

Reconstruction of Indian Society

What Muslims Can Do ?

Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi



Rendered into English by

Mohiuddin Ahmad



ACADEMY OF
ISLAMIC RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS
Post Box No. 119, Lucknow

The Managing Committee of the Shibli Academy (Darul-Musannafin) Azamgarh, U. P. met at Bombay on April 27 and 28, 1972. Taking advantage of the presence of some of the eminent religious and literary personages who were present on the occasion, a general meeting was convened in the Alma Latifi Hall on Sunday, the 30th April 1972, at 10 a. m. under the Presidentship of Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi. In a largely attended meeting both by educated Muslims and non-Muslims, this speech was delivered by the chief guest, Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi.

The address was later compiled from a tape-record of the speech by Ishaq Jalees Nadwi and published in Urdu in May 1972 after its editing by the speaker himself. It has been rendered into English by Mohiuddin Ahmad.

The Topic for the Day

I deem it an honour to address this gathering presided over by one of the foremost men of letters of our country and an eminent commentator of the Quran, Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, whom I have always held as my mentor and drawn inspiration from his delightful compositions.

This meeting is being held under the auspices of Shibli Academy. It would have been more in keeping with its traditions if the topic for today's talk had been "The contribution of Islam to the cultural heritage of India", but a number of learned dissertations already exist on the subject and Shibli Academy has itself brought out several publications which contain valuable material on this topic. This is an attractive topic of discourse for any student of Islamic history and I would have also been too glad to express my views on this subject. However, a lot has already been written on it both by Muslim and non-Muslim writers, such as, *A Survey of Indian History* by K. M. Pannikar, *Discovery of India* by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* by Dr. Tara Chand and several valuable articles written by Sir Jadu Nath Sircar, N. C. Mehta and others besides the *Glimpses of the Medieval India* by Syed Sabah Uddin Abdur Rahman and the writings of other Muslim scholars.

Present or the Past

The present is undoubtedly more important than the past. The role that Islam can play in the reconstruction of Indian society is now much more significant for the Muslims as well as for the country. We ought to consider, in this select gathering of educated persons, the contribution that the Muslims of this country can make both as Indians and as the custodians of a revealed religion, in the reconstruction of the fast changing society and the evolving cultural pattern of India? Do we have anything in our religion to guide and save the country from the impending danger and to help it achieve an honourable place in the comity of nations? I have not raised these questions out of any chauvinistic boastfulness, nor on account of any superiority complex, which have been unfortunately one of our national weaknesses, but in all seriousness and from the practical viewpoint of the community to which I belong. My community, I would like to emphasise, is not an offshoot of any fortuitous circumstances, but that it has an ideal, a mission before it. The Muslim community cannot simply live in its own imaginary world: it is its bounden duty to be fully seized with the problems facing the country. It cannot remain unconcerned with its surroundings nor can it afford to cut itself adrift from the mainstream of national life. It has to realise that it is boarding one and the same boat alongwith all the other communities and peoples living in this great country.

An Inspiring Illustration

To consider oneself immune from a portending evil is really suicidal. The moral has been driven home by

the Prophet of Islam in a very pithy and piquant allegory. He is reported to have said that :

"The parable of those who forbid others and the persons who indulge in the acts prohibited by God is like this : a few travellers on board a ship decided to cast dice for taking their places ; some of them got their place in the upper storey while others were accommodated in the lower one. Inconvenience was caused to those who had found a place in the upper storey, when people from the lower storey happened to pass by them to fetch water. At last, the people lodged in the lower storey said : Then the only way out is that we should bore a hole in the part occupied by us to get water (from the river) and save the "higher-ups" from inconvenience. Now, if the persons occupying the upper storey allow those in the lower part to carry out their resolve, all of them would perish ; but if they prevent them from acting on their decision, all would be saved."¹

I have intentionally used here the word "higher-ups", to make it more relevant to our present-day experiences. I think this parable brings out an important fact of the social life instead of illustrating an experience of minor significance. There can really be no question of any class distinction when a collective responsibility falls on any community ; likewise, nobody can be allowed to act against the common interest of the whole community. This parable is also aptly suited to remind the Muslims

1. *Sahih Bukhari*

of every country, of the collective responsibility they owe to their country and the nation.

The underlying idea of collective responsibility illustrated by the parable just mentioned has, in the past, inspired the Muslims to serve the country according to their lights. I can assert, on the basis of whatever limited knowledge of history I possess, that although there had been no pre-planned effort on the part of the Muslims, they have nevertheless ceaselessly worked to make this country great and prosperous. This idea of collective responsibility is still present there and can guide the Muslims to share the burden of reconstruction and development of the country in the present times.

Society and its Significance

History bears an irrefutable evidence to the fact that the society at any given time is much more important than languages and literatures, cultural patterns and folk-lore of any country. The existence of a vigorous society having a flicker of life in its veins, endowed with a conscience that discriminates between virtue and wickedness and taking offence of all cruel acts is a great blessing from God. Total effacement of tyranny from the society is perhaps an extremely difficult task : it is an ideal of prophets and their companions, which is seldom achieved by others. This is, however, not an impossibility, for had it been so, we would have never been able to speak of virtue and justice with confidence. It is, therefore, absolutely essential that the conscience of the society should at least prick on every injustice and tyranny, and it should never be willing to compromise with the base desires or sordid

longings. It should ever be prepared to assert itself against all odds and difficulties. To check a tyrant from committing an act of tyranny is undoubtedly a deed of valour, but it is also praiseworthy to name the tyrant in his face. A society whose inner voice has not died out is the first pre-requisite for the existence of any country. Only such an upright society can maintain the stability of the country in the periods of crisis. Howsoever long-drawn-out may be these critical occasions, periods of political crisis or moral confusion, the country with a righteous society need have no fear. A country need not give up hope so long as there exists such a society whose inward monitor has not become dormant, which refuses to endorse evil and wickedness and which is prepared to resist the reign of terror. I do not mean that such a society should have eschewed every trace of evil and turned itself into an embodiment of virtue and righteousness : what it needs is a positive acceptance of the spiritual-ethical norms, belief in the existence of God and the final retribution. If these convictions have percolated into the fabric of any society, it can withstand the greatest onslaught on humanity and its moral order, the waywardness of the politicians and the capriciousness of its rulers.

But if any country has been deprived of such a conscientious society, no good can come out of a stable government, huge educational establishments, spectacular religious observances or even individual righteousness. Nothing in the world can take the place of an upright society while a virtuous society can make up for every other loss. It is the society alone that can bring forth a welfare state and a clean administration. The society possessing

the moral sense can easily change the wicked rulers if they somehow come to wield the reins of its government.

Society is the Cynosure of History

Every sagacious historian has his eyes on the society rather than on the ruler or the government of a country. The historical records of Greece and Rome as also of our own country bear out the fact that so long as the conscience of the societies in these countries had not become dormant, the governmental changes for the worse or the assumption of power by any selfish and incompetent person was no more than a temporary phase. The collective will of the people always reasserted itself relegating the usurper into the background, not long after he had donned the purple. The society always brought forward a just and capable ruler to replace the unjust suzerain. Every prudent and foresighted man, therefore, ought to pay more attention to the society than to the political set-up of the time ; for, if the society is healthy and virtuous, it would not put up long with a tyrannical government. The wickedness of the rulers is a fleeting phenomenon like the indisposition of a healthy person. A physician is never worried by such slight ailments because the inner vitality of a healthy man is sufficient enough to overcome a slight illness.

But if the society becomes corrupt ; loses the sense of discrimination between good and bad, virtue and vice, the oppressor and the oppressed ; begins to follow the law of jungle ; learns to bow down in submission before whosoever gets the better of it ; and begins to sing the

praise of every rising sun ; then, of course, it is a matter of grave concern.

Healthy Society of Muslim Era

The history of our own country tells us that after the Muslims came into this land, the governments of the country successively passed into different hands ; no dynasty except that of the Moghuls has had the opportunity of undisturbed sway over the country for as much as a hundred years ; revolutions continuously rocked the ruling elite ; but strange though it was, the logical outcome of such revolutions as, for example, political instability, anarchy, social and moral confusion and cultural and intellectual decadence was almost absent. The common man who was concerned, by and large, with the earning of his bread, was never affected by these palace revolutions. Even the administrative set-up of the land hardly ever showed the signs of change in the ruling dynasty and continued to maintain the law and order undisturbed by these frequent changes. But, what was the reason for it ? The kings were beheaded but the mundane affairs of the masses went on peacefully ! The only reason for this seeming complexity was that the then Muslim society, to whose care Providence had vouchsafed the governance of the country, was a healthy and upright society. For it was the only reservoir of strength and stability, it had been burdened with responsibility to maintain law and order, peace and tranquillity within the country despite political upheavals. It had to bring forth men of redoubtable courage and conviction, poets and scholars, businessmen and administrators to sustain the

social, economic and administrative order of the country. And never did this society failed to produce the requisite personnel at the appropriate time. It is not difficult to visualise the resulting chaos if this society of the mediaeval ages had even once failed to provide men of required calibre to maintain the administrative set-up of the country.

Vitality of the Medieval Muslim Society

A distinguishing feature of the mediaeval Muslim society was its capacity to produce the requisite personnel in abundance. It had always had plenty of men to fill in every vacant place, without any difficulty or time-lag, in all walks of life—from rulers to traders and from military generals to scholars. After Qutub-uddin Aibek's death, the Muslim administration of India got another capable, virtuous and just ruler in the person of Shams-uddin Altamash. Then, after Altamash, Ghayath-uddin Balban ascended the throne, although he was not a progeny of the outgoing ruler. Even the simplicity, piety and kindheartedness of Nasir-uddin Mahmood did not become a source of weakness to the country's administration. When Balban's descendants rendered themselves incapable of maintaining the rule of law, they were replaced by the Khiljis—first by Jalal-uddin Khilji and then by his nephew Ala-uddin Khilji who bestowed on the country a stable, strong and clean administration. Although Qutub-uddin Mubarak was the true successor of his father, yet his murder by Khusro Shah, who wanted to take the country on a path altogether different from that it had been treading so far,

constituted a real crisis pregnant with perilous situation for the country. Then this vigorous society again came to the rescue of the country and provided another courageous, capable and virtuous ruler, Malik Ghazi Ghayath-uddin Tughlaq, who had been guarding the frontiers of the empire against the Mongol onslaughts at far-off Multan. This timely intervention by Malik Ghazi saved the country from internal strife and instability. Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq died at Tath in Sindh, far-away from Delhi, the centre of his Kingdom, at a time when the Tartar hordes were threatening the security of the country from across the river Sind, on the one hand, and internal revolt was about to shatter the Tughlaq kingdom into pieces, on the other. Under the guidance of Sheikh Chiragh-uddin, a mystic of Delhi, who happened to be present when the king died, another upright ruler, Firoz Tughlaq was invested with the purple. Under his rule the country witnessed unprecedented prosperity, peace and amity. The country travelled through its checkered course under different rulers, the Saiyids and the Lodhis, till it got a virtuous prince in the person of Sher Shah Suri, whom it would be difficult to excel in just administration, common weal and far-reaching reforms.

Then came the Moghuls to the fore. They served the country not only for the longest period, but they could be rightly proud of their constructive and literary accomplishments too. Their rule ended with one of the greatest emperors the country has ever known. Aurangzeb ruled over the country with undisputed ability for half a century.

All this was owing to the inner vitality of the Muslim

society and its capacity to produce men of character and ability. The then Muslim society drew inspiration from the pious mentors who were always keenly watchful of the spiritual and moral well-being of the Muslim people and their governments. These mystics led a life of contentment radiating the spirit of piety and ennobling conduct, away from the demands of the covetous desires and free from the influences of princes and rulers. Gradually, however, the Muslim society lost its moral vigour owing to the increasing affluence and comforts, and the grip of its spiritual guides too was loosened rendering it ethically barren and incapable of producing men of ability and competence. Eventually, the Muslim society became unable to provide a just and capable administrator who could hold the reigns of government at Delhi, and, then, all efforts to resuscitate the dying Moghul power came to naught in 1857.

The Key to the Power of Britain

What was it that enabled Great Britain to wield the sceptre for such a long period over so extensive areas of the globe? Extensiveness of Britain's dominions gave currency to the proverb that the sun never sets in the British Empire! Great Britain was enabled to hold the reins of authority in such vast areas not on account of its administration, which was by no means the best in the world, but because of the inherent vitality of its conscientious masses and society. The British people never hesitated to call to account even their greatest but erring benefactors: Clive was one of the founders of the British empire but he was made to stand in the dock ;

Warren Hastings was put on trial although he strengthened and extended the British rule in India. The speeches of Edmond Burke and the writings of Mecauley explicitly exhibit the democratic spirit of the British people who were ever keen to make a distinction between the right and the wrong. This constituted, in truth and reality, the reservoir of its inner strength which enabled Britain to come out successfully after the blood-baths of two world wars, and to emerge as a strong and prosperous country. Now, the British society no longer possesses the characteristics which were once considered to be its forte; moral and social confusion has now taken hold of it; and the country is swiftly nodding to its fall. Britain now occupies the fourth or the fifth position among the comity of powerful nations. Having lost its power and prestige, the country has now to face the increasing internal strife, demoralization and decadence.

The First Task after Independence

I have taken a lot of your time in what could be regarded as an introduction to the topic of discussion. But I would like to emphasise again that it is the society which provides fresh blood into the veins of a country and infuses a new life into a nation. My introductory remarks, although a bit lengthy, were meant to explain the importance of society.

The country is at present passing through a critical period. The matter of supreme importance after attaining Independence in 1947 was not of putting an exemplary constitution on the statute book, reformation of the governmental set-up, formulation of developmental

plans or establishment of educational institutions. I am firmly of opinion that the question requiring our prior attention was, and still is, whether we have a healthy, conscientious and upright society or not, for on it depends the future of the nation and the country. In fact, our very existence depends on such a society. The government has no importance at all: it changes after every five years. What ultimately determines the position and prestige of the country in the comity of nations is a healthy society which can save the country from making grievous mistakes and inviting its doom: This is the danger looming large over our heads today. The strength of a country does not depend on its military power, huge budgets, the number of universities or even the peaceful conditions. None of these can, indeed, check the ultimate downfall of a nation.

Culture, no Check to Downfall

When the decline of the Roman empire set in, it had innumerable centres of cultural refinement and academies for the promotion of sciences and learning. Nothing could, however, check its downfall. The students of history can testify that all those nations which have gone downhill, had a vigorous and living culture before they tumbled down. The Iranian culture had reached its zenith when the Arabs attacked that country. Durafsh-i-Kaviyani¹ and the Resplendent Carpet² known as 'Bahar'

1. The ornate flag of the Persian Emperor.
2. A carpet of silk, sixty cubits in length and as many in breadth, it had a paradise in garden depicted on the ground; the flowers,

(Continued on next page)

bear witness to the artistic achievements and the sophisticated taste of the Iranian royalty. No embodiment of cultural refinement could arrest the decadence of the Sasanian empire, or, for that matter, the extinction of the once prosperous and powerful kingdoms of Syria, Egypt and Rome. The only reason for this was that their peoples had become corrupt: the moral sense of these peoples, which could distinguish right from wrong, virtue from wickedness and justice from inequity had been numbed. They never took notice of what they were told, they always looked up to see who was addressing them. The flattery of the people, servile in conduct and demeanour, besieged the powers that be to endorse and esteem their whims and phantasies. Unfortunate though it is, we find the same trend gaining ground in India today.

A Society free from Prejudices

The question that ought to have engaged our prior attention after Independence was how to bring about a healthy and upright society in this country. This was the supreme task for everyone who loved this country. No hard work, no exertion, no struggle and no strain should have been spared to lay the foundation of a congenial society which would have never compromised with injustice and tyranny. The awe of God should have been implanted in the heart of this society, its inner voice

fruits, and shrubs were imitated by the figures of gold embroidery and the colours of the precious stones: and the ample square was encircled by a variegated and verdant border.

nourished and strengthened, its moral courage emboldened and the sense of discrimination sharpened to distinguish between the oppressor and the oppressed. This is a matter of life and death for our nation. The broad-minded leaders of public opinion owe their duty to the nation to create a society in which injustice and oppression would never flourish.

However, if our national leaders had been free from all prejudices and narrow-mindedness, they could have very well taken advantage of the teachings of Islam. A sizeable section of the Indian people already professes this religion, whose services could have been utilized in diffusing the concepts of unimpaired human equality and justice. Only this was the right approach to make the country strong and great.

The Greatest Danger

Now, let us first take cognizance of the danger spots and weaknesses that are making the Indian society feeble and incompetent and rendering its developmental efforts ineffective. It would, indeed, be a great mistake to overlook the dangers besetting the nation. I may, however, tell you that I am not a politician: I am a student of history, religion and ethics. No intentions need be imputed to me if I point out the mistakes committed in the past and the ways to rectify them.

The first and foremost danger facing this country is the non-existence of a sense of human worth and dignity in our countrymen. I have reached this conclusion not by way of any intellectual postulate but as a practical proposition based on personal experience. I have

decided to live and die in this country ; my fate is inextricably linked with my home-land. Being immersed in the cross-currents of national life, I am as much influenced by the national affairs as any other citizen of the country. One could have misunderstood me if I had expressed my views in this regard in a foreign country. But I want to tell my countrymen that the greatest danger for any society is disregard for human life and dignity. The underrating of human life by a society is the forerunner of ultimate ruin of its culture and civilization, nay, the humanity itself : Destroyer of nations it is, like Chenghez.

Fratricide is the Beginning of Impending Doom

Nothing can save a country that allows fratricide unabated, from its inevitable doom, no matter howsoever developed it might be in agriculture, industry and education, or howsoever rich it may be in natural resources and extensive in area and population.

It is not only surprising but shameful too that a country which taught the lesson of love in the days of yore and later diffused it among its people through Sanskrit and Hindi and Persian and Urdu, whose mystics spread the message of love and humanity, where Mahatma Gandhi gave the call of truth and Ahimsa to the world at large and which still possesses abundant literature on religion and humanitarianism in the scores of languages spoken there, should not be conversant with the true worth of human life and dignity of mankind.

Worth of Humanity

Every citizen of this ancient land should have learnt by now that all the human problems—whether relating to languages, cultures or scripts—relate to man, are man-made and derive their importance with relation to man alone. If the life of man is not safe anywhere, then all these problems become meaningless. After all, who would care for language and culture, rivers and mountains, literature and poetry if one has to live under the shadow of death? Verily, nothing has any meaning or importance except man alone! I would not go into further details to elucidate the matter, but there is no denying the fact that we do not have the consciousness of human dignity which we ought to have imbibed. It is not for me to indicate its reasons or apportion the share of different causes like the divisive political game of our erstwhile foreign rulers or the revivalist movements or else the communalist forces responsible for the atrophy of this moral sense. Let the historians give their verdict on it.

Whirl-wind of butchery and destruction

It is not unoften that hundreds of human beings are slaughtered in cold blood for a trifling object, a tree or a beast, or owing to the misguided sentiments of revivalism. We hang our heads in shame when these violent storms of death and destruction are let loose resulting in despicable acts of cruelty to women and children and the aged and the infirm. Unspeakable horrors are perpetrated and human life becomes cheap; the most exquisite creation of God for whom exists the

world and all that it contains—the beauty of the lakes and mountains, the wisdom of philosophy and the charm of poetry—become valueless. Brother kills brother and friend takes the life of his lifelong partner ! That man should not have learnt to tolerate the existence of another man is something extremely perilous for the country at large.

There is no dearth of intellectuals in our country which also abounds, fortunately, in universities and seats of higher learning as few countries can boast of. At the same time, we often find some people going out of their heads and taking delight in the maddening dance of senseless chaos and carnage. It is, therefore, absolutely essential, a *sine qua non*, that the sense of human dignity is implanted in the hearts of the people ; everyone is made to realise that whatever we see in the world has been created for man. And that man has not been created for the worldly objects.

The Pithy Saying of a Philosopher

I remember to have noted the pithy saying of a philosopher who said : Every newborn in this world declares that God has still not lost hope in man, but we go on announcing by our deeds that human beings do not deserve to walk the earth. The birth of every child means that he has to live and prosper. Why, then, should we not trust man whom God considers worthy of His confidence ?

The Fundamental Right of Man

We really need today hundreds of thousands of writers,

poets, artists and intellectuals who could devote their energies to the task of educating every citizen of India that whatever may be the Directive Principles and the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution of the country, the first and foremost law of human existence to which we ought to adhere is that EVERY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO LIVE. We, indeed, witness the face of our society besmirched time and again but we are keeping mum !

Worth of Humanity in Islam

Now I shall tell you what help Islam can render in the solution of this urgent problem. One of the fundamental teachings of Islam, on which it raises its edifice, is that man is the best of creations, the prettiest flower of the garden known by the name of earth. Thus says the Quran :

"Surely We created man of the best stature."

God crowned man with the most respectable marks of distinction.

"Verily We have honoured the Children of Adam."¹

Man was elevated to the position of vicegerent of God on earth. There can be no greater honour to which man can aspire, nor a way more befitting to glorify him. Says God :

"Lo : I am about to place a viceroy in the earth."²

1. XCV : 4

2. XVII : 70

3. II : 30

God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam. This signified that man need not bow in reverence to anyone save God.

The worth of humanity was still raised higher. In the words of the blessed Prophet of Islam men were described as the "Children of God."

In order to delineate the delicate nature of relationship between man and God, a Tradition of the holy Prophet employs a pithy parable expressing the truth in a graceful yet unaffected style. Thus says the Prophet of Islam :

"God will say unto man on the Doomsday : I was ill but thou didst not pay a visit to Me. Man would reply : My God, how didst Thou fall ill ? Thou art the Lord of the Worlds ? Then God would say : One of My bondsmen (whom thou knew) was indisposed. Thou didst not go to see him. Hadst thou gone to see him, thou wouldst have found Me there. God will then again say : I asked thee for food but thou refused it to Me. Man would reply : How could have I fed Thee ? Thou art the Sustainer of all the Worlds ? God would reply : One of My bondsmen wanted thee to fill his belly, but thou refused him. Hadst thou given food to him, it would have verily reached Me. God would then again ask man : O progeny of Adam, I once asked thee for water, but thou refused it to Me. Man would again express his surprise and would get back the retort : One of My bondsmen asked thee for water but it was refused to him. Hadst thou quenched his thirst, thou wouldst have seen

it with Me."¹

The value of human life has been raised by Islam to inconceivable heights. Says God :

"Whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, -it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind."²

Where the life and dignity of man is at stake, no distinction can be made in the majority and minority, one and the hundred, individual and the community ; for, the life of every man, of every single individual is sacred and the most cherished possession of mankind. Verily, man could never have conceived that the murder of an individual is a crime against the whole society .

Responsibility of the Muslims

What can the Muslims do to save the country from this danger ? They can, of course, spread the gospel of human dignity and strengthen the hands of all well-wishers of this land by acting on the precepts of the Quran and the teachings of their holy Prophet. Unfortunately our political leaders are too preoccupied in the party affairs, elections and matters relating to the governance of the country. They cannot spare their precious time for this matter of overriding importance. The responsibility thus devolves on the Muslims who should devote themselves to the task most earnestly with the spirit of

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1. *Sahih Muslim*
 2. Q.V : 32

service to their homeland. They should never think for a moment that their efforts in this regard would be of any help to themselves : for this would be a selfish and short-sighted view to be given up once for all. I would never be prepared to stoop to this level, nor would I like to see my co-religionists to pursue their interests alone. This is a problem of vital importance facing the country : a question confronting all of us, in fact, the entire humanity. Human blood when spilt is never confined to any section of the people ; it goes on extending its sphere to seek the victims of its vengeance. Who can deny that national, linguistic, racial and cultural differences have been a far greater scourge for mankind than religious disagreements ? The problem, therefore, poses a lurking danger for the country as a whole ; and if it is not tackled properly, it would be ruinous for the country whose entire philosophy of life and literature, values of life and religious norms of ethics, age-old endeavours to extol humanism and the sacrifice of Mahatma Gandhi for the same cause—all would be reduced to ashes. What is happening these days ? An insignificant annoyance or a trivial news item or else the foolish prank on the part a Muslim rogue lets loose the storm of fury and destruction in the surrounding area. Then, everything is lost. The age-long wisdom of the sages, culture and civilization, fair name of the country, in short, all that the country has and for which man has worked so long, goes down the drain in no time. It is no wonder that man then loses heart to work for the betterment of the country and the nation ; his efforts which could have been directed towards the common weal are then diverted towards his own self-defence

and the safety of his own progeny and property.

The Second Danger

Narrow-mindedness, parochialism and religious, linguistic and cultural prejudices seem to be too ancient, frequent and widespread a phenomena still hovering over the head of the nation. These very predilections strengthened the divisive forces in the past and gave courage to the foreigners to invade this country. The demon is very much in our midst, it has been lying low owing to certain internal factors and external situation, but it can come out any moment like the proverbial jinni of Aladin's lamp.

There are marked differences between the people living in the northern region and those in the southern part of the country : they suffer from estrangement and distrust of one another. These differences can flare up the feelings at any time. Then, unbridgeable gulfs divide different castes and communities. In fact, every caste and clan constitutes a world of its own and the people belonging to one social group are as much frigid and spiteful to the other as the nationals of one country are to another. Every partiality and injustice to help the people belonging to one's own caste is considered not only as fair and just, but also a meritorious act, a sacred duty incumbent on every member of that caste. If anyone belonging to a caste or community attains a position of responsibility, he deems it the sole object of his endeavours to appoint as many members of his own caste as possible, without the least regard to the efficiency and suitability of the persons pushed up by him. This is

another bane of our social life which has made the entire administrative set up weak and inefficient.

The Guidance provided by Islam

Islam can again help the country in rooting out the religious, linguistic and racial prejudices, parochial predilections and narrow-minded sectarian ideas. It can help to inculcate broad-mindedness, large-heartedness, sense of justice and equality of mankind. If you are a patriot, your primary concern should be to see if there is anything which can be helpful in making the country united and strong. And, if you are convinced, then it should be of little importance to you as to who supplies the panacea or wherefrom has it been obtained. When a fire breaks out, nobody cares from where the water has been procured or whose bucket is being used to extinguish the fire. The destruction of the country is certainly more serious than the demolition of a house or the destruction of a town. Now, in order to save the country from the dangers threatening its existence and to make it united and strong, one need not reject the principles that can save it simply because these have been expounded by the Quran or taken from the teachings of the Prophet. Islam can undoubtedly protect the country against this second danger too.

Unity of mankind is the first principle of Islam. It has repeatedly emphasised the fact that the Creator of human beings is one, and so is their progenitor, and hence the entire humankind belongs to one family, has one father and one Lord. The Quran declares unequivocally that :

"O mankind ! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another"¹

At another place it says :

"O mankind ! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women."²

This very underlying principle of human oneness and equality was enunciated by the Prophet of Islam in his last *Haj* before a gathering exceeding a hundred thousand souls.

"O mankind : Your Lord is One and your ancestor too is one. Be careful that no Arab has any preference over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab. No negro has a preference over a white man, nor a white man over a negroid. Preference, if any, is only on the basis of the fear of God."³

The Prophet was once heard saying to his Lord during a prayer he was offering alone in the dead of night.

"O Lord ! I bear witness that all of Thy bondsmen are brothers unto one another."⁴

Islam strongly condemns all chauvinistic ideas and national, linguistic and racial prejudices and the passions of hate and aggression engendered by these narrow

1. XLIX : 13

2. IV : 1

3. *Musnad Ahmaa*

4. *Sunan Abi Daud*

sympathies. It calls these the heritage of the pagan past. The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said that :

“He is not one of us who gives a call for partisanship, he is not one of us who fights for partisanship and he is not one of us who dies for partisanship.”¹

The difference in human dialects is recognised by the Quran as a natural diversity and a blessing from God.

“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Lo ! herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge.”²

The historians bear testimony to the invaluable service rendered by Islam in spreading the gospel of human equality. Whatever may have been the ministerings of the Muslims to the country, one of their outstanding contributions was to break down the shackles of the rigid caste system, the man-made inequality of human beings which had dug its tentacles deep into the fabric of Indian society. You can find its ghastly details in the annals of the country or still witness its remnants in the social order obtaining in the country. Islam breathed the message of human dignity and equality in the past and it can still do a lot to create an egalitarian society in the country.

I do acknowledge the fact that the Muslims too were influenced by the caste system obtaining in the country. But they still cherish human equality more than any other people, and their sentiments in this regard can be pressed

1 *Abu Daud*

2. XXX : 22

to the service of the country. It would surely ennoble the country, make it strong and raise the Indian people morally and socially.

The cramped ideas of provincialism and obsessions in regard to linguistic, class and caste loyalties are, to be sure, a great danger to the country. These can explode the cumulated resentment and feelings of hatred nurtured by different castes and communities against one another at any moment. It is our duteous obligation to take all measures necessary to protect the country against this danger before it is too late.

The Third Dager

Everybody in the country appears to have gone mad after a get-rich-quickly craze. We can see its ramifications in the mal-adjustments of Indian economy. It is not bad to earn more or to get rich through one's toil and tears, but the desire to enrich oneself overnight is undoubtedly fraught with danger. But the fact is that the desire to roll in money has taken the whole country in its grip; it has swept over the land like wind and rain, truning every hearth and home into a temple of Mammon. The overbearing craze for money-making has become so conspicuous that one sometimes feels that the two living realities in this country are the worship of the golden calf and the smouldering feelings of fanaticism and hatred—everything else is a mere notion, a bare supposition.

We daily witness the expressions of hate and fanaticism; sometimes its victim is a particular community, at others a culture, or a language, or a geographical

entity or a political party. As for the obsession of money-making, one hardly needs to elaborate it. Take this city of Bombay. It seems to be flowing with a money-grubbing passion. This current of covetousness appears to be even stronger than that of the sea we have here.

What for is everybody running about in this city? If someone were to come here from another planet, he would perhaps think that the city has met with some sudden calamity. Is all this mad craze for wealth simply to earn one's living? Certainly not. It is a real danger both for the individual as well as for the country. At all times we have had political differences and moral vices but such an acquisitiveness was never witnessed before. Filthy lucre is the root of all evil. How can these persons be expected to give preference to the interest of the country over their own selfish ends? This is really a matter of grave concern for the country and the nation.

It is no secret that the executing agencies of construction works like dams, bridges and buildings are mostly dishonest who use construction materials of poor quality in order to increase their profits. The contractors as well as the official supervisors, both of whom lack honesty, combine to put the country to incalculable loss. There is hardly any department of the government which can boast of integrity and honesty of its employees. Our rulers and leaders both are well aware of the fact that the obsession to make a fortune at any cost is a danger to the common weal of the people. They know that illegal gratification and tax evasion are widespread evils. It has become almost impossible to get things done

without greasing the palms of petty officials. What good can come out of the social services provided by the government if the citizens have to buy over the favours of officials for obtaining their rightful claims? It seems as if everybody has an eye on the pocket of the other and is bent upon taking advantage of the other man's difficulties. No sense of patriotism or human consideration can move them to sacrifice their petty selfish ends.

The Way Out

The only way out of this despicable state of affairs, the only cure for this malady is the fear of God, the Omniscient Lord of the Day of Judgement, and a conviction in the final reckoning of whatever we do in this earthly life. Patriotism can also help us, but, only to a certain extent, to be honest and trustworthy. Those who have been to Europe might have seen the people there avoiding bribery and similar other temptations to obtain illegal favours at the cost of national interest or the public good. They are undoubtedly moved by the sense of patriotism but the correct remedy of this evil lies in the belief in after-life and the fear of God alone.

Place of Wealth in Islam

The corrupt and unlawful devices resorted to to amass wealth have become a normal feature of the day. Nevertheless, the conviction in the All-Knowing Creator can go a long way in evolving a sound moral order of the society. I shall not take much of your time in enumerating the examples of stainless honesty and truthfulness from the Islamic history, but I would like to quote one

example here. After the capital of Persia, Madayn, was taken by assault, a poor Arab soldier brought the unique and priceless crown of the Persian sovereign to his Commander. When the Commander asked his name, he replied : 'He for whom I have brought it intact to you, knows my name'. I would not claim that we can bring back the time to repeat the instance again, but what I do say is that only the fear of God and the spiritual-moral view of life and society propounded by a living religion can establish a virtuous order capable of investing people with honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, self-restraint and similar other qualities.

Islam can, therefore, render yeoman's service to the country in solving this problem. Its teachings provide guidance for checking the concentration of wealth as well as for its equitable distribution. Islam puts man under restraints lest he should debase himself by servitude to his own avarice and greed. It has allotted it the position it deserves : wealth is named by it both as a blessing from God as well as an ordeal and affliction.

"Your wealth and your children are only a temptation, whereas Allah ; with Him is an immense reward."
(lxiv : 15)

It asks man not to covet the riches of his more fortunate brother, for wealth is simply a temporary adornment.

"And strain not thine eyes toward that which We cause some wedded pairs among them to enjoy, the flower of the life of the world, that We may try them thereby. The provision of the Lord is better and more lasting".
(xx : 131)

The Quran depicts one of the wealthiest men of his

time, Caren, who enjoyed an enviable place in the then society by virtue of his riches and worldly success but who was also a moral wreck, as a complete failure worthy to be consigned to hell-fire. It has made him a proverbial figure denoting a detestable brute in the everyday conversation and writings of the Muslim peoples.

Islam looks down upon the unquenchable thirst to mint-money and to make one's pile as a terrible malady for the mankind.

"You are obsessed by greed more and more
 Until you go down to your graves.
 Nay but you will come to know !
 Nay, but you will come to know !
 Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of
 certainty,
 You would indeed see the hell you are in.
 In time, indeed, you shall see it with the eye of
 certainty :
 And on that Day you will be asked what you
 have done with the boon of life". (cII : 1-8)

This reminds me of a recent convert to Islam. These very verses of the Quran led Mr. Muhammad Asad (formerly Leopold Weiss) to accept Islam. He writes in his autobiography :

"One Day—it was in September 1926—Elsa and I found ourselves travelling in the Berlin subway. It was an upper-class compartment. My eye fell casually on a well-dressed man opposite me, apparently a well-to-do businessman, with a beautiful brief-case on his knees and a large diamond ring on his hand. I thought idly how well

the portly figure of this man fitted into the picture of prosperity which one encountered everywhere in Central Europe in those days : a prosperity the more prominent as it had come after years of inflation, when all economic life had been topsyturvy and a shabbiness of appearance the rule. Most of the people were now well dressed and well fed, and the man opposite me was therefore no exception. But when I looked at his face, I did not seem to be looking at a happy face. He appeared to be worried : and not merely worried but actually unhappy, with eyes staring vacantly ahead and the corners of his mouth drawn in as if in pain—but not in bodily pain. Not wanting to be rude, I turned my eyes away and saw next to him a lady of same elegance. She also had a strangely unhappy expression on her face, as if contemplating or experiencing something that caused her pain ; nevertheless, her mouth was fixed in the stiff semblance of a smile which, I was certain, must have been habitual. And then I began to look around at all the other faces in the compartment—faces belonging without exception to well-dressed, well-fed people : and in almost every one of them I could discern an expression of hidden suffering, so hidden that the owner of the face seemed to be quite unaware of it.

"This was indeed strange. I had never before seen so many unhappy faces around me : so was it perhaps that I had never before looked for what was now so loudly speaking in them ? The impression was so strong that I mentioned it to Elsa ; and

she too began to look around her with the careful eyes of a painter accustomed to study human features. Then she turned to me, astonished, and said : 'You are right. They all look as though they were suffering torments of hell... I wonder, do they know themselves what is going on in them ?'

"I knew that they did not—for otherwise they could not go on wasting their lives as they did, without any faith in binding truths, without any goal beyond the desire to raise their own 'standard of living', without any hopes other than having more material amenities, more gadgets, and perhaps more power...."

"When we returned home, I happened to glance at my desk on which lay open a copy of the Koran I had been reading earlier. Mechanically, I picked the book up to put it away, but just as I was about to close it, my eye fell on the open page before me, and I read :

"You are obsessed by greed more and more untill you go down to your graves....."

"For a moment I was speechless. I think the book shook in my hands. Then I handed it to Elsa ; 'Read this. Is it not an answer to what we saw in the subway ?'

"It was an answer : an answer so decisive that all doubt was suddenly at an end. I knew now, beyond any doubt, that it was a God-inspired book I was holding in my hand : for although it had been placed before men over thirteen centuries ago, it clearly anticipated something that could

have become true only in this complicated, mechanised, phantom-ridden age of ours.

"At all times people have known greed : but at no time before this had greed outgrown to a mere eagerness to acquire things and become an obsession that blurred the sight of everything else : an irresistible craving to get, to do, to contrive more and more—more today than yesterday, and more tomorrow than today : a demon riding on the necks of men and whipping their hearts forward toward goals that tauntingly glitter in the distance but dissolve into contemptible nothingness as soon as they are reached, always holding out the promise of new goals ahead—goals still more brilliant, more tempting as long as they lie on the horizon, and bound to wither into further nothingness as soon as they come within grasp : and that hunger, that insatiable hunger for ever new goals gnawing at man's soul : *Nay, if you but knew it you would see the hell you are in*

"This, I saw, was not the mere human wisdom of a man of a distant past in distant Arabia. However wise he may have been, such a man could not by himself have foreseen the torment so peculiar to this twentieth century. Out of the Koran spoke voice greater than the voice of Mohammad... I sought out a Muslim friend of mine, an Indian who was at that time head of the small Muslim Community in Berlin, and told him that I wanted to embrace Islam."¹

1. Muhammad Asad : Road to Mecca : London (1954) : pp. 308-310

Such are the teachings of Islam which enable man to subdue his undue keenness to get rich as quickly as possible.

The Best Community

Islam can, then, come to the aid of India in the reconstruction of a healthy, honest and egalitarian society. If we, the Muslims, are not working for it, we are doing justice neither to the country nor to our own teachings. There is nothing to be ashamed of, and least of all any reason for inferiority complex, which might inhibit certain persons to measure up to the formidable task of protecting the country from the hazards facing it. It is, in reality, our sacred duty by virtue of our love for the country as well as on account of our being the "best community" to take care of the country's welfare.

"Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency ; and ye believe in Allah.

(iii : 110)

India's Message to the World

Today India is in search of its Destiny : a message which it can diffuse to the world. But what should after all be the gospel of India—Socialism, Communism or its own civilization of yore ? Socialism has already had the opportunity to bloom outside the country. India can at best be a follower in this field but never a leader. As for the ancient culture of India, there is hardly any charm for the world in the relics of the past. Howsoever we may be proud of our ancient customs and traditions,

culture and philosophy we cannot convince the world to adopt these simply because of the profundity of our philosophical thought or the past achievements of our deep-rooted culture. We cannot, in the same wise, hope that any nation could give up its own culture and traditions and change-over to our own. Similarly, Indian nationalism cannot be expected to have an attraction for any other people in the world, for the nationalism of every country has an equal claim on the patriotism of its own citizens. None of these has any attractiveness at all. But we can certainly catch the attention of the world if we have a message which can deliver the modern man from the servitude of his fellow beings, liberate his soul from the subjugation of evil desires and demoniacal spells, trappings of power and pelf, raise human beings in the scale of dignity, enjoin the service of humanity as a sacred duty of every man and enforce the equality of human beings as the creation of the one Omnipotent Master and Lord. This is indeed the underlying meaning and content of the worship offered to God.

"Surely pure religion is for Allah only." (xxxix : 3)

A message so sublime cannot suffer injustice nor can it give preference to a country, individual, language or culture over another land, man, dialect or social tradition. This is a message befitting India and it can assure an honourable place to it in the comity of nations.

The Second-hand Islam of India

It is really regrettable that no sincere effort was made during the last one thousand years to spread a true understanding of Islam in this country. The Islam that reached

India was second-hand. It is our misfortune that the Arabs who were the torch-bearers of Islam and who had conserved its reanimating spirit, did not come to this country. There is no denying the fact that the Turks and the Moghuls gave a stable and powerful administration to this country and saved it from the onslaught of the Tartar hordes, never allowing them to advance beyond the frontier regions of the country, but they failed to present Islam before India in its original simplicity. Had the Arabs come to this country, they would have undoubtedly left permanent imprints of Islam in India as they did in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Northern Africa. Wherever the Arabs went they set such ennobling examples of human equality, brotherhood and the dignity of mankind that the conquered nations began to esteem them as their succourers, friends and benefactors instead of conquerors and oppressors.

An Appeal to our non-Muslim Brethren

I appeal to my non-Muslim friends, particularly to the educated and the intellectuals amongst them, that despite the past mistakes and failings, they should endeavour to understand Islam and should not identify it with the Muslims. They should not disown the sublime teachings of Islam merely on account of the past or present failures of the Muslims. It is incumbent on them to save the country from dark ignorance, gloomy moral depression and frightful anarchy and chaos spreading fast over the country since Independence. If they had only understood the true impact of a really stable and morally self-reliant India the country would have by now become the undis-

puted leader of all the countries from Dacca to Djakarta and from Istanbul to Rabat—the leader of Asia and Africa.

This, however, is now past history. And what is past is past. Islam is still a living and energetic religion. Islam had nothing to do with the happenings in the recent past. It was really a game of politics which always makes its moves with the utmost dexterity shifting all the blame to its adversary. Islam was made out as an unsuccessful religion but the fact is that whatever happened was not the result of adhering to the teachings of Islam but, of a truth, because of its non-adherence. However, it is a duty enjoined also on the Muslims to come forward for the service of the country. They should realise the responsibilities devolving on them as citizens of the country, as the sons of this great land. They should give up their misconceptions if they have any, that the responsibility for India's reconstruction and prosperity lies mainly on the shoulders of majority community or the political party holding the reigns of country's administration. In fact, we, the Muslims of India, can play a pivotal role in bringing about a better and healthier social order in our homeland. Our tenets and teachings already provide guidance to us in this matter. I am saying this in all humility and not on account of any superiority complex or jingoism that the Muslims are definitely more capable of saving the country from the dangers threatening its existence. You should turn a deaf ear to all those who doubt your integrity and faithfulness to the country or recurrently demand the proof of your fidelity to the country ; you need not also be discouraged

by your poverty, educational backwardness and unemployment ; for God will help you despite all these difficulties and weaknesses. To my non-Muslim brethren I would again most earnestly appeal that they should be willing to accept and utilize whatever wisdom they are able to lay their hands upon, irrespective of its origin and the source from which it is obtained. This is also dictated by true patriotism. You have amongst your countrymen such luminaries of Islamic learning who are considered an authority on their subject and such institutions of research and higher education which have made immense contribution to the Islamic thought and literature. Indian Muslims are second to none; they are rather on the top so far as the Islamic learning is concerned, and their contribution to the Islamic subjects and Arabic language and literature is not a bit less than that of the Muslims of any other country including the Arabs. We can, even today, learn something from the Arabs but, at the same time, teach them as well. It is our bounden duty—the responsibility of every Indian to take full advantage of this precious treasure and employ it for the stability and prosperity of our homeland.

PRINTED AT THE LUCKNOW PUBLISHING HOUSE
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