League had kept its options open on economic programme. These feudal Muslims captured the party machinery and geared up their resources to have it out with the Congress, which had, at least on paper, a progressive economic programme. All the propaganda tactics were tried to create mass hysteria amongst the Muslims which gave the League a great boost in the minority provinces. This success can be largely attributed to the natural phobia of the minority against the majority.

In the Muslim majority provinces it could not enamour the Muslim masses. The Unionist party of Sikander Hayat Khan in Punjab, Praja Krishak Party of Fazlul Haq in Bengal and Badshah Khan's influence in the Frontier Provinces kept the Muslim League at bay. These parties did not support the partition plan of the League. Fazlul Haq of the Praja Krishak party from East Bengal, even after the partition became certain, suggested to the Congress to keep Bengal united. It was the Congress which, under the threat of agitation from Shyama Prasad Mukerjee, developed cold feet and spurned the offer.

The Congress Ministries resigned at the outbreak of the second world war in protest against the British India Government's unilateral decision to participate in the war. Jinnah, the master tactician gave the call for celebrating "deliverance day" and captured the imagination of the gullible masses. The whole nation was indignant at the insulting decision to participate in the war, whereas the Muslim Leaguers were busy maligning the Congress leaders. Jinnah pronounced the two-nation theory in 1939.

It is interesting to note that the Hindu Mahasabha had earlier accepted it in its Ajmer session of 1933. According to Mr. V. D. Savarkar, "They (Hindus) possess the same culture, because Hindus alone possess a common Rashtra, and a common

Sanskriti and accept India not only as a motherland and fatherland but also their holy land i.e. *punya bhumi*. They alone constitute the Indian nation." In 1933, Bhai Parmanand, the then President of the Hindu Mahasabha, decried the theory of Hindu-Muslim unity, the only and the surest condition of attainment of swaraj as ridiculous. According to the Mahasabha, the Muslims and the Christians were to be treated as minorities and given rights as citizens but not as nationals.<sup>10</sup> Bhai Parmanand wrote in 1938, "Mr. Jinnah asserts that the Muslim League should be recognised as the sole representative of the Muslim community. . . . Mr. Jinnah argues that there are two nations in the country. . . . If Mr. Jinnah is right and I believe he is, the Congress theory of building up a common nationality falls to the ground. The situation has got only two solutions. One is the partition of the country into two, and the other to allow a Muslim state to grow within the state." In 1937, at Ahmedabad session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Shri V. D. Savarkar propounded the two-nation theory before Mr. Jinnah did so.<sup>11</sup>

The two-nation theory propounded by Mr. Jinnah raised a storm of political controversy in the country. It was opposed with equal vehemence by all the nationalists, Hindus as well as Muslims. Azad Muslim Conference, broadly representing the Muslim masses was convened in Delhi, in 1940, to oppose the two-nation theory propounded by Shri Jinnah. The conference was attended by over 50,000 people and it adopted a resolution condemning the two-nation theory.

Here we cannot go into the details of the arguments advanced by Mr. Jinnah in his well-known speech to support this unfortunate theory, but this much is obvious that they were quite fortuitous and merely a cover to hide class interests of those who wanted a separate territory to advance their own economic interests unhindered by the powerful competitors of the other community. The Muslim masses had no say in deciding the destiny of this great nation as there was no adult franchise at that time. The 1935 constitution had enfranchised only 10 per cent of the Indian population. The electors by and large belonged to the class, whose economic interests were at stake and the

general masses, whose aspirations should have mattered most, could not have an effective say in the matter. It was the most gratuitous tragedy of our history that though only five million out of 90 million of Muslims voted for the Muslim League, the country got divided.

Thus, from the analysis attempted above, it is clear that communalism is a very complex phenomenon. The historical, psychological, religious and economic factors combine to make communalism a nasty force. Only a socialist society based on principles of economic justice and equal opportunity for development of all the sections of our society can bury this hatchet.

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## Chapter 4

### COMMUNAL PSYCHOSIS

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Communal violence, it appears, has invaded us again. There was only a brief lull. This lull, as if, was a prelude to another storm. The recent happenings at Hazari Bagh, Delhi and Ahmedabad are once again pointing to this sore thumb. Is communal conflict inevitable and unavoidable for our socio-political milieu? It would not be cynical to give answer in the affirmative, if the dead weight of our pre and post Independence history is any indication. It should be clearly borne in mind that communalism is a politico-economic phenomenon and not a purely religious one, as is commonly misunderstood. Though it is oversimplification of the sorts, it is, nevertheless, not wide off the mark to say that economic compulsions generate communal conflict, and that the religious, cultural, or ideological idiom which is employed to project these conflicts is a mere expression of the more basic cleavages. The emergence of system changes in the economy and dominance of ballot box politics puts the position of the elite groups, who till then had dominated and manipulated the fulcrum of power, in jeopardy. The elite-groups then try to protect their position by identifying themselves with a recognisable community and its socio-economic grievances, which inevitably become coterminous with communal division.

Thus the communal conflict generated and sustained by the elite groups of both the major communities led to the vivisection of our country in 1947. (The same kind of conflict which assumed the regional form, erupted in East Bengal which is now Bangla-Desh and led to further partitioning of the Indian



sub-continent). It would, therefore, be quite evident that religion, though a powerful instrument to incite communal hatred, is not the prime-mover of this conflict. In order to retain their hold over their respective religious, regional or linguistic communities, the politicians obsessed by the power complex and aided and abetted by the powerful vested interests, develop a parochial ideology, anchored in the collective sub-conscious of these communities. This powerful passion play enables them to effectively masquerade their real designs, and instead, project themselves as the great champions of these respective communities. The Jansangh, the Indian Muslim League and the Shiv Sena politicians essentially belong to the same category and are the co-sharers of spoliation of communal politics. This is not to absolve other secular parties of the charge of communal politicking though their ideology is consciously based on the principles of secularism. As a short cut to power, these secular parties also have a wayward indulgence with parochial sentiments, though, of course, quite subtly and covertly.

The political situation is a variable function of economic crisis and consequently has a direct bearing on the vicissitudes of communal politics. Our country has been passing through a deep economic crisis since 1967, when, as a result of this, the Congress suffered a severe setback at the hustings. Naturally, various parochial parties and groups emerged on the scene to exploit the economic hardships of the common masses of the people and direct them through communal channels. The Jansangh had a field-day in Northern and Central India, where it captured a large number of seats in the state assemblies. The other secular parties became their partners in the coalition governments and thus lent them respectability and political viability. But these coalition governments themselves were not viable and hence tried to retain their hold over the electorate. The communal parties like the Jansangh and the Majlis-e-Mushawarat could do it by fanning communal hatred. Thus, there was a major communal riot in Ranchi when a procession taken out in support of the Urdu language was attacked by the Jansangh-inspired goondas, during the United front regime in those days. Many

other riots also took place, in which number of innocent lives were lost and properties worth crores of rupees were destroyed, as a result of vile machinations of these communal fascists. The communal hatred was worked up to such a pitch that the Jansangh adopted the notorious resolution about the Indianisation of the Muslims and the other minority communities in its Patna session in 1969 and, by and large, it went unchallenged by the secular forces in our country. The right reaction found it a most convenient handle to work up communal passion and thus, mount powerful barriers against the progressive secular forces in the country.

The economic crisis deepened further and hence, it was thought necessary to nationalise the major commercial banks to tide it over. The right reaction took alarm and bang came the Ahmedabad communal massacre, which was the worst ever seen during the post-independence period. Within one year, there followed another macabre show of communal frenzy at Bhiwandi and Jalgaon in 1970. This denouement of communal reaction turned even the most optimist secularist into pessimist of sorts. The secularists, it appeared, threw up their hands in despair. But this situation was not to last very long. The politics of the so-called 'Garibi hatao' slogan worked, at least so far as communal question was concerned, wonders and radicalised the whole atmosphere in the country. In the mid-term parliamentary elections held in 1971, all the right reactionary parties were routed and the Congress, because of its commitment to the politics of 'Garibi hatao', got a landslide victory at the polls. The communal reaction, it appeared, was now a spent force and would not be able to stand on its own any longer. A similar fate was in store for the Jamat-e-Islami in Pakistan, which could secure only four seats in the National Assembly. The Awami League under the leadership of Mujiburrehman captured nearly all the seats in the then East Pakistan. But as ill luck would have it, the people of East Bengal had to pay with their blood to attain freedom from the clutches of the corrupt and decadent dictatorship of the state of Pakistan. However, this catastrophe delivered another shattering blow to the communa-

lists of both varieties and thoroughly demoralised them. They lost, as if, the very *raison d'être* of their existence.

But, this too proved, as is evident from the recent communal irruptions in various parts of our country in the last couple of months, another ephemeral illusion of its kind. The subterranean forces of the dark animal world are surfacing again. The economic crisis, as is apparent, is deeper than ever and is causing political turmoil unheard of in the post-independence period. This political vicissitude cannot but have a very adverse effect on the communal situation. The frustrated aspirations of the masses of the people lower the threshold of violence. In such tension-ridden situation, it requires but little ingenuity to give a mischievous communal twist to the problem. This sleight of hand can easily cause major conflagration, if some organised efforts are made by interested parties. The recent communal holocaust in Poona is standing testimony to it. The Poona riot was unique in the sense that the Bandh call given by the Leftist parties degenerated into communal clashes. This should make all those sit up, who care for the common men's struggle for bread. The vested interests would always hatch such conspiracies to turn movement against rising prices, more food, better wages, etc., into sickening communal infight. By injecting the communal virus into the body politic of the healthy, secular movement, it can be easily destroyed. This disturbing trend has emerged to the surface in other towns and cities also. The recent rioting in Ahmedabad is another such case. To begin with, the arson and loot was directed against food grain shops, as the mob was ventilating its grievances against chronic shortages and rising prices, but, soon it degenerated into communal rioting within the walled city. There was, it appears, some invisible hand which gave it this turn. A week earlier, Indore also witnessed, though on a much smaller scale, similar communal disturbances. But, such a gust can turn into hurricane in no time. The apathy, or, subtle encouragement by the law and order enforcing machinery can make all the difference. On a number of occasions, many innocent lives were lost, as the law and order machinery was not willing to be ruthless with the communal elements, and, not only that, in some cases gave them open

encouragement. But whenever the authorities have shown any such determination, disturbances have been quelled in no time. The communal rioting which broke out in Delhi on the night of 12th June would have turned into a major catastrophe, but for the prompt police action.

The shameless political opportunism of politicians has been the major contributing cause in aggravating communal conflict. The cynical exploitation of the Vande Mataram issue in the Bombay Municipal Corporation election in March 1972 is a case in point. The Muslim League incited the passion of the innocent Muslim masses and got rich dividends by capturing 12 seats; the Jansangh and the Shiv Sena also took the cake on the other side of the fence. The city of Bombay was in the grip of communal tension, when this high drama was going on. And what was its climax? The Shiv Sena and the Muslim League teamed up to get the Shiv Sena candidate elected for the Mayor's post. For the power-crazy politicians, masses are mere pawns on the political chess board. The fast changing political scene in the country has forced the communal parties on both the sides of fence to evolve new strategies for survival. The venomous anti-Muslim propaganda of the Jansangh is no more to be heard. Instead, in North India, political horse-trading is going on between it and the Muslim communalists. There has been, of late, a subtle understanding between these communal groups. Dr. Faridi, in his statement a few months back, gave a clean chit to Jansangh, by saying that it had no hand in the 11 communal riots which took place in U.P. last year. According to some press reports, Shri Vajpayi of the Jansangh even championed the cause of Urdu to woo Muslims in the forth-coming elections. All this does not mean that there has been a change of heart on the part of the communalists. These are mere tactics to stem the tide of progressive socialist movement. Such tactics can be changed any time. Interests and not the alliances are permanent in politics. One can only say: Beware of this cloak and dagger politics.

## Chapter 5

### COMMUNAL INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Has writing of Indian history—ancient as well as medieval—been affected by the parochial twist of the twentieth century historians? On the careful study of the historical writings of the scholars of Indian history, the answer would be in the affirmative. There are, of course, certain notable exceptions like Dr. Romila Thapar, Dr. Satish Chandra, Harbans Mukhia, Dr. Irfan Habib and others of their ilk. But, as yet, this does not appear to be the predominant trend in modern Indian historiography. The subtle strains of communalism, in the form of certain stereotypes, have been systematically projected in the writings of our history. The writers of lesser breed, who are primarily responsible for writing the history text-books for the students of the lower standards, have, unabashedly used communal concepts in the presentation of past history to our school-going children. This continual injection of communal poison in their minds, produces a generation with the distorted vision of our past history and heritage and it also sustains and nourishes the seeds of communal conflict in its mind. This article attempts to draw the attention of the unwary readers to such grossly misinterpreted facts of our history.

Historical facts make sense only when seen in the total context of the socio-political structure of the society then prevailing and the acceptable political ideology of that era. Besides these operative constraints, the science of history needs a conceptual frame-work to lend itself to proper analysis and understanding. The facts of history must be seen in the light of this conceptual frame-work. If communal concepts are used to understand the underlying forces that shape the important events in history, the result would be disastrously different.

The first systematic attempt to give communal orientation to our history was made for the first time by the British utilitarian philosopher and historian, James Mill. He introduced the communal concept of periodisation of Indian history by dividing it into three periods, viz., the Hindu period, Muslim period and the British period. Dr. Romila Thapar rightly objects to this arbitrary periodisation of Indian History and pertinently observes: "It is assumed that the period from about 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1200 can be called Hindu because the ruling dynasties of the subcontinent subscribed to Hindu religion. However even on the basis of dynastic history alone, this period cannot correctly be described as Hindu since there were number of major dynasties which cannot be fitted into this description—the Mauryas, the Indo-Greeks, the Shakas and the Kushanas. Many of their kings were Buddhists and although not antagonistic to Hinduism, they consciously identified themselves as Buddhists."<sup>1</sup>

The term 'Muslim period' is similarly open to objection in as much as the commonalty of religion did not prevent interdynastic warfare amongst Muslims themselves. The nomadic tribes of central Asia had, undoubtedly, embraced Islam; but, this by itself did not mitigate the intertribal rivalries, as the mere fact of conversion to this faith did not bring about any significant change in the socio-economic structure of that society. The religion of Islam and its lofty spritual values—a product of the aspirations of the trading class of urbanised Mecca—did not mean anything to these primitive tribes of Central Asia. All it did was to provide an opportunity to various tribes to federate on regional basis, the most powerful of which were the federations of Mongol and Turkish tribes.

Marauding and predatory wars were, for them, the where-withal of their sustenance. They did not have any other economic base. Their first target of wholesale massacre and destruction was the seat of religions learning and culture of Islam—a faith which they had embraced. Prof. Mohammad Habib writes, "...In the countries conquered by the Mongols—Trans-Oxania, Persia, and Iraq—a Mongol governing class had been established; this class had been formally converted to Islam; but, in most

important matters it still lived by the traditions of the Mongols, which not only permitted but glorified wholesale massacres.”<sup>2</sup> After having exhausted all possibilities of further plunder in Western Asia, these Central Asian tribes turned their attention to India, not for any love of spreading their newly embraced faith, as has been demonstrated earlier, but to indulge in their insatiable lust for repacious plunder.

At times their predatory expeditions bore the stamp of ‘Jehad’; but it was only a masquerade to hide their real design of naked plunder. They had not spared their co-religionists and the centers of Islamic learnings from the fury of devastation. How could they feign to wage ‘jehad’ in India, except that it suited their crafty design to loot. It was—to use Prof. Toynbee’s pet word—*volkerwanderung* of the Central Asian tribes rather than crusade for Islam.

Seeing the momentous invasions of the Turko-Mongolian tribes of the Central Asian region in the light of the above analysis, it would be wrong to describe the period of the governing class, as it emerged out of the dominant section of these tribes in India, as a ‘Muslim period’. This fallacious nomenclature impregnates it with communal overtones. They should rather be referred to by their respective dynastic names. This is all the more desirable as there were interdynastical wars amongst these foreign invaders with as much ferocity as against the local Indian rulers. Sometimes the ruling Turkish dynasty would find its allies amongst the native Hindu princes to repel the invasion of their co-religionist Mongols.

This, therefore, should be seen as a struggle for power in which all sorts of combinations, without any regard to race or religion, were inevitable. Religion, as and when it suited the crafty design of the rulers in their power struggle, was also unstintedly used, even if it injured the very spirit of it. It has been very aptly remarked by Percival Spear that, “The first Mughals were kings by profession and Muslim by birth and circumstance. Like their Central Asian forebears they regarded the ruled as a flock or herd to be tended and exploited rather than converted or persecuted.”<sup>3</sup>

Communally-oriented historians, muddled as they are, consider religion as the motive force behind most of the historical events and ignore other complex factors of politico-economic nature. Power struggle cuts across narrow religious and sectarian loyalties and predominantly casts its shadow over historical events. Historians have painted Allauddin Khalji black for his giving severe punishments to certain powerful Hindu zemindars and this is held out against him as proof of his anti-Hindu policy. Allauddin, interested as he was in maintaining his imperial sway, took such harsh measures against the Hindu zemindars, because they were conspiring to have a showdown with the Sultan and consequently, he wanted to cut them to size by inflicting humiliating punishment on them. These historians ignore to mention much harsher punishments meted out to those Muslims, who dared to challenge his imperial authority. Thus R. C. Majumdar says, "The 'New Musalmans', settled near Delhi, were also severely dealt with by Allauddin. They were discontented and restless... and they actually rebelled when Allauddin's army was returning from the conquest of Gujarat. The Sultan also dismissed all 'New Musalmans' from his service. This added to their discontent, and in despair they hatched a conspiracy to assassinate him. But this conspiracy was soon discovered and the Sultan wreaked a terrible vengeance on them by issuing a decree for their wholesale massacre. Thus, between twenty and thirty thousand 'New Musalmans' were mercilessly slaughtered in one single day."<sup>4</sup> Similarly a Muslim saint Siddi Maula was executed at his command because Alauddin suspected his involvement in treason. These events make it very clear that imperial hegemony was the only thing these emperors cared for.

Another glaring example of the historian's selective bias in focussing on events of their choice and leaving out those embarrassing to them, is that of Mahmud Ghaznavi's sacrilegious and iconoclastic act of despoiling Somnath temple. This contemptible act is described with great indignation whereas no mention is made of much more atrocious and heinous acts of king Harsha of Kashmir (A.D. 1089-1101). D. D. Kosambi says, "King Harsha of Kashmir systematically melted down all metal



images throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom, with just four exceptions. The work was carried out under a special 'minister for uprooting gods' (devotpatana-nayaka). Each image was publicly defiled by leprous beggars who voided urine and excrement upon it before dragging it through the streets to the foundry. Not the slightest theological excuse was offered."<sup>5</sup>

The root cause of this profanity, with or without theological trappings, was, of course, economic. It was either naked plunder as in the case of Mehmud of Ghazni or some exigency to meet the shortage of precious metal as in the case of king Harsha. Similarly Subhatavarman, the Parmar ruler (1193-1210A.D.), attacked Gujarat and plundered a large number of Jain temples at Dabhoi and Cambay.

The communal concept of history, as pointed out earlier, oversimplifies historical events and tries to cast them in narrow religious frame and completely ignores the historical and political compulsions of the period. The religion of the Muslim rulers of medieval India has been confused with the system of government followed by them. The desire of any Muslim ruler apart, the country of India's dimensions, with its variegated socio-economic structures, could not be reduced to a system of monolithic religion like Islam. The Turkish Sultans grasped this reality and never attempted the imposition of the Islamic concepts of revenue and this despite the pressure of the bigoted Ulema who wielded considerable influence in the durbar. In fact the administration at the lower rungs was left in the hands of local Hindu chiefs, Zemindars, Rais, Thakurs and Chaudharis. They were instrumental in the revenue exactions for the central imperial authority. As long as they did this job well and paid the revenue to the imperial treasury, they were left undisturbed.

The self-sufficient villages, where the mass of the Indian population lived, remained, by and large, unaffected by the political vicissitudes and the turbulence at the nerve-centre of power. As for the role of Brahmins in running the Muslim empire, Prof. Toynbee says, "Under all political regimes in India, one of the prerogatives of the Brahmins had been to serve as ministers of state. They had played this part in the Indic world

before playing it in the affiliated Hindu society. The Mughal's Muslim fore-runners and the Mughals themselves in their turn had found it convenient to follow the example of the Hindu states which they were supplanting. Brahmin ministers and minor officials in the service of Muslim rulers made this alien rule less odious to Hindus than it otherwise would have been. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

So far as the social and legal aspects of Islam are concerned, they were enforced, with varying degree of effectiveness, only on the Muslim population. The Islamic Shariat never became the integral part of the state policy, or, at least, it never transcended the limits of Muslim population. Ala-ud-din's reply to Qazi Mughis-ud-din epitomises this policy. Ala-ud-din is reported to have said to the Qazi, "To prevent rebellion, in which thousands perish, I issue such orders as I conceive to be for the good of the state, and the benefit of the people. Men are heedless, disrespectful, and disobey my commands; I am then compelled to be severe to bring them into obedience. I do not know whether this is lawful or unlawful; whatever I think to be for the good of the state, or suitable for the emergency, that I decree." There may have been departures from, or aberrations of, this policy, but it formed the general pattern of the empire's overall strategy.

Aurangzeb has been consistently painted as anti-Hindu in our text-book histories. So much has been written about it and so long, that this has become an accepted fact and the very mention of his name evokes derision. This is far from the truth. In his personal practice of religion, he was extremely orthodox and very fastidious. He was, in this regard, follower of Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi, who sought to reconcile Sunni legalism with the religion of the spirit and so to repel the tendency of syncretism with Hinduism. But this personal bigotry, as far as Aurangzeb was concerned, was perfectly reconcilable to his political catholicism.

His approach to political and administrative matters can best be demonstrated with the reply he wrote on the petition for the Bakhshiship claimed by M. Amin Khan on the grounds of his being the follower of the Sunni faith. Aurangzeb wrote across

the petition, writes Dr. Satish Chandra, "What connection have earthly affairs with religion? and what right have administrative works to meddle with bigotry? For you is your religion, for me is mine. If this rule (suggested by you) were established it would be my duty to extirpate all (Hindu) rajas and their followers."<sup>7</sup> This sounds very much like the basic tenet of modern secularism. Though Aurangzeb was far too cautious to enrage Hindus as a whole, there was a yawning gap between the policies followed by the emperor Akbar and Aurangzeb. Thus Percival Spear perceptibly remarks, "He differed from Akbar in consciously tolerating Hindus rather than treating them as equals, but his intolerance is little more than a hostile legend based on isolated acts such as the erection of the mosque on a temple site in Benaras."<sup>8</sup>

The conflict between the indomitable Maratha hero Shivaji and Aurangzeb is also projected with communal trappings. Shivaji was a master strategist of guerrilla war. He challenged the might of Mughal empire with his small but highly compact and mobile army. Marathas were hardy, capable, and rough-hewn people. The exploited Maratha peasantry rallied round Shivaji who represented their aspirations. It was essentially a power struggle between Shivaji and Aurangzeb which has been projected with communal overtones by our historians. Aurangzeb sought to accommodate Shivaji, but failed to satisfy his soaring ambitions. Writes Dr. Satish Chandra, "Thus, the main differences between Shivaji and Mughals centered around the territory and mansab which was to be granted to Shivaji, and later, around the claim for chauth and sardeshmukhi. For strategic and economic reasons, the Mughals were unwilling to see a powerful Maratha state arise on their southern border, on the flank of the vital trade route to the west coast. Financial stringency made it impossible to satisfy the ambition of Shivaji, except at the expense of the Deccan states."<sup>9</sup>

Though Shivaji welded Maratha peasantry into a cohesive force, he could not liberate them from the clutches of unrelieved feudal exploitation as he himself aspired to be the feudal chief. For the masses of the Maratha peasantry it amounted to mere

change of masters. After Shivaji's death his sagacious restraint broke loose and their kingdom disintegrated. Percival Spear says, "The hardy patriots noted for their moderation towards their foes (we have the Muslim historian Khafi Khan's testimony for this) and restraint towards civilians had become toughened raiders notorious for their rapacity and ruthlessness as much as for their daring. They were to spread this reputation all over India, until their name was as much dreaded by other Hindus as by Muslims."<sup>10</sup>

Our histories have too often focussed on the deeds or misdeeds of the kings, emperors and military adventurers. The rulers and the ruling classes have dominated the historical scene. The plight of the common masses of people, their socio-economic condition, their habits and customs and the popular movements which arose amongst them have received very scanty attention. We have been projecting the socio-political conflicts of the feudal rulers as of our own.

We forget that the members of the ruling classes, Hindus as well as Muslims, had more in common amongst themselves than with the downtrodden masses of their own communities. Thus Ziya Barni, the court historian of the Turkish Sultans, calls lowly Muslims as dogs and swine and considers them unworthy of any higher education. Similarly Hindu Rajas and Rajput kings became willing allies of the foreign Central Asian invaders and collaborated with them to perpetuate their exploitative rule. The poor peasantry at the bottom of the social pyramid, which also included Hindus as well as Muslims, toiled endlessly to sustain the ostentatious luxury of their rulers. Amir Khusro, the celebrated poet significantly remarks that "every pearl in the royal crown is but the crystallised drop of blood fallen from the tearful eyes of the poor peasant."

The harassed and harried masses found their solace in the mystic and the Bhakti movements of medieval India. The power struggle and the court intrigues was a matter of unconcern to the villagers and the economically downtrodden people. The political and social tensions at the top did not divide the masses at the bottom. Thus K. K. Dutta and Majumdar write, "The

Hindu and Muslim communities came to imbibe each other's thoughts and customs; and, beneath the ruffled surface of storm and stress, there flowed a genial current of mutual harmony and toleration in different spheres of life. As a matter of fact, both Hindus and Muslims had mutual admiration for each other's culture, since the early days of the advent of Islam in India, and one of the sources of Muslim mysticism was Indian... The wholesome spirit of mutual toleration found expression in growing veneration of the Hindus for the Muslim saints, particularly of the mystic school, and a corresponding Mohammedan practice of venerating Hindu saints; and it ultimately led to the common worship of Satyapir (the true saint)."<sup>11</sup>

Many Muslim princes and saints like Zainul Abidin of Kashmir, Dara Shikoh and Mazhar Janjanan, the celebrated Muslim saint, studied and greatly admired Hindu philosophy derived from Yoga, Vedanta and Upanishads. Many of these Hindu scriptures were translated into Persian by Dara Shikoh. In reply to an inquiry, Mazhar Janjanan makes it very clear that the Merciful God revealed a book by the name of Veda and sent an angel by name Brahma in ancient India.

Furthermore the assimilation of two cultures gave rise to new forms of architecture, music and painting. The syncretism of thought and art is the rich heritage of which every Indian should be justly proud. These and other similar aspects should be emphasised in the presentation of our history to the future generations to disabuse their minds of the communal poison injected so long into their thought streams.

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## Chapter 6

### INDIAN MUSLIMS : THEIR PROBLEMS IN PERSPECTIVE

The Indian Muslims, though very much part of the national mainstream, face certain challenges and problems distinctly peculiar to themselves. The fast changing political, social and economic scene in recent years has thrown up new challenges and created new problems. Whether the response of Indian Muslims is matching these challenges or not, time alone will show. Prof. Toynbee, in his *Study Of History*, has proposed an interesting hypothesis which he has attempted to test on different peoples and communities. The hypothesis runs thus : As the magnitude of the challenge—that of physical and human environment—increases, the stimulus to meet the challenge also grows in direct proportion. This proportionality of response breaks down after a limit and this sets in motion the forces of psychological disintegration. Does this apply to Indian Muslims? One may be tempted to draw this conclusion.

What are the problems confronting Indian Muslims and how are they reacting to them? The problems broadly speaking are economic, political, social and psychological. These problems, one might say, are being faced by the entire masses of people in India. How are they different or peculiar in the case of Muslims? I concur with this point of view in as much as the Muslims are part of the national mainstream. Moreover, their reaction pattern, influenced as it is by the historical and religio-socio-psychological factors, is likely to be different. We will try to explore, in this article, the contours of this terrain of behaviour peculiar to the Indian Muslims.

## POLITICAL PROBLEM

The various problems, economic, political as well as social are, actually speaking, intricately enmeshed and spin around economic axis. In spite of this complexity of interrelationship, we can map out different focal areas of operations. To begin with, we would turn our attention to the political problem.

The advent of the British in India and their hegemonistic designs proved to be a *coup de grace* for the Muslim rule. But the fact of having ruled India for centuries gave the Muslim upper classes a unique sense of pride which was almost indelible. This past-oriented power-complex hid their present incompetence to face the real challenges of the changed power equations. This emotional complex completely insulated them from all that was good in foreign sciences and technology. Thus, they further slid down the scale of modern achievements. They tried to match the modern challenges with continual back reference to what can be described as their politico-cultural continuum which had now fallen into an interregnum. This class, with its tenacious sense of power complex, provided leadership to the Muslim community in its political struggle. The aspirations of this class of feudal lords from North-West India found expression in the political idiom of the Muslim League. Thus, we can concur with Mr. Ratna Datta that economic compulsions generate communal conflict in India, and that "the religious, cultural and/or ideological idiom, in which the conflicts are sustained, is a mere expression of the more basic economic cleavages. . . . The subsequent system changes in the economy and the emergence of ballot box politics threatens the privileged position of such elite-groups. If they can protect their interest by identifying with the interest of a recognisable community, and to the extent that economic divisions are co-terminus with communal divisions, communal conflict is inevitable."<sup>1</sup>

The inevitability of this communal conflict generated by the elite groups of both the major communities led to the vivisection of this country in 1947. (The same kind of conflict which assumed the regional form, erupted in East Bengal and led to further partitioning of our sub-continent.) The entire Muslim com-



munity in British India was tricked into accepting the leadership of this elite-group, which constituted the core of the Muslim League. The analysis of the charter of demands drawn up by the Muslim League makes it quite clear that it was least bothered about the plight of the common Muslims. They played up with the minority phobia of the community to secure leverage for their political horse-trading. This is the single most important factor of the League politics to be borne in mind by the Muslim intelligentsia in India today. The projection of the politico-economic interests of a section of the community onto the entire community is a usual course adopted by the economically dominating classes.

The systemic and the structural changes taking place in our economy have fast transformed the political scene in our country. The plurality of the political system has brought into existence different political parties and groups identifying themselves with regional, linguistic, religious and caste interests. The inherent constraints of the capitalist growth of economy restrict the fruits of progress to the upper elite classes in the society. There is, therefore, an inevitable conflict to wrest maximum share of the limited resources available and the leadership of these various castes and communities, in order to usurp all these fruits, form pressure groups and parties. The hapless masses of these communities are psyched into believing these demands to be their own. No community, including the Islamic community of India, is monolithic, in as much as it is divided along economic class lines. The Muslim workers or tenant farmers cannot hope to get better wages or treatment on the grounds of the commonalty of the religion with their Muslim employers. Otherwise, industrial peace would have been the order of the day in Pakistan today. There is certainly greater solidarity along class lines than communal lines. The sense of cohesion felt in times of external danger, as in the days of pre-partition struggle, or during an outbreak of communal violence is a purely temporary phenomenon and illusory in character. The recrudescence of communal violence, thus, helps the communal reactionary interests of both the communities, by consolidating and perpe-

tuating a false sense of communal unity. The emergence of ballot-box politics further exacerbates the already not-too happy situation.

The popularity of the Muslim League and its slow intrusion in the North must make the Muslim intelligentsia sit up. The Muslim League leadership can, at best, act as a pressure group to wrest certain concessions for the Muslim elite. The Muslim masses will be and are being left high and dry. The leadership of the Muslim League, as is wont of any communal group, is in the hands of the Muslim upper classes and the mass of the Muslim population cannot hope to better its condition — as is evident in the case of Pakistan — by casting its lot with the Muslim League. The same applies to the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat. They will get a raw deal from such organisations. The hyperbole of their propaganda drive to secure concessions for the Muslims should deceive no body. It is a mere masquerade. Moreover, such moves are pregnant with grave danger, as they generate communal tension by giving impetus to the communal reactionaries of the majority community.

The Jamat-e-Islami, I believe is a party to be put in a different category. The Muslim League, though it plays up communal sentiments, does not talk of theocracy as the Jamat does, and, to that extent is wedded to bourgeois secularism. The Jamat politics based on the concept of Islamic theocracy, is a greater potential danger for the Muslims in India, though its activities here, unlike those in Pakistan, might appear politically innocuous. By talking of non-participation in parliamentary politics — since it implies supporting ungodly secular political structure — Jamat's leaders are drugging and politically maiming the young enthusiastic generation of the Indian Muslims. The chief ideologue of the Jamat in Pakistan, Maulana Maududi, while departing to Pakistan, thus spoke to his followers on May 10, 1947: "So far as the Muslims are concerned, I want to tell them that present irreligiousness (secularism) and the concept of national democracy are out and out opposed to your religion. If you bow your head before them, then you will be going against the teachings of Quran. If you participate in its

establishment and sustenance, then you will be raising the banner of revolt against God.”<sup>2</sup> Further, Maulana prefers Hindu Raj to the secular way of government for the Muslims. When questioned by Justice Munir, who was inquiring into anti-Qadiani riots in west Punjab in 1953, as to his opinion about the establishment of the Hindu raj in India, the Maulana replied, “I would have no objection even if the Muslims of India were treated in that form of government as shudras or mlenchhas and Manu’s laws were applied to them, depriving them of all share in the government and even the right of a citizen.”<sup>3</sup> My only comment to this opiate politics of Jamat is that the Muslims of India beware and unite against the reactionary horde of the Jamat leaders.

The politics of the Jamat, and one should take note of this, has not attracted the Muslim masses, who have been as responsive to political changes in our country as any other community. The Jamat’s appeal has been restricted to a negligible section of the Muslim intelligentsia, one can say only a lunatic fringe. The propaganda of the Hindu communalists, or the general impression pervading that Muslims always behave by communal motivations, is a political myth. The Muslim communal organisations notwithstanding, the Muslim masses—faced as they are with pressing economic problems—politically behaved in as good or as bad a way as the non-Muslim masses in India. The allegation that they have always voted *en bloc* for the ruling party, is also unfounded. In 1967, when anti-Congress feelings were very strong, by and large, the Muslims voted against the Congress. But for the Muslim support, the United Front government could not have been installed in power in the state of West Bengal in 1967. Similar instances can be multiplied from other states as well. During the recent elections (i.e. 1971 mid-term elections) the Congress was riding the wave of popularity, and, despite Bangla Desh action, which was after all, not very palatable to the Muslims, they were no less enthusiastic to vote Indira Congress to power, except perhaps in few cases, where they were swayed by communal sentiments. The casteism and communalism so thoroughly pervade our ballot-box politics that

communal and caste pattern of voting is a general rule rather than an exception and no one community or group can be singled out for committing this political sin, if it can be so construed.

#### SOCIAL PROBLEM

The second dimension of the Muslim problem in India is the social attitude and the norm of behaviour of this community in facing the modern problems. It is alleged, even by well meaning intellectuals, that the Muslims are inward-looking and resist doggedly all that impinges on their religious faith. This contention, I believe, is by and large true, but by no means only ascriptive to the Muslims. There are historical and psychological reasons behind it, which need little elaboration. The psychological dynamics of the Muslims is no different from that of the other communities. The psychological dynamics is — though this may not be acceptable to those who reject the materialist interpretation of history — rooted in the social dynamics. Let me elaborate :

Islam was at the height of its glory from the eighth century to the thirteenth century of our era. When it emerged from the Arabian desert in the beginning of the 7th century, it unmistakably bore the birth-marks of an urbanised tribal society with its simplicity of doctrines. But after having conquered the countries with superior cultures, it underwent a basic transformation. During the height of its glory in the Abbasid period, it achieved a pinnacle of excellence in philosophy, mathematics, medicine and natural sciences. The Greek thought and reason deeply influenced the Islamic theological formulations. The Arab intellectuals freely borrowed from Greek, Persian and Indian sources, and built up an impressive thought structure. Al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawayh, Avicenna, Averros etc., are the shining stars of the firmament of Islam. "Avicenna's works on the physical and natural sciences are numerous.... About one hundred of his books have been translated by the Europeans since the twelfth century. His works were used in European universities until the 18th century. He presumes to discuss

Aristotle as his equal, and his original thoughts are considered precursors of modern scientific theories. He believed in the unlimited power of reason."<sup>4</sup> Averros was another votary of reason from amongst the innumerable others. Roger Bacon considered some of his writings as epoch-making monuments. During his official career he continued to teach and write on philosophy and in later years of his life his rational ideas provoked the ritualists and the fanatical reactionaries, amongst them being theologians.<sup>5</sup> Examples of such intellectual achievements within and outside the Islamic frame-work can be multiplied.

Cross-breeding with Greek thought produced strains of religious heresies, the most famous of which is Mu'tazalite one. Alfred Guillaume says about it, "They are not a sect in the strict sense of the word, but rather a group of thinkers who could count adherents in most of the sects proper. Perhaps the best term for them would be 'Modernists'. They rejected the traditional interpretation of the Quran and the dogmas of the orthodox school, and claimed the right to judge revelation in the light of reason and the tenets of philosophy."<sup>6</sup> All this goes to illustrate that the Muslims, when economically prosperous and politically strong and powerful, were far from being conservative. Thus H.A.R. Gibb correctly points out, "The way to the reconciliation of Islamic orthodoxy with the modern movement of thought lies, not as is so often supposed, through compromise with the hypotheses of modern science. The scientific habit of thought has never been lost for Muslim scholars, though they may very likely need to revise their scientific method and to broaden out as well as deepen their grasp of it. The way is to be found rather in revaluation of the data of thought through the cultivation of historical thinking."<sup>7</sup> Briffault, the author of *Making of Humanity* says, "For, although there is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the permanent distinctive force of the modern world, and the supreme source of its victory — natural science and the scientific spirit."<sup>8</sup> The same author says on page 190 of the book referred to above,

“The debt of our science to that of the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries of revolutionary theories; science owes a great deal more to Arab culture, it owes it its existence. The ancient world was, as we saw, pre-scientific. The Astronomy and Mathematics of the Greeks were a foreign importation never thoroughly acclimatized in Greek culture. The Greeks systematized, generalised, and theorised but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation and experimental inquiry were altogether alien to the Greek temperament. Only in Hellenistic Alexandria was any approach to scientific work conducted in the ancient classical world. What we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of Mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. The spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs.”

These brilliant achievements and the liberalism of thought, however, were coterminous with the glory of the Arab empire. With it, declined the intellectual vigour and the progressive orientation of the Muslim thought. The Mongol invasion of 1258 A.D. delivered a shattering blow to the already tottering Abbasid empire. This was a traumatic experience which reversed the process of intellectual achievements and made it look more and more inward. Dr. Iqbal describes this terminal point of the Islamic thought in these words : “On top of all this came the destruction of Baghdad — the centre of Muslim intellectual life — in the middle of the thirteenth century. This was indeed a great blow... For fear of further disintegration, which is only natural in such a period of political decay, the conservative thinkers of Islam focussed all their efforts on the one point of preserving a uniform social life for the people by a jealous exclusion of all innovations in the law of Sharia't as expounded by the early doctors of Islam.”<sup>9</sup> The subsequent Muslim empires of Persia and India could not match the early glorious achievements of religious and philosophical thought. The later empires were more dedicated to the revival of the national culture of

Persia. All the traditions of their governance drew sustenance from the Sassanid patterns and were completely devoid of the early Islamic spirit. In socio-religious sphere, the early arch-typal patterns reigned supreme. All the rights of innovations, as if, were reserved for the earlier generations. Now only copious comments could be written.

Our encounter with modern liberal and secular thought began in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. This was also a period of disintegration of the Mogul empire in India. The last attempt to restore the tottering empire in 1857 also met with disaster. One can just imagine the state of the Muslim intellectuals' mind. Its conservatism was psychological defence mechanism. Compared to this, the Hindu intelligentsia felt a sense of relief and emancipation. Though the British rule did not mean termination of subjugation, the knowledge of Western political and social sciences did show a way out. This newly lit flame of hope gave a new fillip to the Hindu thought. By acquiring western knowledge, the Hindu upper classes were equipping themselves with modern weapons of thought for the final show down with the new masters. For the Muslim rulers and elite, it was just the opposite. It was a journey from domination to subjugation. The Muslim thinkers now hitched their wagons to the backwater of the past. They did not realise that a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection was no remedy for the present state of decay.

This turning point in the history of Muslims did throw up some thinkers and intellectuals who realised the folly of the backward orientation of thought and launched out a programme of modernisation and western education. The most prominent amongst them were Sir Syed, Justice Amir Ali, Khuda Bakhsh, Chirag Ali and others. Justice Ameer Ali and others vigorously pleaded for modernisation of the Muslim political and social institutions and a radical change in the laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Moulvi Chirag Ali wrote, "Neither the four traditional sources of Muslim law, nor the authority of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence which make use of them, can be regarded as legally infallible or immutable. Certain sections of

Muslim civil law require re-writing... New legal authority has to be evolved to effect thorough-going legislative changes in the inherited traditional law, to eliminate out-dated and by modern standards inefficient, unproductive and inhuman features in legal institutions."<sup>10</sup>

As it is in the nature of communal conflict, the leadership of the Muslim community passed into the hands of feudal and compradore mercantile vested interests, whose very survival depended on perpetuating the obscurantist practices. Unlike the Hindus, the Muslims did not have strong bourgeois class interested in modernisation. Modernisation is not possible without an educated and articulating middle class. This, the Muslims totally lack, as they do not have a viable entrepreneurial, managerial and professional middle class in post-independent India. Mostly, they belong to the toiling lower classes. For the middle classes, modernisation of socio-political institutions is a vital necessity as the traditional ways become downright obstacles. The capitalist structural changes, therefore, are invariably accompanied by the changes in social and political modes of thought. The Turks could modernise themselves precisely because they overthrew the rotten feudal monarchy in early twenties and the emerging middle class assumed the reigns of power. The Turkish nationalist leaders felt the necessity of training people in modern industrial skills so that the country could be industrialised. They, therefore, had to forcibly close down the centres of religious learning and open institutions of modern learning; but, because of its thwarted industrialisation as a result of its becoming a satellite of western imperialism, this transformation could not be completed. The peasant population is asserting itself to pressurise the rulers to concede more religious concessions.

Whereas modernisation took place in early twenties in Turkey, in Pakistan it was delayed for a long period. Pakistan, in its formative years, was dominated by reactionary feudal leadership and the process of industrialisation—on which modernisation ultimately depends — was extremely slow as it was totally dependent on imports from western countries. But slow-



ly the feudal interests are being undermined, and newly emerging middle class is mounting pressure for greater measures of modernisation; the recently enacted 'Muslim Family Laws Ordinance' (Ordinance VIII of 1961) is a case in point. This ordinance brings about long-desired changes in the Islamic Laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance. The structural changes taking place in the economic field make reforms inevitable in the socio-political superstructure. Other Muslim countries like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, Iran etc. have instituted a variety of reforms in the laws of Shariat within the framework of Islam. Under the impact of western thought, it is interesting to note, Taha Husayn of Egypt went to the extent of saying, that Egypt owes nothing to the East, being the child of Greece and of Europe.

The Indian Muslims belonging mostly to the lower strata of the working masses, have not felt the pressure of change on the scale the Hindu middle class did. Moreover, the old leadership which survives by playing up the minority phobia, has a vested interest in perpetuating the out-moded socio-religious institutions in the name of the freedom to practise religion. None of these leaders has sincerely cared to fight the economic distress of the community and the tremendous problems it faces. They have an extremely narrow base, mainly among the middle class Muslims and hardly enjoy popularity among the Muslim masses. Their demands have a reactionary character so as to draw political sustenance from this narrow base. The Muslim masses can hope to improve their lot, only by joining the struggle of the common masses of the people in India for greater social and economic justice. The recent upsurge of the people has built up pressure for socialist measures and the Muslim masses are as much part of it as any other. This has, and would continue to undercut the political influence of the traditional leadership. The social revolution and this interrelationship between psychological and social dynamics can make no exception in the case of the Muslims. Is it then true to say that the Muslims are more conservative than others? I leave the answer to my perceptive readers.

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## Chapter 7

### MUSLIM PERSONAL LAW AND UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

A uniform civil code is one of the directive principles of our Constitution. After twentyfive years of our existence as an independent nation, this uniformity in the civil code, amongst other directive principles, has still remained an unrealizable goal. The minority communities, and specially the Muslims, are hyper-sensitive towards any reformation of their codes of personal laws as they are considered to be divinely inspired or ordained. The parliamentary form of government has its own constraints and, therefore, it cannot be expected to force the pace of change in such highly religiously sensitive matters. Moreover, the parliament's right to legislate is subject to the constitutional provisions guaranteeing certain fundamental rights to the minorities. The part III of the Constitution confers the rights to 1) freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion (articles 25 and 2), the right to conserve culture (article 29). In Mohammad Imam's opinion, "the right to freedom of conscience and right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion are not infringed by the law which makes reforms in the Muslim Personal Law because, firstly, the rules of Muslim personal law, as in force in India though emanating from the Quran do not concern with the conscience or practising or profession of religion; they merely deal with regulating social and economic relations. Secondly, even if the observance of the rules of Muslim Law is regarded as professing, practising and propagating religion since these rules deal with social and economic matters, it may be open for parliament to regulate or restrict or modify them to a desired extent for providing for social welfare and reforms under article 25 (2)."<sup>1</sup> Apart from the constitutional modalities of the reforms,

the political and electoral considerations would deter the government from proceeding with the reform.

It is therefore, inevitable that the initiative to build up pressure for the reform should come from the thinking sections of the community. The matter, in this case, unfortunately, gets further complicated — and this is quite important for looking at the matter in its proper perspective — by the fact that the Muslims are in minority in India. The Muslim intellectuals in India regard any proposal to bring change in the Muslim personal law as an attack on the minority rights and view it with suspicion and ascribe ulterior motives even if the cause for reform is pleaded by the persons whose sincerity is beyond any reasonable doubt.

A section of the Muslim intelligentsia, even if it agrees to the desirability of the change, doubts the urgency of the matter. The inevitable argument is that the other socio-economic problems are more urgent in nature and this reform in the personal law can wait till these problems are satisfactorily solved or till our society is transformed into a socialist society. While this argument is undeniably plausible, it does not touch the core of the matter. While the economic problems are undoubtedly urgent, they are intricately linked up with the structural aspects of our economy. Though the radical structural transformation of our economy is eminently desirable, the social transformation of our religious-cultural complex cannot be made mechanically dependent on this change. The incongruent pattern of such a social fabric militates against the dynamics of change which is so very vital for ushering in a new millennium of socio-economic justice. One cannot wait indefinitely for bringing about parity in the social status of both the sexes. The Muslim intellectuals must come to grips with the modern realities and give up their fixation to the decadent practices. For too long they have tenaciously clung to the idea of the superiority of the Islamic institutions developed long after the death of the Prophet and in places far flung from the heartland of the original Islamic movement and under the influences which were either Hellenistic or Syro-Roman in origin. The paradigm of Islamic law as it was developed by the Ulama

of the 2nd and 3rd century Hira, has come under the strains and stresses of modern concepts and needs to be completely discarded. The patterns of our thoughts must be refashioned and restructured so as to conform to the commonly accepted normative concepts of the modern period as it had to conform to the acceptable norms of the period when the Islamic law was codified in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Islamic era.

The Quran, as interpreted by the trail-blazing intellectuals of great eminence like Mohammad Abduh of the late nineteenth century Egypt, teaches its followers to follow reason. Thus comments Abduh on chapter II, verse 243, of the Quran, "How far those who believe in taqlid are from the guidance of the Quran! It propounds its laws in a way that prepares us to use reason and makes us people of insight. . . It forbids us to submit to taqlid."<sup>2</sup> It would be quite interesting to note that Mohammad Abduh of Egypt was the most eminent disciple of that ardent votary of political pan-Islamism, Jamal-addin Afghani. Mohammad Abduh who was also a man of great religious learning, reinterpreted the Quran and concluded that polygamy and unilateral divorce cannot be encouraged by the Quranic injunctions as it (the Quran) has laid down certain conditions which are most difficult — if not impossible — to be fulfilled. He, therefore, was of the opinion that repudiation of the marriage should not be permitted unless a court authorises it.

The battle for reforms was fought with equal vehemence and enthusiasm in India by the reformers of great importance like Sir Syed, Justice Ameer Ali, Khuda Bakhsh and Maulvi Chirag Ali. They brought to bear the breadth of their vision to creatively interpret the Quran so as to modernize the codified law of Islam as evolved by the Ulama on the basis of their own interpretation of the Quran. Maulvi Chirag Ali hit the nail on its head when he wrote, "Certain sections of the Muslim civil law require rewriting. The codification of Islamic jurisprudence was a reflection of the historical situation of Islamic society in the ninth and tenth centuries. . . (we will analyse that in the later part of this article). In such countries a new legal theory has to be evolved to effect thorough-going legislative changes in

the inherited traditional law to eliminate outdated and by modern standards inefficient, unprogressive and inhuman features in legal institutions.”<sup>3</sup> Justice Ameer Ali brings the matter in right focus when he says, “The fact must be borne in mind, that the existence of polygamy depends on circumstances. Certain times, certain conditions of society, make its practice absolutely needful, for the preservation of women from starvation or utter destitution. If reports and statistics speak true, the greatest proportion of the mass immorality prevalent in the centres of civilization in the West arises from absolute destitution. Abbe Hue and Lady Duff Gordon have both remarked that in the generality of cases sheer force of circumstances drives people to polygamy in the East.” (This of course, appears to be disputatious proposition from sociological point of view). He then continues, “With the progress of thought, with ever-changing conditions of this world, the necessity for polygamy disappears, and its practice is tacitly abandoned or expressly forbidden. And hence it is, that in those Muslim countries where the circumstances which made its existence at first necessary are disappearing, plurality of wives has come to be regarded as an evil, and as an institution opposed to the teaching of the prophet...”<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Iqbal’s commitment to Islamic fundamentalism is well-known. But in view of the intellectual advancements in the human urge for progress, he also pleaded for structural reforms in the Islamic institutions which had succumbed to medieval accretions. He was deeply moved by the honest attempts of the Turkish intellectuals to revolutionize the age-old Islamic practices. He legitimized this momentous development by investing it with the religious sanctity of ‘jihad’. He termed jihad as the ‘principle of movement’ in the nature of Islam. As for eternal principles, he says, “When they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change which, according to the Quran, is one of the greatest ‘signs’ of God, tend to immobilize what is essentially mobile in its nature.”<sup>5</sup> So far as the concept of ijtehad (creative interpretation) is concerned, he is a votary of it. He writes, “The Idea (of ijtehad), I believe, has its origin in a well-known verse of the Quran — ‘And to those who exert We show Our

path'.<sup>6</sup> Then he goes on to narrate a well-known Tradition (hadith) of the Prophet. "When Ma'ad was appointed ruler of Yemen, the Prophet is reported to have asked him as to how he would decide matters coming up before him. 'I will judge matters according to the Book of God,' said Ma'ad. 'But if the Book of God contains nothing to guide you?' 'Then I will act on the precedents of the Prophet of God.' 'But if the precedents fail?' 'Then I will exert to form my own judgement.'" With the expansion of the Islamic empire and assimilation of new social milieus, ijtehad, as we shall see later, was a very important instrument for interpretation of the Quran and Prophetic traditions (ahadith). The Muslim is obsessed with reverence for past history. Iqbal perceptibly remarks, "Thus a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection constitute no remedy for a people's decay." Then he goes on to approvingly quote a modern writer, 'the verdict of history is that worn out ideas have never risen to power among a people who have worn them out.'<sup>7</sup> Iqbal fully approves of the new theory of Moham-medan law as propounded by Halim Sabit which is grounded on modern sociological concepts.<sup>8</sup> In emulation of Turkey's example, he feels, "we (Indian Muslims) too one day, like the Turks, will have to re-evaluate our intellectual inheritance."<sup>9</sup> And justifying the claim of the young generation of Muslims he writes, "The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to re-interpret the foundational legal principles in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life is, in my opinion, perfectly justified. The teaching of the Quran that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems."<sup>10</sup>

The ripples of the controversy created by the votaries of modernisation of the *corpus juris* of Islam have spread far and wide and have drawn the intellectuals—traditional as well as modern—into its vortex. Maulana Muhammad Tariq Amini, who is an orthodox theologian also admits of a degree of change, albeit very cautiously, when he says, "The position of law is affected to a large extent by the prevalent customs and laws

of a society in a particular period, and the constitutional position (i.e. fundamental canons of religion) depends on the psychological, physical and natural disposition of all the nations in the world. The law admits of change, depending on social factors, and the pressures generated by the changed era."<sup>11</sup> In 1948, Shaykh Muhammad Ashraf began the publication of a monthly journal called *The Islamic Literature*, with the avowed objectives of (1) reflecting in a worthy manner Islam's ambition to reconquer its lost field of cultural glory; (2) presenting the new interpretation of Islam that would fit in with the changed condition of the world; (3) analysing boldly and critically the present situation, unearthing the hidden treasures of Islam's actual past, ignorance of which has made Muslims feel so doubtful of their future.<sup>12</sup> Through this journal he propagated and popularized the modern rational interpretation of Islam. Alfred Guillaume comments on this journal, "The journal is marked by a liberal and enlightened spirit, and though occasionally polemic raises its ugly head it is not the fault of the editor, whose style is always courteous. Articles from western Arabists are frequently to be found. I do not know of a parallel in a Christian periodical to this broad tolerance."<sup>13</sup> Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf very pertinently remarks, "In undertaking this task (that of historical criticism) they should remember that the Prophet applied the principles of Islam in a primitive stage of historical and social development which lacked the technical and organizational resources of the modern world." This clearly means to imply that the modern development of the human thought processes has rendered what was once of social relevance, quite obsolete. He, therefore, concludes, "What we should do is to evolve fresh principle of historical and rational criticism, re-examine and recodify the existing corpus of tradition, and then proceed on the basis of the holy Quran and the hadith so selected and codified towards a modification of the existing body of the Islamic laws."<sup>14</sup> If it ever happened, one could, without much hesitation, be one with Fazlur Rahman in thinking that, "It is, a curious and striking fact about the religious history of Islam that at each critical point of its career the force that comes to the forefront and takes over the situation is not the then formalized establish-



ed 'orthodoxy' but rather something that presents itself at every juncture as the 'raw material' of the orthodoxy subsequently to be formed. . . . To some extent, of course, this happens with all developing religions. But whereas in Christianity, or even in as little 'reified' a religion as Hinduism, there is something that runs through it like a wave with new elements riding on its crest, Islamic orthodoxy seems to develop in recreated formations of quanta that issue from time to time from the very heart of Islam. It is characterized by an indistinguishable blend of reinvigorated fundamentalism and progressivism; it develops not by self-propulsion, so to say, but by watching, adjusting and absorbing within itself that which moves within it."<sup>15</sup>

Shah Waliyullah of Delhi (1703-1762) was a theologian of great vision who attempted to synthesise purified Sunna with purified Sufism. He attacked the latitudinarian nonchalance of the medieval Sufi practices which religiously tolerated the decadent society. He attempted to enrich and re-invigorate Islam by reinterpreting it. His penetrative intellect could perceive the focal areas of the Islamic institutions which urgently needed re-furbishing and re-structuring. He tried to coalesce the best formulations of the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence as is being suggested today by many legal authorities as a way out. The summary of his views as far as our problem is concerned is given here.

The prophetic method of teaching, according to Shah Waliyullah, is that, generally speaking, the law revealed by a prophet takes special notice of the habits, ways and peculiarities of the people to whom he is specially sent. The prophet who aims at all-embracing principles, however, can neither reveal different principles for different peoples, nor leave them to work out their own rules of conduct. (The modernists may not agree with him here.) His method is to train one particular people, and to use them as a nucleus for building up of a universal Shari'a. In doing so he accentuates the principles undelying the social life of all mankind, and applies them to concrete cases in the light of the specific habit of people immediately before him. The Shari'at values (Ahkam) resulting from this application

(e.g., rules relating to penalties for crimes) are in a sense specific to that people; and since their observance is not an end in itself, they cannot be strictly enforced in the case of future generations.

This clearly shows that even the religious thinker like Shah Waliullah was clear in his mind about the relativity as against the eternity of the Islamic laws of conjugal relations and criminal matters. He understood the fact perfectly well that every revelation contains elements of conceptual and ethical framework of the space-time wherein the revelation occurs. It can be very legitimately claimed, as it will be shown later in the article that the spatio-temporal genesis of Islam did carry the birth-marks of tribal customary law and the Judaic conceptual-valuational system. For any attempt to assimilate and syncretise the contemporary thought-cum-value system with that of Islam, this fact must be clearly borne in mind.<sup>16</sup>

Islam, as is claimed, is a revealed and divinely-inspired religion. Its enactments and commandments as formulated and expressed in the Quran, are integral to this divine vision. They are just in themselves as God cannot make anything otherwise binding on man. Inspired by the divine injunctions as revealed to the prophet, the early followers of Islam tried to implement it in the time-space frame of that society. This was the first expression of the Islamic ideal as envisioned by its founder prophet Mohammad. The concretised expression of this Quranic ideal had, as is evident, situational constraints of the existent society. Whenever a potentiality or an ideal is actualized, the constellation of the historical forces plays a very decisive role. What is more important is the ideal rather than its situational concretion at a particular stage in the temporal flux of the dynamic history. The 'ulama of the 2nd and 3rd century of Islam undertook the great historical enterprise of establishing a just society based on the transcendental ideal of Mohammad's prophetic vision. In this, as is quite natural, they were influenced by the prevalent norms and standards. These norms or the Sunna of the people of the prophet's society cannot be integral to the concept of the Islamic justice. As a concomitant of the

historical changes, these norms can change. In fact, the stagnating norms, in the temporal flux of history, can and do become injurious to the original ideal. Whenever this happens there should be a shift from the existent to the essential as it is of vital import to the central concept of justice which is the essence of that ideal. As Prof. W. C. Smith puts it, "For the Muslim, like the Marxist but unlike the Hindu, what happens here below is of inescapable and lasting significance. The building up of a proper community life on earth is a supreme imperative. Surely the Islamic enterprise has been the most serious and sustained endeavour ever put forward to implement justice among men; and until the rise of Marxism was also the largest and most ambitious."<sup>17</sup>

The embodiment of the practice of polygamy, unilateral divorce and the laws of inheritance was temporal rather than eternal. The Islamic jurisprudence was only a concrete expression of the eternal ideal of justice in the historical milieu of that society. The Islamic jurisprudence must be re-shaped in the changed historical milieu. It would be the most concrete expression of the Islamic ideal of justice in the present circumstances. This new concept of Islamic ideal has been expressed by the great nationalist poet Zia Gok Alp (of Turkey). The poet says: "There is the woman, my sister, or my daughter; it is she who calls up the most sacred emotions from the depths of my life! There is my beloved, my sun, my moon and my star; it is she who makes me understand the poetry of life! How could the Holy Law of God regard these beautiful creatures as despicable beings? Surely there is an error in the interpretation of the Qur'an by the learned!"

'The foundation of the nation and the state is the family!

'As long as the full worth of the woman is not realized national life remains incomplete.

'The upbringing of the family must correspond with justice;

'Therefore equality is necessary in three things—in divorce, in separation, and in inheritance.

'As long as the woman is counted half the man as regards inheritance and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of man in matrimony, neither the family

nor the country will be elevated. For other rights we have opened national courts of justice.

‘The family, on the other hand, we have left in the hands of schools.

‘I do not know why we have left the woman in the lurch.

‘Does she not work for the land? Or, will she turn her needs into a sharp bayonet to tear off her rights from our hands through a revolution?’<sup>18</sup>

## II

To understand the necessity for change in the Muslim Personal Law as it is operative today in India, it is necessary to see it in proper perspective of its historical growth. In this section, therefore, an attempt is made to trace out the growth of the Islamic jurisprudence.

The Islamic movement originated and grew in an essentially tribal society. Quresh, the predominant tribe, had settled in Mecca and made it a centre of trade between China, India, South Arabia and the Roman empire. Because of its commercial activities, the Meccan community was being transformed into an urban community. This inevitably caused the weakening of the age-old tribal structure and its morality. The community was on the threshold of a new society and ready to receive a new message that would provide it with a *weltanschauung* so very necessary for this proto-urban community. Max Weber at times makes a brilliant analysis of the socio-economic factors giving rise to religious or ideological movements. This is how Bendix has summarised Max Weber’s view on this matter: “This religiosity of bourgeois strata seems to originate in urban life. In the city a religious experience of the individual tends to lose the character of ecstatic trance or dream and to assume the paler forms of contemplative mysticism or a low-keyed, everyday piety. (This also explains the emphasis on legalism in Islamic society.) For the craftsmen, steady work with customers can suggest the development of concepts like ‘duty’ and ‘recompense’ as basic orientations towards life.”<sup>19</sup> The urban milieu of Mecca had a

decisive influence on the religious vision of the Prophet. As he had to influence the trading community of Mecca and those of his followers who had similar urban ethos in Medina, he had to develop a rationalism of a more practical sort. As Max Weber observes in a remarkable way, "The contrast between warrior and peasant classes, and intellectual and business classes, is of special importance. Of these groups the intellectuals have always been the exponents of rationalism which in their case has been relatively theoretical. The business classes (merchants and artisans) have been at least possible exponents of rationalism of a more practical sort. Rationalism of either kind has borne very different stamps, but has always exerted a great influence upon the religious attitude."<sup>20</sup>

The mercantile class of Mecca was all powerful and in the absence of any state machinery, this business oligarchy governed the Meccan community through a tribal council. The economic prosperity and their intercourse with the highly developed cultures of the world caused an intellectual ferment and made the Meccan Arabs acutely aware of lack of any coherent social, political and philosophical pattern of their society. The Prophet Mohammad, with his prodigious gift of intellect, could perceive the inherent deficiencies of this society and with his sense of down to earth pragmatism and prophetic vision, he evolved a comprehensive code of life, which successfully met the political, social and legal challenges of tribal life and integrated the healthy practices of an urban milieu with the not too objectionable traditions of the tribal way of life. Maxime Rodinson says in his book *Mohammad*, "There are those whose enthusiasm has rendered them incapable of seeing anything in the development of ideas beyond complete, perfect and well-ordered systems appearing mysteriously in place of others of the same kind. What I am trying to show here is that an ideology was, on the contrary, built up from elements imposed on a man by his own situation and adopted by a society by reason of its situation."<sup>21</sup>

It would be quite interesting to briefly sketch the situation in respect of tribal customs as it obtained in the 7th century Arabia. It is mainly based on W. Montgomery Watt's excellent

summary: The newly revealed precepts dealt, above all, with marriage and the family. These were clearly vital matters for the small community. On the other hand, the new legislation did not conflict with any previous rules which had been firmly established and consecrated by former systems. It is not easy to penetrate the maze of pre-Islamic Arab customs concerning domestic relations, but it would appear likely that by the seventh century A.D. they were in a comparatively fluid and rapidly developing state. Some accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia suggest the existence of matrilinear characteristics, especially in certain regions, such as Medina. There may be a connection between these characteristics and the traces in certain places of the existence of polyandry, that is, the marriage of one woman to several men at a time. Montgomery Watt has suggested as an indication that Arab society, which had formerly been matrilinear, was in the Prophet's time in the course of changing to the patrilinear system, and was therefore in a transitional stage associated with the general development towards individualism. This view seems to me, as it does to J. Henninger, somewhat dubious. There is evidence that the patrilinear system, predominated in Arabia from time immemorial, in particular from the so-called Thamudic inscriptions. What does seem to be true is that in certain regions and localities such as Medina, this system co-existed with some types of polyandrous custom, and with the accepted assignation of a substantial role to women (several sources indicate a remote period in which there were Arab queens); even in some cases with uxorilocal residence and the inheritance of property through female line.<sup>22</sup>

The developed commercial and property relations are obvious in the Islamic laws' emphasis on individualism and its elaborate rules to distribute property of the deceased among various relatives. The determination of paternity — in view of the existing property relations — was also quite important and hence a period of waiting is prescribed for a woman about to remarry after divorce or her widowhood, so that there shall be no doubt as to the real paternity of any future child. It is very clear from the careful study of the Quran that its rules were aimed at

rooting out customs which did not treat individuals, and women in particular, as independent entities. The Quran also prohibited the established custom of a man's automatic marriage to his father's widows other than his own mother. Another example of an emphasis on individualism in Islamic legal thought system is that of the rule that a bride (and not her father) was entitled to receive the dowry paid by her betrothed groom. The emergence of a commercial society and the resulting break-up of the tribal structure had necessitated these changes and had, consequently, improved the status of women. This change was taken notice of by the Prophet and was enshrined in the corpus-juris of Islam. But, in view of the patrilinear system which prevailed in Arabia, it was historically impossible to elevate women to the status of complete equality with men and hence the Quranic verses declaring the superiority of men over women. The tolerance of polygamy is also a case in point (though it was a mere permissive and not a normative pronouncement). Polygamy, slavery, etc., did not interfere with the functioning of the society which was then coming into existence and hence were tolerated, though discreetly discouraged. The religious and moral vision can never become fully operative in the sense that it would not bear the impress of the society in which it evolves. The rising waves of any movement carry, on the crest, little dirt of injustice found in the body of the then existent society. The new vision takes into its sweep the new realities of the societal situation — though it may be only in a developing stage — and discards the obsolete and the decadent and thus provides impetus for the development of a new system. "The religious determinant," says Max Weber, "however, is also one — note this — only one, of the determinants of the economic ethic. Of course, the religiously determined way of life is itself profoundly influenced by economic and political factors operating within given geographical, political, social and national boundaries."<sup>23</sup>

The practice of usury was unreservedly condemned by the Qur'an as it was causing social tension among the poorest stratum of the society. The prosperous class of Meccan commercial bourgeoisie and the jewry in Medina (which monopolised trade

and agriculture there) neglected these wretched people and thus aggravated the tension. Some scholars believe that usury was condemned in Medina as the emigrant Muslims were being charged high rates of interest by the Jews of Medina further impoverishing their precarious economic condition.<sup>24</sup> The Prophet clearly perceived the danger and warned them against their usurious practices. "Believers", says the Quran, "do not live on usury, doubling your wealth many times over." It would be interesting to note that Germany in the fifteenth century faced a similar turmoil due to extortionate practice of usury and the church had to decisively intervene to condemn it. "Usury", writes R. H. Tawney, "long a grievance with craftsman and peasant, had become a battle cry. From city after city municipal authorities, terrified by popular demands for the repression of the extortioner, consulted universities and divines as to the legitimacy of interest, and universities and divines gave, as is their wont, a loud, but confused, response. Melanchthom expounded godly doctrine on the subject of money-lending and prices. Calvin wrote a famous letter on usury and delivered sermons on the same subject."<sup>25</sup> The Arabian prophet anticipated similar situation and banned usury, though the commercial practices of Mecca continued uninterrupted.

The impress of the commercial milieu of Mecca is woven into the texture of the Quranic teachings. Not to indulge in extravagance, to refrain from dishonest practices and fraudulent embezzlement, puritanism, to execute written trade agreements, to pay poor-tax and look after the wretched of the society are necessary characteristics of a stable commercial society, and these very aspects have been emphasised in the Quranic precepts. "Believers", says the Quran, "do not consume your wealth amongst yourselves in vanity, but rather trade with it by mutual consent." An emerging commercial society can not permit squandering of wealth for pomp and pageantry — a veritable norm in tribal and feudal societies. Parsimonious conduct is very necessary to stabilise the structure of an emerging commercial society. Thus writes Joseph Schacht, an eminent authority on Islamic jurisprudence, "Mecca, however, was a trading



city (in admittedly modest sense) in commercial relations with South Arabia, Byzantine Syria, and Sassanian Iraq; the city of Taif was another centre of long distance trade, and Medina was the chief town of an intensively cultivated group of oases of palm trees with a strong colony of Jews, probably mostly Arab converts. It is likely that these and perhaps other towns in Arabia possessed laws more highly developed than those of the Bedouins. We can form some idea of the character of commercial life in Mecca and of the kind of law which it pre-supposes, including the technique of loans with interest. An important source of information on commercial law and practice in Mecca in the time of Mohammad is provided by the Koran, in its extensive use of commercial technical terms, many of which are legally relevant."<sup>26</sup>

The Koran accords superiority to men over women and the logic for so doing is also rooted characteristically in the economic relationship. "Men have authority", declares the Koran, "over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient... As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them." There is, evidently, a deep imprint of urban as well as tribal milieu on this teaching of the Quran. The inferiority of woman and dominance of man got woven into the very texture of the Islamic jurisprudence relating to their mutual relationship.

The Quran could, however, lay down only the nucleus and the foundational principles of the Islamic jurisprudence around which was deftly woven the entire fabric of law, by the ingenious casuistry of the Muslim jurists of later centuries. Muhammad all through his years in Medina remained busy in consolidating the position of his incipient community and waging wars against his enemies. He could hardly get time to work out the elaborate structure of civil as well as criminal laws. Nor was there considerable social surplus available to maintain a class of theologians, jurists or scribes in Medina of Mohammad's time. Little surplus that was available from the palm-groves of Khaiber and

other Jewish settlements around Medina was badly needed in other areas. Even Mohammad, who was by now head of state, had to live in a hut. With the scanty surplus available, it was not possible to maintain an army of salaried soldiers. They had to be satisfied with a share in the loot in the battles fought. This explains the absence of any priestly class in the early period of Islam. The main characteristics of the nascent Islamic community were, therefore, strict monotheism, puritanism, stress on scriptural revelation, egalitarianism between the believers, absence of special mediation and consequently of any hierarchy, minimisation of ritual or mystical extravagance resulting in moderation and sobriety and lastly — which is quite important from our point of view — stress on the observance of rules rather than on emotional states.<sup>27</sup>

During Mohammad's life time, the Islamic movement was almost limited to the Arabian peninsula. Except for the Meccan pocket of mercantile community, the rest of the commanding area of Islam was a Bedouin tribal region. This reality cast its own shadow on the value system of nascent Islam and its formulation of various laws, civil as well as criminal. This explains fairly well the concept of vengeance-oriented justice in the criminal sphere, i.e. nose for nose, or ear for ear, and life for life, *et al.* The criminal code evolved by Mohammad, and now given up by almost all the Muslim countries, was based on rather primitive tribal sense of justice, and for him was an inevitable compromise with the turbulent Bedouin tribes which survived on burglaries and looting expeditions as a normal way of life in the absence of any other means of sustenance in the inhospitable desert of Arabian peninsula. But in the sphere of civil law, desideratum of the mercantile community of Mecca had to be borne in mind. The new system in order to be successful, had to evolve a comprehensive code acceptable to the trading community of Mecca. Thus the emergence of this new value system provided the Meccan community with its much needed *weltanschauung*. The tribal division of society ran counter to the norms of a proto urban community and so Mohammad gave them a comprehensive social, political and religious code and welded the Arabs into one nation. Armed with the new *weltanschauung*.

they evolved a state apparatus (which was non-existent before) based on tribal notion of elected chief of state and launched on a conquering spree.

Within a century after the death of Mohammad, the Arabs became masters of a vast empire. Possessing as they did, the simpler institutions of an emerging commercial society still cherishing tribal way of life, they found themselves at the receiving end of the highly refined Greek, Syro-Roman and Persian culture. This confrontation with the vastly superior feudal institutions threw up bewildering problems. The Arabs, pitted as they were against highly sophisticated non-Arab people, wanted to retain their political superiority and domination. This could be done only by maintaining the superiority of Islam. The systematic attempts were, therefore, made to find the solution of all these problems within the frame-work of Islam. Its socio-political aspects need not detain us here. Our area of discussion would, of course, be confined to the *corpus juris* of Islam. The original paradigm of Islamic law, as developed by the Quranic precepts and Mohammad's sunnah was found inadequate, as a host of complex problems of a juristic nature was being faced by this new multicultural society and in a locale far from the Prophet's Medina. This paradigm, consequently, had to be expanded to integrate into its fold the bewildering variety of these complex problems.

To confront the problems born of this newly emerging hybrid society, a class of 'ulama', the 'learned' or the 'doctors', corresponding to the 'scribes' in judaism came into being. This now became possible as considerable social surplus was available which could maintain this class of learned theologians. This surplus was, of course, made available partly by the exploitation of the peasantry from rural areas and partly from the considerable volume of commercial profits netted from all over the vast Abbasid Empire which now controlled all the important trade routes. These 'ulama started codifying the laws relating to crimes, matrimony and other civil matters. Obviously, the foundation of the entire *corpus juris* was laid on the commands and prohibitions found in the Quran and also in traditions. The

Quran, however, touched only a few aspects of various legal formulations and it was left to the doctors of 2nd and 3rd century H<sub>ijra</sub> to work out the details of the law. The nature of the questions faced by them can be understood from the following example: the Quran prescribes amputation of hand for stealing but is silent about the amount of stolen goods necessitating this punishment. Should one's hand be amputated if the amount stolen is, say, one dirham? The doctors of law differed. The minimum value of stolen goods, for the hadd (Quranic injunction) punishment to be applicable, was fixed by some Iraqians, by a crude analogy with the five fingers, at five dirhams. The generally accepted doctrine in Iraq, however, fixed it arbitrarily at ten dirhams, and this has remained the Hanafi doctrine. This doctrine is to be regarded as the original opinion, and the analogical reasoning as refinement which was finally unsuccessful.<sup>28</sup>

Another example is of the permissibility of silk for men. A group of traditions which, together with others, expresses an ascetic tendency in early Islam, forbids the use of silk to men but allows it to women. The question arose as to whether men can use silk in any form. Again the answers differed from scholar to scholar. Some felt that the use of silk in the garments is allowed only as applique work, as a border not more than two fingers broad, etc. Some traditions declare that use of silk for upholstery is like its use for clothing, and they explicitly forbid its use in saddle-cushions and the like.<sup>29</sup>

Thus one can see the kinds of elaborations needed to make the Quranic precepts and the Prophet's traditions meaningful in a vastly different situation. Wherever points of law arose which were not covered by a clear statement in the Quran or tradition, the majority of jurists had recourse to analogy (*qiyas*), consensus (*ijma'*), and creative interpretation (*ijtehad*). Opinion about the importance of these bases varied among the 'ulama, *Ijma'* was, in practice, the most important of the bases of Islamic religious law. According to the classical theory (*usul al-fiqh*), it is in theory the unanimous agreement of Umma on a regulation imposed by God. Technically it is "the unanimous doctrine and opinion of the recognised religious authorities at any given

time."<sup>30</sup> Santillana, an Italian scholar says about *ijma'*, "When the Muslim community agrees to a religious practice or rule of faith, it is, in a certain manner, directed and inspired by God, preserved from error, and infallibly led towards the Truth... by virtue of a special grace bestowed by God upon the community of Believers."<sup>31</sup> When, therefore, a consensus of opinion was attained on any issue, the further explorations or interpretation in a new way was as good as barred. This principle, thus, imposed retrogressive constraints on the right of individual to *ijtehad* or creative interpretation. In this way the decisions of the earlier 'ulama became irrevocable and the gates were shut once for all on the later generations to creatively interpret and suitably amend the code of law.

The preceding discussion makes it abundantly clear that the codification of Islamic law as enshrined in the four schools and other schools of heretic sects (like Shii' and Ismai'li sects), was done in an atmosphere which was influenced by the decadent feudal influences of Syro-Roman and Persian culture. The Islamic frame-work of law was now transplanted from the comparatively fresh, simplistic and unbiased environment of primitive Arabian society to the heartland of sophisticated culture with its inbuilt institutions and prejudices. The entire system drew its sustenance from the new soil and thus acquired its test and colour. This historical criticism lends a new dimension to our argument in favour of change in the decadent and now obsolete aspects of the Muslim personal law. Polygamy is an institution of a feudal or a pre-feudal culture (as in case of Islam which originated in a pre-feudal society) and is repugnant to the concept of equality of men and women. The progressive Mu'tazalites, who were under the influence of Greek rational thought and called themselves a 'party of Justice', opposed it even then when the Muslim law was being compiled in second and third century of Islamic era and they cited the Quran to corroborate their argument. George F. Hourani says, "They (Mu'tazalites) called themselves among other things 'the party of justice', and by this name they referred to their position on theodicy, that God was just. This was a first principle

of their theology, and it meant to them two things. Primarily, God is just in His essence, but this justice is beyond man's understanding. From it, however, is derived the justice of God's acts, and this is of the same kind as the justice of human acts. The justice of human and of divine acts is a real characteristic of human acts; and it is knowable in principle and often known in fact by natural human reason, without the aid of revelation. Thus we can name the Mu'tazalite theory of ethics 'rationalistic objectivism':"<sup>22</sup>

The Prophet of Islam retained or tolerated polygamy as it did not militate against the contemporary standard of normative behaviour as much as it does today. The situational concretion of the Quranic justice in the mono-dimensional culture of primitive Arab society could not have been otherwise.

The Islamic law can be divided into five categories :

- 1) Obligatory;
- 2) Recommended but not obligatory;
- 3) Indifferent;
- 4) Disapproved but not forbidden;
- 5) Prohibited.

The polygamy and unilateral divorce, I believe, fall in the 4th category. This is quite clear from the following Quranic verse, 'And you shall never be able to do justice among women no matter how desirous of this you may be. So do not incline completely (away from one wife) leaving her suspended in the air'. (4/129). As for divorce the Prophet is reported to have said, "Curse of God rests on him who repudiates his wife capriciously," and "God created not anything on the face of the earth which He loveth more than the act of manumission (of slaves) nor did He create anything on the face of the earth which He detesteth more than the act of divorce." Thus the Quranic verse and the tradition of the Prophet leaves no one in doubt that polygamy and unilateral divorce were approved only very reluctantly and the faithfuls were warned time and again against these practices. Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer has observed, "The cheap jibe about freak 'talaqs' and the helpless bondage of women to wedlock cannot be blamed on Quranic injunctions. On the

contrary, having regard to the circumstances of pre-Islamic Arabia reeking with sex promiscuity and social injustice, wives unlimited and divorce at pleasure for men and unbreakable chains for women, this great messenger of God and revolutionary, had planted restraints on the male and granted cautious rights to the female, and innovated a rational and fair system, astonishingly radical and modern and more protective than Manu's verdict on women." The orthodox party opposing any change in Islamic jurisprudence should bear in their minds that the institution of polygamy was reluctantly tolerated and as such the doctrine of the immutability of the Quranic verses does not apply to it. The Quran in keeping with the historical situation, had also permitted sexual intercourse with female slaves. But, as slavery has been irrevocably abolished from all parts of the world, no Muslim can insist on this right simply because the Quran once recognised it. The practice of polygamy is similarly repugnant to our conscience in the modern period and, therefore, the Muslims should reconcile themselves to abolition of this institution.

The practice of unilateral divorce as prevalent among Muslims also falls in this category. The Quran has given the right to divorce to women also, but it was relegated to secondary position because of the total subjugation of women in a feudal society. Justice Ameer Ali says, "A large and influential body of jurists regard talaq emanating from the husband as really prohibited, except for necessity, such as the adultery of the wife. Another section, consisting chiefly of the Mu'tazalites, consider talaq as not permissible or lawful without the sanction of 'Hakim-ush-shara."<sup>33</sup> It was the practice in a decadent feudal environment, rather than theory, which gave predominance to the concept of unilateral divorce. It would be upholding the spirit of Quran, rather than injuring it, if the autocratic and whimsical practice of pronouncing unilateral divorce is ended.

It is claimed by the orthodox followers of Islam that the legal structure of Islam is based on Quran, Prophet's Sunna and his traditions. As for the Prophet's Sunna and his traditions, there are genuine reasons to doubt their authenticity. D. S.

Margoliouth, in his *Early Development of Islam*, maintained that (1) the Prophet had left no precepts of religious decisions—i.e., had left no Sunna or Hadith outside the Qur'an; (2) the Sunna as practised by the early Muslim community after Muhammed was not at all the Sunna of the prophet but was the pre-Islamic Arabian usage as it stood modified through the Qur'an; and, (3) later generations, in the 2nd/3rd century, in order to give authority and normativity to this usage, developed the concept of the Sunna of the Prophet and forged the mechanism of the Hadith to realize this concept. H. Lammens, in his *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions* expresses the same view and declares tersely that the practice (Sunna) must have preceded its formulation in the Hadith."<sup>34</sup>

Again Schacht's argument about the character of the Hadith is in two parts. First, on the basis of evidence he finds in the works of Muhammed-ibn—Idris-Shafi'i (150-204/767-819), he concludes that traditions from the prophet did not exist at all until about the middle of the 2nd/8th century; that the usage or the Sunna until that time was regarded not as the Sunna of the Prophet but as the Sunna of the community (although the Sunna in Medina for example, differed from that in Iraq), for it was mainly the product of the free reasoning of individual lawyers; and, finally, that the natural resistance of the lawyers to the traditions from the Prophet was broken by the efforts of al-Shaf'i, who, for the first time, systematically introduced into the legal theory of Islam the concept of the Sunna of the Prophet.

Secondly, by a comparison of some earlier and later versions of tradition, Schacht finds that either in the succeeding period there exist traditions which did not exist in the preceding period and hence that these are forged, or that the succeeding versions are fuller than the earlier ones and that therefore the later ones had been expanded by forgeries.<sup>35</sup> Thus one has to be very cautious in accepting the Prophet's Sunna and his traditions as the infallible sources of Islamic jurisprudence. The extraneous elements—besides the Quranic precepts, Sunna and the traditions—have got inextricably woven into the elaborate structure



of the Islamic law. So the argument of divine immutability in order to oppose any change in its structure will not hold water.

### III

The brief outline of the historical growth of Islamic law as sketched above makes it abundantly clear that in keeping with the Quranic spirit, the elaboration of the Islamic law was done to suit the specific conditions of that society. The practical expression of the Quranic ideals was an ambitious venture in which the 'ulama of that time participated with religious enthusiasm. The human quest for knowledge has explored new dimensions and the frontiers of our knowledge have expanded immensely in all directions. As a result, our beliefs and practices have lost much of their relevance in our time and consequently stand in need of thorough overhauling. Our conceptual system, thought system and value system will have to be re-examined and re-constructed so as to conform to the norms of our own time. Our own generation is experiencing new tensions in the field of religion and its thought system. To resolve these tensions, we will have to develop creative conscience in place of conditioned conscience. The liberal Muslims have kept this conflict unresolved by merely permitting the religious and modern thought systems to co-exist in a permissive attitude. To end this conflict this harmonising will have to be creative rather than permissive. One can't be both a Muslim and a westernised liberal without attempting a creative synthesis. The praxis must have new theoretical orientation. The present day Muslim intellectuals like the 'ulama of the 2nd century of Islamic era will have to participate in the new historic venture to find practical expression for the Quranic ideals in our own society. For Islam is nothing if not a practical expression in history. History moves, and, finds expression in new thought systems, in new ideas and ideals. It has a transcendental dimension, which, if integrated into historical praxis, tends to create a just society.

Our own country is passing through a period of reconstruction in all spheres of life. The outdated legal practices are

being rejected in favour of those which better serve our practical needs. In 18th century the Islamic criminal code (which was hardly in practice) was abolished and a uniform penal code was enforced. In 19th century the repugnant practice of Sati was banned. But as a matter of imperial policy and to perpetuate religious differences, various communities were permitted to retain their personal laws. The Muslim personal law remained in force not as a legal body of divine commands — this should be noted carefully — but as a piece of legislative enactment by the legislative council as it existed in British India. This was known as the Shari'at Act of 1937. Again in 1939 an act known as 'Dissolution Of Muslim Marriages Act' was promulgated. Thus in British India, from 1772 onwards, Islamic law as it was administered locally fell under the influence of English legal thought, and an independent legal system, substantially different from Islamic law according to Hanafi (and, for the Shia' minority, according to Shi'i doctrine, came into being. This is properly called Anglo-Mohammedan Law.<sup>36</sup> The continuation of Islamic law, is therefore, a matter of state policy rather than a divine act, which, Islamic law is supposed to be. The Indian Muslims have accepted it as a fact of life. So the argument that no change can ever be permitted in Islamic law, as it is divine law, does not hold water. Moreover, the law is administered, not through Qazis, but, through secular courts. The Islamic law, then, certainly admits of further change. The Muslim countries, for that matter, have long since brought about necessary changes, comprehensive in some countries and piecemeal in others. To argue, as some Indian Muslims do, that these countries have Muslim majorities, and therefore, can revert to original practice of unpurged Islamic law, is to ignore the facts of life as they are. These reforms started in some Muslim countries like Egypt right from the beginning of the twentieth century and till today they have shown no sign of throwback to the original position. On the contrary, they have taken more and more steps in bringing about further changes in the inadequately amended laws.

In India common civil code is eminently desirable. But it may not be possible to take a plunge right away and bring common civil code into practice. The first step, therefore, should be to either ban, or, strictly regulate the practice of polygamy and unilateral divorce. As the nature of Muslim marriage is contractual, a clause, restraining husband from taking second wife, can be inserted in the marriage agreement. Suitable provisions can also be made in respect of divorce. Moreover, the good points of different schools of jurisprudence can be combined to give maximum benefit to women. The eclectic method of revising the Sharia, is not new; it has a respectable history behind it. A century ago the Shaykhal-Islam at Constantinople ruled that a marriage of a woman who had been deserted by her husband could be dissolved by the courts. This was in the face of contrary ruling of the Hanafi school of the Ottoman empire, but in agreement with the other three schools. In 1915 a wife was permitted dissolution of marriage if her husband suffered from certain specific diseases.<sup>37</sup> The followers of different schools should thus be given advantage of the good points of other schools. Similarly, the divergent customary practices of different Muslim communities like Cutchhi Memons, Moplas etc. in respect of joint family, hiba and dower should be brought under uniform rules. The problem of inheritance of the children of a pre-deceased son can be solved by the system of obligatory bequest as applied in Egypt, Syria, Tunis and Morocco. According to this system the grand parent is compelled to make a bequest, in favour of such orphaned grandchildren, of what their deceased parent would have taken provided, always, that this must not exceed the "bequestable third"; and these obligatory bequests, which are to be divided between the grandchildren on the principle of "double share to the male", will take precedence over any voluntary bequests. If any grandparent fails to make such a bequest, moreover, the courts will act as though he had done so.<sup>38</sup>

The above changes in the Muslim Personal law are overdue and must be brought about as soon as possible. This will ultimately pave the way for the much maligned uniform civil code.

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## Chapter 8

### PROTEST MOVEMENT : BOHRA PROTESTANTISM

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Twentieth century has been an era of epoch-making changes of political, social, religious and economic nature. The pressures generated by the complex nature of these changes have thrown great challenges for different sections of Indian society, fragmented into various regional, linguistic, religious, caste and credal groups. The degree and nature of turmoil has, of course, varied from group to group or community to community. Similarly, and this is important to note, the efforts and responses of the challenges of modernism have differed in degrees from one religious community to another. The Indian Muslims in general, and, Bohras — a small Shia sect with certain esoteric doctrines and beliefs peculiar to itself — in particular, were, due to certain socio-economic situation they found themselves in, slow to respond and adjust themselves with the tensions created by the forces of modernism. Their psycho-social feed-back kept them away from the mainstream of events occurring with rapid succession. The Muslims, in general, were politicalised during our freedom struggle and the conflict of politico-economic nature between them and others in India led them to participate in political movements with great gusto. But, the Bohras being a business community, always wanted to have their peace with whosoever ruled and therefore, were never drawn into a turmoil of political movements. This kind of situation acted as a powerful retarding force against the process of modernisation among the Bohras. However, they could not remain totally immune to the fall-out of modern socio-political changes set in motion by the western thoughts. The rumblings of protest against the

totalitarian religious orthodoxy, stubbornly opposing modern education, were heard in the early twentieth century. Sir Adamji Peerbhoy's sons were involved in bitter struggles for democratisation of Bohra Jamat's set up against the monolithic and hierarchical rule of the Bohra priesthood.

It would be quite interesting to briefly narrate the history of Dawoodi Bohras, to understand this protest movement in its right perspective. The Dawoodi Bohras share the fundamental doctrines like unity of God, prophethood of Mohammed, etc. with other Muslims. They, along with other Shia Muslims, are partisans of Ali in the battle for succession — spiritual as well as temporal — to Mohammed. However, the schisms further occurred between Shias and the followers of Ismail whom Bohras acknowledge as the rightful claimant to the august office of Holy Imam. The glorious era of the Fatimid rulers in Egypt — these rulers are all Holy Imams for Bohras — is the proud religio-cultural heritage of all the Ismaili Shias in general and Bohras in particular.

When the Fatimid empire was tottering, two Arabs were deputed to India on proselytising mission. These two Arabs are reported to have studied the Sanskrit language and the Holy Scriptures of the Hindus. Using the art of religious polemics, they won number of adherents for the Fatimid mission among the influential sections of the Gujarati Hindus — a minister and a rajah of Pattan being from amongst them. Faced with the incessant hostilities of enemies all around, and considerably weakened in its own native country, the entire Fatimid mission migrated to India — a legendary land of hospitality and refuge — where they found a favourable clime for the peaceful propagation of the faith. This faith, with its Persian and neo-Platonic trappings, appealed to the mystical minds of the Indian people, especially petty traders of Gujarat, (the petty traders are usually attracted towards more egalitarian and democratic faiths like Buddhism and Islam, specially when adapted to their socio-psychological make-up) who had their own contradictions with the ruling feudal class. These early converts came to be known as 'Bohras' precisely because all of them were, before and after

conversion, small traders. Conservatism and deep attachment to formal religion are the characteristic traits of these traders, and, in case of Bohras, there has been no deviation from this course. By and large, the Bohras have remained petty traders mostly settled in small towns and cities. Very few of them have achieved pre-eminent positions in business, industry, science and other intellectual and cultural fields. It was because of this that the protest movement within the modern context was inordinately delayed among the Bohras.

The Bohras, like the Christians, are tightly knit together in an hierarchically structured religious institution known as 'Dawat' (literally an invitation to faith) with 'Dai' (high priest) as its apex who enjoys supreme religious authority in the absence of Imam supposedly hidden from his followers. The Dais have been traditionally God-fearing and paragons of simplicity. But, of late, the situation changed and Syedna Saheb (the high priest) accumulated a vast fortune by all conceivable means. The source of the fortune was, of course, offerings from the faithful and other obligatory religious tithes, in all seven in number, imposed on them from cradle to grave (nay, even on conceived ones) on pain of social ostracism. This newly-acquired power of wealth coupled with vigorous impact of the British rule created new stresses and strains for the Bohra high priest. The earliest challenge was from the Ulema in 1840 about succession, which the then pontiff, Abdul Kader Najmuddin, apparently had to quiet by liberal distribution of titles and perquisites. This opposition was based on orthodoxy and not on modernism. Only in the sense that Martin Luther or John Calvin were unwitting precursors of European modernism can one say that these Ulema played a like role among the Dawoodi Bohras. However, under the impact of modernism, the systematic efforts by the progressives were made to bring about much-needed changes in the set-up of the community. The initiative was taken, as noted above, by the sons of Sir Adamji Peerbhoy — a pious businessman who expired in 1913. Disputes were even referred to the British courts, famous among them being Chandabhai Gulla (Alms Box) Case in 1917, and another about the



amount of modern English-medium education to be permitted in a school at Burhanpur. These cases ushered in a second period of reform efforts characterised by competitive resort to lengthy and expensive litigation. The reformist movement, though it stirred the imagination of many, did not strike firm roots as modern education was, in a community of petty traders, spread all over India in small and big towns, still sporadic and halting. The reformist movement therefore, remained confined to a band of western-educated elite. The psycho-social framework and conservative outlook kept the major chunk of the community out of the vortex of political upheaval in pre-independence era. Further, lack of modern education impeded the growth of well-trained professional classes like lawyers, doctors, engineers, and managers who could champion modern reforms.

Like the Aga Khan of the Khojas earlier, the Syedna Saheb also converted his superior financial resources into political influence by making strategic donations. He gave generously to the Aligarh Muslim University although very few Bohras attend that North Indian institution. (Knowledgeable sources say that all such donations are made out of the fund collected from the community itself). This gave him nation-wide publicity. His benefactions put the Syedna in contact with Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Zakir Husain and others, and, in 1953, Taher Saifuddin, the then Syedna, was made an Honorary Chancellor of the Aligarh University. The progressives could not, as is obvious, make matching contributions and their cause, although laudable, went by default. The Government, while paying lip sympathy, pleaded its inability to interfere in the 'internal affairs' — an obvious euphemism for its inaction — of a pontiff. The Ministers belonging to the ruling Congress had their eyes on elections (and his fat purse too) and high priest's blessings to a candidate (only one, who contested on the ruling Congress ticket could, of course, qualify for his blessings) could tilt the balance, or so it was thought; though, of late, the recent trends are disappointing for the Bohra chief. All the candidates who contested the Udaipur Municipal elections with his blessings (raza) lost their deposits. The suffocating grip of Syedna Saheb on the community thus always remained tight.

Syedna Saheb, it is alleged by all progressive Bohras, uses all overt and covert methods for breaking the reformist movement. Though it has become very difficult for him to excommunicate anyone in the light of stringent conditions laid down by the Supreme Court, he manages to ostracise any reformist soul by using an ingenious device called, Baraat. Baraat means incurring Syedna's displeasure and its implications are as bad as that of ex-communication. As soon as Baraat is declared by Syedna Saheb against anyone, he stands condemned in the eyes of the Bohras and all relations are snapped with them. Refusal to solemnise marriage or withholding permission to bury the dead are some other methods to bring the defiant reformists to book. Even relatives and friends of the one so condemned are not spared in the all-out war to crush them. The ruthlessness of Syedna Saheb in dealing with the reformists is all the more surprising if one carefully examines the demand put forward by the reformists. The main demand centres around democratisation of the community or rather local jamat's administration in keeping with the spirit of the time. The Bohras in Africa had framed a constitution on these lines which, though initially approved by the present Syedna's father, was subsequently annulled on realising its implication on Indian Bohras. Number of such efforts for democratic reforms as far as community's social affairs are concerned, were made by the unflinching reformists like Shri N. L. Contractor and others. But these efforts did not meet with any measurable degree of success on account of Syedna Saheb's ruthlessness in putting them down. Number of conferences and conventions were held in Bombay as well as other cities like Bagasra in Gujarat to press for democratic rights for Bohras. However, as noted earlier, a reformist movement could not develop mass base. But, it was quite different this time in Udaipur. This movement has drawn Bohra masses, young and old, men and women, alike into its vortex.

The story of what happened in Udaipur shows utter impudence on the part of Syedna Saheb. The Bohras in Udaipur are, by and large, well-educated and politically conscious, especially, the youth among them. Even the Bohra ladies in Udaipur have achieved high excellence in the realm of academic

learning. Many of them have produced research papers in social sciences. There are also, among them, brilliant professionals like doctors, engineers, and advocates. This band of young enthusiasts was very much pained at the deteriorating moral standards in the management of Jamat's affairs. These young men, inspired by democratic ideals, took up the challenge and constituted Najmi Committee to ensure honest and efficient management. Moreover, they stubbornly refused to endow huge chunk of burial ground and its adjoining plot of land to Syedna Saheb, which he was persistently demanding. In a developing city like Udaipur, the cost of this chunk of land will work out to quite a fortune which Syedna Saheb could not lay his hands upon. This enraged him and he deputed his son with a mission to dissolve the democratically constituted Najmi Committee. The Bohras of Udaipur had lent its unqualified support to the honest and principled functioning of this Committee and therefore, they were very much perturbed when it was unilaterally dissolved by Syedna Saheb's son. This authoritarian and undemocratic step rallied all the Bohras round the Najmi Committee and they went in great numbers to request Syedna's son to undo what he had done. By so doing the Bohras of Udaipur earned Syedna Saheb's wrath, who declared Baraat (which means virtual ex-communication as explained above) against all the supporters of the Bohra Youth. This took them by surprise, as they had done nothing wrong and had not defied any of Syedna's religious fiats. They i.e. the Bohras of Udaipur, went to meet Syedna Saheb to supplicate to him to withdraw Baraat and they were even prepared to tender apology on Syedna Saheb's own terms, if any. But, to their shock and dismay, Syedna Saheb did not budge and under his very nose his followers humiliated, spat upon and hurled abuses on these Udaipur Bohras including their women-folk. They were even denied food and water and had to go back to Udaipur much shocked and grieved. Even thereafter the representatives of the Bohras of Udaipur made incessant efforts to persuade Syedna Saheb to see the light of reason and accept their supplication. Not only Syedna Saheb refused to reconcile but he allegedly resorted to religious coercion. Syedna Saheb's followers resorted to violent

means against the supporters of the Bohra youth in Udaipur. Many innocent Bohras were mercilessly beaten. Even elderly people and women and children were not spared. Some rough-necks of Bombay and elsewhere publicly claiming allegiance to Syedna Saheb surfaced in Udaipur to intimidate members of the Bohra youth. Syedna Saheb also did not hesitate to use other coercive weapons like refusal to solemnise marriages, bury the dead and permission to hold prayers in mosques. And all this is being done just because the educated Bohras of Udaipur wanted autonomy in managing the affairs of the jamat without in any way eroding his religious supremacy, which they conceived to be his personal preserve.

Syedna Saheb is perhaps afraid of the fact that conceding any liberal and democratic functioning of jamat's affairs would loosen his strangulating grip over the community which would ultimately lead to parting with the huge funds accruing to him and over which his overlordship is absolute. Today, he owns a huge fortune in the form of liquid funds, industrial enterprises and real estates worth crores of rupees. It should be borne in mind that all this has come from the community itself by both persuasive and coercive means. He has a large family and his brothers, sons and daughters are known as princes and princesses and are given princely sums in addition to bungalows, big apartments and limousines. Reformist Bohras wonder as to how a religious head lives a life of luxury, which would be envied even by old rajahs and maharajahs, while exhorting his followers to eschew all worldly temptations and consider this world as the prison-house for the souls of the faithful. In the history of the world, truly religious souls have always led a life of exemplary austerity and have always avoided worldly ostentations. Even the history of the Bohra sect and its earlier Dais is replete with such instances.

Religion is the set of ideals which has ennobling and exalting effect on the human soul. It is a vision of a society which would be rid of all material conflicts and lust for power. It provides new meaning to life and ensures inner peace. But, organised religion, as is borne out historically, is the very negation of

those ideals. It becomes means to worldly ends like wealth and power. To achieve these ends, emphasis is laid on dogmas and rituals rather than the noble values and humanistic essence enshrined in the transcendental vision of religion. Syedna Saheb being the head of organised religion is more concerned with irrelevant dogmas and rituals rather than truly humanist and egalitarian essence of religion, in order to perpetuate his material interests. Otherwise, why should he wield the weapon of *raza* (he never tires of calling it a blessing! sic! what a price one has to pay for procuring this blessing) for solemnisation of marriages and even burial of the dead, to punish social dissidents and unbending reformists. Only a tyrant autocrat would wield such sadist weapons. A religious saint would pardon even the most recalcitrant of his enemies.

The reformist youth of Udaipur is demanding only democratic management of the social affairs of the community, keeping Syedna Saheb's religious supremacy intact. The revolt sparked by Syedna Saheb's medieval persecution has drawn the masses of Bohras in Udaipur into its fold — something unheard of among Bohras before. The movement in Udaipur is no longer confined to the educated elite only. Old and young, men and women, educated and uneducated, all have jumped into the fray to fight for their democratic rights and their self-esteem. It is an experience to be in Udaipur these days. The enthusiasm of the supporters of democratic reforms is unbounded and their resolve to fight unshaken. And this despite the worst kind of religious persecution. The grip of orthodoxy has loosened, as the exploitative character of the organised religion stands exposed before them. Given right leadership and proper guidance, this movement can turn into a lasting phenomenon, which would represent more truly the noble ideals of religions in general and Islam in particular. The heroic determination of the Bohras of Udaipur and the involvement of masses makes this reformist and democratic movement a unique occurrence in the history of religious reforms. The sociologists of religion can probe deeper to find out the social and economic roots of this movement. One can even find a parallel in Martin Luther's protestant movement

of European religious reformation. It deserves the unqualified support of all those who swear by democratic, secular, socialist and humanistic ideals. Udaipur is poised to give lead in the field of religious reformation in the post-independence era in India. Let us not miss the opportunity.

## Chapter 9

### IQBAL

#### CRITICAL EVALUATION OF HIS SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS

Iqbal was undoubtedly a poet *par excellence*. The emotional intensity, the lyrical quality, mastery over expression, lucidity of diction, excellent craftsmanship and everfresh forms of articulating thoughts are some of the qualities of his poetic genius. He achieved the pinnacle of excellence in fusing philosophy with poetic art and no other poet of eminence has surpassed him so far in this respect in Urdu poetry. He used Persian also as vehicle of this thought and thereby meant to address the world Muslim community. His exuberant poetic talent alone entitles him to be placed amongst the geniuses of world literature.

One of the significant dimensions of his luxuriantly prolific poetic talent is its emotional depth. This is perhaps his limitation also. Though a poet of excellent achievements, Iqbal was not a systematic thinker. His commitment to Islamic fundamentalism on the one hand, and his attraction towards radical economic doctrines on the other made him a strange amalgam of contradictory conceptual systems which he quite unsuccessfully tried to reconcile.

Thus, Prof. W. C. Smith says about him, "The religion (of Iqbal) was radically new, basically different. Iqbal enunciated it boldly; but he himself never really believed it without reservation. The old traditions with their emotional force were too deeply ingrained in him for him to abandon himself utterly to the new vision which he sometimes saw; certainly too deeply for him to act upon it whole-heartedly. He was a poet, not a systematic thinker; and he did not hesitate to contradict him-

self. The strain of orthodoxy gets prominence in the balance-sheet of his thoughts.”<sup>1</sup>

Iqbal said of the classical Muslim thinker Iraqi “He was unable to see the full implication of his thought, partly because he was not a mathematician and partly because of his natural prejudice in favour of the traditional Aristotelian idea of a fixed universe.”<sup>2</sup>

“Of Iqbal,” says W. C. Smith, “we can say that he himself was unable to see the full implications of his thought partly because he was not an economist and partly because of his natural prejudice in favour of the traditional Platonic idea of a primarily spritual universe.”<sup>3</sup> I propose to examine, in this article, the formulations of Iqbal on socio-philosophical problems and their basic contradictions.

Iqbal was basically committed to the idea of Islamic rejuvenation in the light of modern philosophic and scientific developments. He was greatly pained to see Islam encumbered with medieval mystic ideas and practices. He, therefore, devoted himself with great gusto to rid Islam of these medieval encumbrances and attempt the reconstruction of its socio-philosophic concepts. He undertook to do this through his prolific poetry and prose writing. He has given clear exposition of his thoughts on the reconstruction of Islam in his famous lectures published in the book, *Reconstruction Of Religious Thought In Islam*. Poetry was, of course, his forte and he used it profusely to express his ideas on religio-philosophic subjects.

Though Iqbal was committed to an Islamic frame-work, his philosophic concepts were essentially eclectic, and his approach elitist; this later suggestion he would have, of course, rejected out of hand. The charge is, nevertheless true, and can be substantiated from his writings. He drew heavily from the Nietzschean concept of superman and the philosophy of power and integrated it with his concept of Mo'min. He acknowledged Nietzsche's prophetic talent and described him as a man of vision.



Thus, he says about Nietzsche, "Perhaps a psychopath endowed with a great intellect — the combination is not an impossibility — may give us a clue to such a technique. In modern Europe, Nietzsche, whose life and activity form at least to us Easterners, an exceedingly interesting problem in religious psychology, was endowed with some sort of a constitutional equipment for such an undertaking. His mental history is not without a parallel in the history of Eastern Sufism. That a really imperative vision of the Divine in man came to him cannot be denied."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, he admired Nietzsche for his nearness to Divine vision but at the same time disapproved of his approach and dubbed him as a failure. In Iqbal's opinion, "Instead of looking for a spiritual rule which would develop the Divine even in a plebeian and thus open up before him an infinite future, Nietzsche was driven to seek the realization of his vision in such schemes as aristocratic radicalism."<sup>5</sup>

Iqbal, thus, assimilated certain aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy but never fully agreed with him. His atheism and his reliance on his own internal forces without seeking any external spiritual guidance, made him unacceptable to Iqbal. The cornerstone of Iqbal's philosophy was the recognition of religion as the most perfect form of social consciousness. "Philosophy," he said, "must recognise the central position of religion and has no other alternative but to admit it as something focal in the process of reflective synthesis."<sup>6</sup> Because of lack of spiritual element in him, he describes Nietzsche as a man with the heart of Mo'min and a mind of a kafir.

He also rejects his theory of 'eternal recurrence' as it amounts to mechanical repetition and militates against the concept of creative evolution, a concept borrowed from the French philosopher Bergson. Under the influence of Bergson, Iqbal is totally opposed to any idea of mechanical determinism and as a corollary, also of historical determinism, as posited by Marx. Of the Nietzschean concept of 'eternal recurrence', Iqbal says, "It is only a more rigid kind of mechanism, based, not on ascertained fact, but only a working hypothesis of science."<sup>7</sup>

To Iqbal, the deeper mysteries of life cannot be explained with the help of scientific concept, mechanical as they are. To him, life is no mere mechanism capable of being fitted into mechanical concepts. Its inner meaning and vitality eludes all such mechanical categories. To him "the discoveries of Newton in the sphere of matter and those of Darwin in the sphere of Natural History reveal a mechanism. The concept of mechanism, a purely physical concept, claimed to be the all-embracing explanation of nature. And the battle for and against mechanism is still being fought in the domain of Biology."<sup>8</sup>

Because of his deeper emotional commitment to the spiritual nature of the ultimate reality, Iqbal had a positive bias against the scientific explanation of nature, and was attracted with a magnetic force towards the scientifically doubtful theory of Bergson which postulated an element of 'elan-vital' in the explanation of the evolution of nature. Science to him was not a single systematic view of reality. It was a mass of sectional views of reality, fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together. Again his concept of the religious nature of ultimate reality drove him to seek a teleological explanation of nature, and this was his point of departure from Bergson.

Consequently, he sees nothing but chaos in Bergson's scheme of things as it is void of any immediate or remote purpose. Thus he says of Bergson's view, "Again, in Bergson's view the forward rush of the vital impulse in its creative freedom is unilluminated by the light of an immediate or remote purpose. It is not aiming at a result; it is wholly arbitrary, undirected, chaotic, and unforeseeable in its behaviour. It is here that Bergson's analysis of our conscious experience reveals its inadequacy."<sup>9</sup>

Iqbal, with all his talk of dynamism, and his partisanship of perpetual change, is found to be a prisoner of *a priori* concepts. Therefore, his admiration for, and commitment to, any western philosopher is always qualified.

Iqbal was opposed to the idea of the cognition of reality through the process of intellection. He was one with Kant in rejecting pure reason as an instrument in comprehending the ultimate nature of reality. To him intuition alone can enable

one to understand the reality in its totality. Thought provides a piecemeal view. But it need not be opposed to intuition as such. They can complement each other. He says, "Thought and intuition are organically related. They spring from the same root and complement each other." Then again, "One fixes its gaze on the eternal, the other on the temporal aspect of reality."<sup>10</sup>

Because of his acceptance of intuition as the only means of grappling with reality, he totally disapproved of Aristotle's syllogistic or deductive approach. To him, the assimilation of this intellectual approach of the early Muslim thinkers, became a great impediment in understanding the real spirit of the Qu'ran which was anti-classical to the core. Plato despised sense perception and thought it leads to mere opinion and no real knowledge. Unlike this, the Qu'ran laid its emphasis on sight and hearing as instruments of reflecting over nature. Its whole approach was inductive. Thus the Greek influence marred the true Islamic vision of the early Muslim thinkers.

Iqbal, therefore, made a critical appraisal of the Mutakallims' atomistic nature of reality. To him, their scheme of things was rather ambivalent and smacked of materialism. The Soviet scholar M. T. Stepanyant says of him, "He took an approach to the problems of existence characteristic of idealist pluralism, or the division of nature into separate elements. His 'spiritual pluralism' was the result of the idealistic scheme of atoms found in the philosophy of Kalam."<sup>11</sup>

According to the theory of Kalam, the particles did not exist eternally in the universe, but were continually being created by God at his own discretion and consequently could also be non-existent. The mutakallim held that all atoms were the same and had no property of potentiality. Things had no constant properties, as these had to be created anew each time by God. "When God makes a simple substance he puts into it whatever accidents he pleases. This vanishes at once, for it cannot last two moments. Therefore God puts into each new moment an accident of the same type. This goes on all the time as long as God wishes the given type of accidents to be preserved."<sup>12</sup>

Iqbal, in general, agreed with the philosophical outlook of Mutakallimin but, he, disagreed with their formulation that all atoms were the same, and, reason and soul is nothing but accidentia. As Iqbal was an idealistic monist of a sort, he criticised the Mutakallimin for maintaining that soul, was merely one of the properties of the substances, and thus aligning themselves with the position of materialism.

According to Iqbal, the early Muslim thinkers, under the influence of classical Greek philosophy, thoroughly misunderstood the real spirit of the Qu'ran, and thus missed its real import.

His criticism of Mu'tazalites and their doctrines is mainly on account of their acceptance of Greek dialectic as a mode of comprehending the tenets of Islam. "The Mu'tazilas," he says, "conceiving religion merely as a body of doctrine and ignoring it as a vital fact, took no notice of non-conceptual modes of approaching Reality and reduced religion to a mere system of logical concepts ending in purely negative attitude."<sup>13</sup>

He eulogises Ghazali for having revolted against Greek classicism and putting religious truth in a different category beyond the orbit of reason. He compares Ghazali with Kant for having performed this momentous task, for, both revolted against the instrumentality of reason in comprehending ultimate reality. Intuition, and not reason, led to it. Iqbal found an essential difference between them. Kant, consistently with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God. Ghazali, finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience, and there found an independent content for religion.<sup>14</sup>

Iqbal sees far-reaching implications in Ghazali's revolt against Greek classicism. Not only that it put religion out of the reach of reason and found an independent content for it in mystic experience, but also because, it put back on the track, the real spirit of Islam, which was lost in the confabulations of Greek speculative thought. The revival of this Islamic spirit finally reached its culmination in the masterly interpretation of history attempted by Ibn-Khaldun.

To Iqbal, the real spirit of Islam lay in its emphasis on a keen sense of the reality of time, and the concept of life as a continuous movement in time. It is quite interesting to note what Iqbal has to say about this movement of history in time. Iqbal writes in his 5th lecture on *The Spirit Of Muslim Culture*, "All that I mean to say is that, considering the direction in which the culture of Islam had unfolded itself, only a Muslim could have viewed history as a continuous, collective movement, a real inevitable development in time. The point of interest in this view of history is the way in which Ibn-Khaldun conceives the process of change. His conception is of infinite importance because of the implication, that history, as a continuous movement in time, is a genuinely creative movement and not a movement whose path is already determined." Iqbal further continues, "His chief merit lies in his acute perception of, and systematic expression to the spirit of cultural movement of which he was a most brilliant product."<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from the above passage that Iqbal is, what can be described, as an objective-idealist. His interpretative analysis of the brilliant period of Islamic society is spiritual and psychological in its character. He does not reckon with the historical and material forces as determinant factors. On the contrary, to him, the creative movement of history in time, as conceived by Ibn-i-Khaldun, was inherent in Islam, and only a Muslim could have so analysed and understood it. Thus, for Iqbal, Islam was the causative influence on the emergence of the ethos of a society, which was so brilliantly analysed by the historian philosopher Ibn-i-Khaldun.

He seems to be closer in his analysis to that sociologist of religion, Max Weber, who attempted to trace out the causative influence of protestant ethics on the emergence of capitalist society in Europe, though perhaps, as an explanation of the congruency of such diverse factors as religion and economics.

If one holds valid the abstraction, that the economic base has a decisive influence, though not in a mechanical sense, on the total complex that the human society is, then it is not very difficult to understand the forces that shaped the early Islamic

society. I will briefly try to explain it here. The institutional superstructure of the early Arab civilisation is no mystery. The Arab world to the east of Egypt, popularly known as Mashraq, was the seat of civilisations that were brilliant, wealthy, and, moreover, extremely urban in character. It was an area of great cities. It was a zone of great passage between the major areas of civilizations in the old world. This semi-arid zone, naturally poor as regards agriculture, divides the old world like a belt, and thereby separates three areas of civilization based on agriculture: Europe, Black Africa, and Monsoon Asia. The Arab zone has therefore always fulfilled a commercial function, bringing into contact, through its role as the only middleman, agricultural communities that had no direct awareness of each other. The social formation on the basis of which its own civilizations were erected was always commercial in character. Thus, the surplus on which its great towns lived did not come from the areas of its rural inhabitants, but from the profit of the long-distance trading activity.<sup>16</sup>

This explains the dynamic character and brilliance of that civilization as against the feudal civilization which is based on the direct exploitation of its peasant population and is stagnant in nature. The cities of the Arab east were always centers of merchants, with a crowd of craftsmen and clerks around them. They were merchant cities, like those of Italy in the medieval West. The accumulation of wealth in many of these cities expressed the brilliance of their civilization. To take cognizance of the material forces operating at the base, perhaps, would have been, nothing short of blasphemy for Iqbal. The conquest of vast territories in the east and west consolidated the position of Arab imperialism, and enabled its ruling classes to enjoy the monopoly of trade throughout the length and breadth of this empire; this profitable monopoly, gave a dynamic character to the entire society and its creative power and potentialities.

This also explains the flourishing of various sciences, geography, mathematics and alchemy in that society. The emergence of an eminent historian, like Iban-i-Khaldun, who gave history a dynamic and creative character, is, therefore, under-

standable. This was reflected in the dynamic character of the Islamic ethos also; and hence the revolt of Muslim thinkers against the influences of early Greek thought, which was speculative in character and lacked moorings in the type of society that early Islam was.

#### IQBAL'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC THEORIES

As discussed earlier, Iqbal was firmly and irrevocably committed to the Islamic socio-economic framework. But, he was equally opposed to the medieval and stagnant character of Islam and the accretions to its teaching in that period. He set out to jettison it of this dead weight. His agony at the medieval decadence of Islam is quite understandable. He was the product of a crisis-ridden period in the history of Indian Islam. The glory of Mughal rule had faded, and, Islamic society was writhing under the pain inflicted on it by the collision with the West. Feudal Islam could not measure up to the new challenge and fast started disintegrating. A reconstruction of religious thought was inevitable in the light of new developments.

Iqbal took up the challenge in full measure. His thinking matured at a time when the anti-colonial struggle was raging in the country and this conflict left an indelible mark on his poetic sensitivity. He wrote a number of poems giving vent to his deeply-felt emotions. Unlike Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, his political credo was intensely anti-colonial and anti-imperialist. He gave a stirring call to the people of India to arise from their slumber and wage an all-out struggle against the imperialist masters and cast off the chains of political bondage. Thus he says :

In slavery the heart is killed in the body,  
 In slavery the soul becomes a burden to the body,  
 In slavery the community is disunited.

This one and that one quarrel with this one and that one.<sup>17</sup>

He exhorts his countrymen with these evocative words :

Think of the country, O thoughtless! trouble is brewing,  
 In heavens there are designs for thy ruin,

See that which is happening and that which is to happen,  
What is there in the stories of the olden times ?

If you fail to understand this, you will be exterminated  
O people of Hindustan !

Even your story will not be preserved in the annals of  
the world.<sup>18</sup>

He wanted to free his country from its humiliating enslavement to foreign imperialism. In this, he echoed the demand of the younger generation of the national bourgeoisie and intellectuals to cast off the burden of the old dogmas and adopt new ideals. In this period of his poetical career, he was patriotic in the sense implied by nationalism. This was also a period when Hindus and Muslims were fighting a united battle against British hegemony, and, separatist tendencies had not appeared on the political scene. There was yet no cleavage in the common interests of the dominant classes of the two communities.

Iqbal, meanwhile, went to Europe, and saw for himself, the imperialist forces riding roughshod and tearing asunder the very fabric of human society. This cut-throat economic competition, oppressing itself in the political creed of nationalism, greatly disturbed Iqbal, who was a person gifted with the finest poetical sensitivity.

But Iqbal, with his psychological frame of mind, drew conclusions which reinforced his conviction in a society centered around a religious vision. He concluded that, "Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity."<sup>19</sup>

His scheme of things either ignored, or, gave secondary importance to economic determination of our social complex. Now, he turned his back on the concept of political nationalism and became an ardent votary of Islamic internationalism, though his patriotism, in the sense of love for one's country, remained undiluted.

Iqbal with his total commitment to the Islamic vision, never perhaps, tried to understand the potentialities of scientific socialism in curing the ills of a decadent capitalist society. He



rejected socialism for the curious reason that it had repudiated the mysticism of Hegel, the very source which could have given it strength and purpose.

It is Iqbal's conviction that, "Neither the technique of medieval mysticism nor nationalism nor atheistic socialism can cure the ills of a despairing humanity. Surely, the present is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of the modern science necessarily involves and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter."<sup>20</sup>

And again, "It is only by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future whence and whither that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by inhuman competition, and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values."<sup>21</sup> This is an ostrich-like attitude which is shorn of reality and is a wishful projection of his Islamic ideals on to a society which is hopelessly sunk in the quagmire of profit-hunt.

Iqbal, product of emergent bourgeois society as he was, jettisoned Islam of its feudal encumbrances, and imparted a new sense of dynamism to its religious structure. He even enthusiastically welcomed, the Turkish reformation movement. He approved of Halim Sabit's new theory of Mohammedan Law, grounded on modern sociological concepts. "If the renaissance of Islam is a fact", he says, "and I believe it is a fact, we too one day, like the Turks, will have to re-evaluate our intellectual inheritance."<sup>22</sup>

Iqbal did not remain immune to the epoch-making events of the Soviet socialist revolution. It stirred his poetic imagination. He wrote poems of powerful emotional appeal welcoming workers' emancipation from ruthless exploitation. He also paid a glowing tribute to Karl Marx though with certain reservations. Thus, in his poem, *The Assembly Of Satan's councillors*, the

third councillor says to his master, "What is there to worry if the spirit of imperialism prevails? But, what is thy answer to the mischief of that jew (i.e. Karl Marx)? That Moses without light, that Christ without cross, he is not a prophet, but has a book in his armpit. How can I tell thee, what a penetrating sight he has? It is like a day of judgement for the nations of east and west."

Again in his trilogy on Lenin, God and His angels, Lenin, though a proclaimed atheist, is made to confront God as a paradox. Lenin addresses God, thus :

O Thou Whose signs one sees in Life and Nature !  
 With thy permission I desire to ask a question,  
 To which philosophers' theses could provide no answer,  
 Where is the man whose God thou art?  
 Is it the man of clay who lives beneath the skies?  
 For the East, gods are the whites of Europe,  
 For the West, gods are the shining dollars,  
 This knowledge, this learning, this statemanship,  
     this statecraft,  
 They suck the blood and yet preach equality.  
 Thou art all-powerful and just, but in thy world,  
 The lot of the hapless labourer is very hard !  
 When will this boat of capitalism be wrecked?  
 Thy world is waiting for the day of reckoning.<sup>23</sup>

I have quoted Iqbal's poem at length just to project his view on socialism. However, Iqbal's socialism does not go very far. Sometimes he talks of the theory of trustee-ship of the capitalists and condemns Marxism as the equality of the stomachs, and, crass materialism preoccupied with corporeal aspects only.

Here, it is difficult to exonerate Iqbal of the charge of reaction. To be fair to Iqbal, it must be said that in Javid-Nama, the same poem, in which he condemns Marxism as the equality of stomachs, he also rejects August Comte's Positivist philosophy as a clever trick of the capitalists to deceive the worker and rob him of the rightful share of his labour. The fact is that Iqbal was subject to contrary pulls of radical socialist

doctrines on the one hand, and of a powerful religious transcendentalism on the other.

And the latter force exercises the final pull on him. In one of his soul-stirring poems, the order to arise and make the poor of the world, to shake up the very foundations of the palaces of the rich, to warm the blood of slaves with the fire of faith, to give the humble sparrow the strength to fight the falcon, and to burn every corn of wheat in the field that does not provide sustenance to the toiling peasant, emanates from God; and this perhaps resolves Iqbal's dilemma.

Socialism has been subjected to metaphysical principles, science and intellect have been subordinated to intuition. Socialism has been integrated into the frame-work of Islam, which was Iqbal's most cherished desire. It would be interesting to mention here Iqbal's concepts of 'negation' and 'exception' which are Arabic equivalents of 'La' and 'Illa'. For him to destroy the present order, is negation (La), which is, in itself, not enough. It must be accompanied by the positive affirmation, Illa. The Muslim says, "There is no god except God." First, he negates all the false gods, and, then affirms the existence of the true God.

Iqbal applies this concept to the social and political order also. Thus Russian revolution is the negation of the present abominable society which has been rightly destroyed. But, this, is the stage of negation only, i.e. Illa. The next affirmative stage must follow, otherwise, Russian socialism would be nothing more than the equality of the stomach. In other words, it must be subjected to the transcendental principle. He fervently believed that the Russian people, would, one day, take such a step.

He wrote, "I do not personally think that Russians are atheistic by nature. On the contrary, I think that Russian men and women have a deeply religious attitude and their negative out-look would not continue forever, because no social system can ever be based on atheism. As soon as the condition becomes normal, and the people get time to think seriously, they will have to find some positive basis of their system."<sup>24</sup>

For Iqbal, this could happen only when communists renounce their profound atheism, and submit to the authority of God. Communism plus quintessential religion would generate a new social fabric and a new human material. This matter was of profound import to Iqbal, because, in his view, the atheistic bent of ideology is disruptive, within history, of any society that thus loses its vision of transcendent goals.

#### AN ASSESSMENT OF IQBAL

We have briefly tried to survey the social and philosophical ideas of Iqbal. It clearly emerges from the survey that Iqbal's commitment to Islam was total and irrevocable. He, of course, did not accept Islam as handed down to him with all its feudal accretions and encumbrances. He attempted its reconstruction in the light of modern developments to make it acceptable to the newly-emerging westernised bourgeois generation among the Muslims. Excellently equipped as he was, he fulfilled this task admirably well.

Furthermore, says M. T. Stepanyant, "He was familiar with western philosophy and science and knew how to present the ideas of religious modernism with theoretical persuasion. His desire to bring the teachings of Islam closer to western philosophy and the findings of modern science echoed the mood of the younger generation of the national bourgeoisie and intellectuals, who wanted to cast off the burden of the old dogmas and adopt new ideas."<sup>25</sup>

This was more so, as viability in the competitive technological world of to-day makes, modern concepts, from industrialisation to intellectual flexibility, that are not explicit, or, may not even be implicit in the Islamic model, inevitable.

As the struggle for power between the Hindu bourgeoisie and its weaker Muslim counterpart intensified, Iqbal became by far the most brilliant spokesman of the latter community, and he conceived the idea of Pakistan in its embryonic form. In it, he found a unique opportunity for Indian Muslims to actualise the potentialities of the reconstructed Islam of his conceptual

scheme. Nehru's atheistic socialism, he thought, would not be acceptable to Muslims. Islam as a cultural force, could survive, in his opinion, only if it carved out a territory of its own in North-Western region.

But he equally despised the Muslim League's upper class character and wanted to impart a radical thrust to it, so that it could attract muslim masses to its fold. For, to assimilate socialist democracy with Islam and to conform it to the principles of Quran, would not be any new revolution, but, would be more in keeping with its quintessence.

The medieval mystical practices and their negation of the self was a natural outcome of the repressive feudal environment which came down heavily on the exploited mass of the people and made this self-mortification attractive to them. Iqbal, being the product of emerging bourgeois class, found this mystic philosophy of renunciation detestable. He, therefore, emphasised action and dynamism. His masterly skill of poeticising these ideas, had an irresistible appeal for the aspirations of the Muslim gentry. The culmination of this process was in his philosophy of 'self'! This was typical of the bourgeois glorification of the individual.

He asks, "What then is life?" and answers, "It is individual: its highest form so far is the Ego (khudi) in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive centre." Further, "These operations lead to the evolution of the self. Every object possesses individuality and in the scale of life, the status of every object is fixed according to the extent it develops its individuality and gains mastery over the environment."<sup>26</sup>

This glorification of self ultimately drove Iqbal to assimilate the Nietzschean concepts of power and superman. The concept of superman, in Iqbal's scheme, has, of course, been shorn of its aristocratic trappings and transformed into the Islamic concept of Mo'min. Nevertheless, the crux hardly changes.

He is also enamoured of Bergson's concept of 'pure duration', which is, according to him, an 'Eternal Now' of sorts, and charged with the potentialities of creative evolution. This

doctrine of creative evolution is an outgrowth of the concept of free will, and, therefore, has an irresistible appeal for Iqbal who integrates it with the character traits of the superman of his conception.

Iqbal unquestioningly accepts the fundamental doctrines of Islam, and for him the concept of the finality of Mohammed's prophethood is irrevocable. According to Iqbal's epistemology, the ultimate reality can be known through intuition only and hence prophet Mohammed's revelational knowledge is unaltered by the passage of time. The inductive approach, also in keeping with the spirit of Quran, belongs to the domain of the study of nature, yields piecemeal knowledge, and is, therefore, subject to change.

Iqbal, then, as Prof. D. D. Kosambi said about Bhartrihari, is the poet of his class; a class that had not fulfilled its function, and a poet who, try as he might, could not but lay bare the yearning and weaknesses of his class. This at once explains his success and his failure. But he is not a poet of the people. The Indian poets who made a real and lasting place for themselves in the hearts of the people came from the people themselves, and not from this narrow helpless stratum shut off from the masses by birth, training, occupation or the lack of it, language and culture.<sup>27</sup> Such poets spoke the language of the people, addressed themselves to the people and not merely the upper classes.

Again to use Kosambi's words, the mechanism of his projection, the images and phrases which the poet uses, unconsciously reflected the structure of the society in which he functioned, and inevitably bore the stamp of the class to which he belonged. As for Iqbal's radicalism, the reason is obvious. During the course of its struggle against the old, every new class tends to assimilate and identify itself with the entire oppressed section of the humanity and to take its victory as the desideratum of the progress of civilization. A great poet in a stratified society not only expresses the urges and aspirations of his own class, but also transcends the barriers of that class. He lays bare the oppressive mechanism and exploitative nature of the social

structure and also points the way to its negation. Iqbal's greatness owes no other explanation.

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## Chapter 10

### CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN URDU LITERATURE

'As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams', says Franz Kafka in his famous story, *Metamorphosis*, 'he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect!' The modern literature, by and large, seems to have undergone somewhat similar phantasmagoric metamorphosis and the Urdu literature is no exception to it. The literary-cum-cultural continuum, as if, has shattered and the modern writing appears to be a disjunctive and an incongruent mass. The deep impress of the past literary heritage is sought to be completely erased by the enthusiasts of the modern creative writing.

The creative literature is the product of its own milieu and consequently mirrors the ethos and the values of its period of creation. As Engels has put it while attacking Bernstein. "...it is men themselves who make their history, but within a given environment which conditions them..." This, needless to say, applies to literature as well as any other intellectual enterprise. The literary crisis is but an expression of the social crisis and its mobility or immobility is, in its ultimate analysis, due to the contradictions which split society.

Before thirties, the Urdu literature was a stagnant pool of the moribund feudal literary traditions. The earlier attempts by some poets like Hali, to introduce a new experimental style under the influence of the 18th and 19th century English literature, were sporadic and could not strike deeper roots in the body literature of the Urdu language. Moreover, Hali himself was not well-versed in the western literature and did not have knowledge of any western language. And, he was no man of exuberant poetic talent. He, therefore, failed to give new idiom



and expression to Urdu poetry. What was worse, he drew inspiration from the past heritage of the Islamic civilisation of the Abbasid period in its Persianised form.

Mirza Ghalib was, undoubtedly, the greatest Urdu poet born in the 19th century. He witnessed the great upheaval of 1857, and, his poetic vision enabled him to perceive the inevitable socio-political change, which was being ushered in by the British Raj. His poetic genius lay in the expression of the ethos of subtle transformation with a touch of poignancy. His craftsmanship was superb; he converted feelings, as if, into images or into complex of images. The poetry of Mirza Ghalib was, as it were, a lyrical intuition and contemplation of feelings in their affective-volitional sense. He imparted freshness of meaning to the words so often used in traditional sense. Ghalib's poetic language is not, as Benedetto Croce puts it, 'an arsenal of arms already made, and it is not a vocabulary, a collection of abstractions, or a cemetery of corpses more or less well-embalmed!' But the poetic exuberance of Ghalib sprouted forth in the traditional forms of Urdu poetry. He chose Ghazal and masnavi as his poetic arena. Even though he chose traditional form, Ghalib's poetic idiom left a deep imprint on the formative minds of the subsequent generations of Urdu poets and writers. He became the father figure, an archetypal pattern of Urdu literature. The progressive writers and poets drew inspiration from him and his creative endeavours.

Nineteen thirties was a period of great turmoil for the Urdu literature. The great October revolution of 1917 in Russia and the gradual transformation of our own society from fossilised feudal society into semi-industrial bourgeois society, created its own stresses and strains. Specially, the October Revolution in Russia greatly affected the sensibilities of the creative writers and poets in almost all the languages of India. A storm broke out in the literary arena. The new breed of writers and poets discarded the traditional forms of expressions and set out to evolve new ones with greater potency to express the ethos generated by the contradictions of the emerging bourgeois society. This was vehemently opposed by the traditionalists who

could only look back with a sense of pride on the rich literary heritage of the bygone ages.

The controversy raged in full swing for more than a decade. The new ideas and ideals expressed in new forms of metered and free rhymes were nothing less than sacrilegious for the traditionalists. The socio-political urges and aspirations of the new generation of literary writers were beyond their comprehension and, therefore, they looked down upon all attempts to inject new dynamism in literary writings and creations as unpardonable heresy. The feudal institutions, along with their paraphernalia, could not, however, bear the brunt of attack mounted by the onward march of new ideas, and hence the traditionalists fought a losing battle.

The progressive writers' association was formed. The writers and poets belonging to it committed themselves to Marxism and pledged to fight against oppression and exploitation of class society. They believed that an abstract concept of universal man shorn of his class association is meaningless idealisation, which serves the ruling class. They accepted Brecht's point of view that in a society of class struggle, the 'immediate' effect of a work of art demanded by the ruling aesthetic is to suppress the social distinctions within the audience and thus, while the work is being enjoyed, create a collective not divided into classes but 'universal human'. They stripped their aesthetic concept of its bourgeois class trappings, and naturally wrote poems on the subjects till then prohibited in the feudal literature.

This revolt and the feeling of disgust against the prevailing social milieu had two dimensions. The one dimension was the refuge in the concept '*L'art pour l'art*' — the attitude adopted by that great and fundamentally great realist poet, Baudelaire. This is also a protest against the vulgar utilitarianism, the dreary business preoccupations of the bourgeoisie. "It arose", says Ernst Fischer, "from the artist's determination not to produce commodities in a world where everything becomes a saleable commodity!" In the words of the same author, "Baudelaire set up the sacred effigy of beauty in opposition to the smug world

of the bourgeoisie!" Baudelaire was, as if, experiencing the eternal conflict between escapism and hard realism.

The other dimension of the problem was to seek solution by committing oneself to a socio-political philosophy. This is what the progressive writers of Urdu did. They realised that man had paid a colossal price for his rise to more complex and more productive forms of society. As a result of the differentiation of skills, the division of labour, and the separation of classes he was alienated, not only from nature, but from his own self. The complex pattern of society meant also the breaking up of human relationships; increasing social enrichment meant, in many respects, increasing human impoverishment. Many poems were composed and short stories written with such political and socio-cultural themes by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Makhdum Mohi-ud-din, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Sardar Jafri, Kaifi-Azmi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Majaz, Sahir Ludhyanvi, etc.

Though the corpus of Urdu literature consisted mainly of poetry, since the second decade of the twentieth century, short stories and novels were being written, and this art of fiction had fully bloomed during thirties, when the progressive writers' movement was sweeping across our country. From among the progressive writers, those who made their name in Urdu literature were Krishn Chandra, Rajendra Singh Bedi, Sadat Hasan Manto, Qurratul Ain Haider, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Sajjad Zaheer, etc.

The important question, which has been debated time and again, is, whether a committed artist or writer can create great literature. This was fiercely argued, for and against, in Urdu literature also. For the committed artist "Marxism forms today the system of coordinates which alone permits it to situate and to define a thought in any domain whatsoever — from political economy to physics, from history to ethics", as the French critic and philosopher Garudy put it. This kind of commitment, according to its opponents, kills the very spirit of creativity. Latitudinarian non-chalance towards any social or political philosophy, according to them, is the cardinal principle of great literature.

This kind of criticism could be partly justified, if, it had been directed against agit-prop kind of literature, but not otherwise. Committed artists have produced, and continue to produce great art. Dante, Voltaire, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Tolstoy, Gorky, Hemingway, Sartre, etc., all have been committed artists, in one or the other sense. The greatness of art depends on the inherent ability of the artist to project the conflicts and passions of man in a language which has aesthetic appeal and affective charge, in other words, which can stir powerful emotions and evoke greatness of man. The committed artists can and do have all these qualities, and, their sincere commitment to a cause adds a quality of artist's emotional involvement without which his creation would be a barren statement; it would be like Wittgenstein's conception of language as mere assertion or denial of facts. Rightly says Christopher Caudwell, "Not poetry's abstract statement — its content of facts — but its dynamic role in society — its content of collective emotion — is therefore poetry's truth."

But this does not mean that all the committed progressive writers can be exonerated of the charge of producing mere propaganda literature. Sartre has very succinctly described such artists as those whose fixed image of idealism and of violence did idealistic violence to facts. For years, the Marxist intellectual believed that he served his party by violating experience, by overlooking embarrassing details, by grossly simplifying the data, and above all, by conceptualising the event before having studied it. This applies to the progressive writers of Urdu as much as to any other writers.

Like the revolution of thirties by the progressive writers in Urdu literature, the early sixties witnessed another trend which found itself in direct confrontation with the earlier trend of progressivism. A new breed of literateurs professedly set out to liberate Urdu literature from the hard grip of by now outdated progressive literature. A fierce controversy raged again and generated a lot of heat. These modern writers suddenly realised that our society has been transformed, like Gregor Samsa of Kafka's story, into a monstrous cockroach — a despicable disease

which can't be got rid of. They started wailing about it. In their writings, they use symbols born out of their phantasy and representing the dark side of human animal. The phantasy, as opposed to logical or directed thinking adorns their literary output. Directed thinking which follows a rational path, a path conforming with our conscious knowledge of reality and is derived from the common perceptual reality, is an anathema to them. Similarly 'directed feeling' as Caudwell puts it — a feeling which conforms with what we think right, with our true self, with the valid or beautiful, with what we feel is the better part of us, with the ideal each has in his breast, does not appeal to them.

"The new aesthetes" says Howard Fast, "take two paths in their retreat from reality. The first as indicated by a generation ago in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, is compounded out of a brutal contempt for man, a growing insensitivity and moral corruption which in its final analysis equates man and cockroach. The second, as exemplified by so many of the new poets, embarks on a search for an alternative to life, and results inevitably in a neurotic intellectual embrace of death." These modern writers and poets, it seems, have lost all hopes of ever attaining a much awaited millenium. The ideals man has cherished and nurtured for ages can never concretise, the wounds of his suffering and misery in this vale of tears would keep on rankling. All this has happened as a result of beastly nature of man who is guided by his animal instincts, not by reason or passion for good.

The industrial society, the modern artist feels, is a monstrous growth. It has generated strictly rational order, which is in firm control of technocrats and bureaucrats. These technocrats and bureaucrats calculate and measure everything in terms of mechanical and stereotype formulae, totally ignoring human conflicts and aspirations. This has alienated man from himself and has disintegrated his ego. The human side of this social enterprise has gone by total default. He should, therefore, land back into Laputa from which he has fled. Kierkegaard, the German existentialist, believed that one cannot surpass his unhappy conscious-

ness. It is a purely verbal exercise. The existing man, he feels, cannot be assimilated by a system of ideas. "In fact," says Sartre, "the subjective life, just insofar as it is lived, can never be made the object of a knowledge. This inwardness, which in its narrowness and in its infinite depth claims to affirm itself against all philosophy, this subjectivity rediscovered beyond language as the personal adventure of each man in the face of others and of God — this is what Kierkegaard called existence."

The creative artist is, undoubtedly, a highly sensitive individual. The spatio-temporal changes are intuited and internalised by him. By his imaginative power, he intuits an object though the latter may not be present and creates something new out of the given material of cognition. Thus, to use Herbert Marcuse's words, "...imagination denotes a considerable degree of independence from the given, of freedom amid a world of unfreedom." But, if the artist chooses to descend deeper into himself, not to emerge out again, he would be lost to the external world, and his creation could be nothing better than discur, or, babbling of a mad man, who uses some frightening symbols and gives free reign to his phantasy. Imagination, uncombined with conscious perception of reality, degenerates into sheer phantasy.

The modern Urdu writer, like others of his tribe, declares that his creations are non-communicative. The creative artist, according to him, is a shattered individual who has to sever all his connections with the externality, as far as his artistic creations are concerned, though, for all other purposes, he continues to be a normal person. And he calls this introvertive act as contemporary sensitivity.

There is an element of truth in it, no doubt. The disorder of his language is disorder of the external world to an extent. His frightening symbols do reflect shattering disillusionment with the external reality. His phantasies tell a tale of woes mankind is undergoing as a result of the conspiracy of a few in the establishment to rule and exploit the vast majority of human beings, ignoring their human sensitivities and treating them merely as a means to quench their insatiable thirst for power. The grow-

ing urbanisation and the efforts of power that be to create megapolices has created its own conflicts and tensions. In such vast multitudes of massive populations, the individual feels totally lost and lonely.

And this sense of solitude is reflected in the creations of the modern writers. The loss of identity and bearings in the society, coupled with the struggle to survive causes deep sense of anguish and the individuals feel torn within themselves. The subordination of all the ideals and ideologies to selfish interests and the deadly power of modern technology to grind down all human aspirations to be free has also brought its crop of disillusionment. The vulgar consumerism and the rat race for the bigger share of the cake has rusted and corrupted his soul. All this has forced the modern artist to revolt against this enslavement of humanity by severing his connections with the society itself and descending into his own self.

The modern Urdu writer, however, does not realise that India's reality is vastly different. Though some such trends are surfacing in our society, they cannot strike deeper roots because of our poverty and backwardness. The masses of people in our country are denied even two square meals. Unlike the western society, vulgar and non-purposive affluence is not our problem. We are far from being at the end of the tether. The masses of our people have to struggle and struggle very hard. The sensitivity of the artists cannot ignore this. While symbolism is part of creative endeavour, it can't be allowed to degenerate into senseless and macabre phantasy unconnected with the reality of collective life and consciousness of the community that has thrown up that artist. The artist, undoubtedly projects the inner conflict and acutely felt emotions into his creations, but, it does not have to degenerate into psychologism of unfettered variety.

What modern Urdu writer does today is to ape western notions and sinks into self-styled primal chaos that is abyss of self. Lost in his currently fashionable mental anguish, he forgets the aspirations and agonies of his own fellow citizens. His art may satisfy the imitation super ego of westernised urban elite,

but, it certainly fails to do justice to the vast multitude of masses in urban as well as rural areas, whose sufferings know no bound. If the progressive writers have committed the folly of mechanically projecting party line in their art and propagandising, the so-called modern writers are falling into the trap of moribund western stereotypes.

However, one must not fail to acknowledge the creative endeavours of a few contemporary Urdu writers and poets who have not forsaken the reality of the struggling people. They have artistically projected the inner conflict, mental anguish and solitude of the present generation without getting lost in the abyss of the self. Notable among them are Jan Nisar Akhtar, Makhdum Mohiuddin, Baqar Mehdi, Akhtarul Iman, Qazi Saleem, etc. And among fiction writers are Krishna Chandra, Rajendra Singh Bedi, Qurratul Ain Haider, Anwar Azeem, Iqbal Majid, Ram Lal, Abid Suhail and others. But, as yet, the writers and poets of modern Urdu literature have not contributed enduring masterpiece. So it could be said of the progressive writers of ealier generation also.