

ISLAM IN A CHANGING WORLD

Thoughts and powers. This revolution was to nullify the efforts of all those conquerors of the past who had won the land for Islam. It also meant the invalidation of the labours of Khwaja Moin Uddin Chisti and his pure hearted disciples who had on the one hand preached the message of love and humanity and social justice to the people and, on the other, provided moral and spiritual guidance to rulers to run the country as conscientious, true-hearted and God-fearing servants of the country. This was not all, for this revolution threatened to destroy the entire educational system and intellectual fabric of the land which had been laboriously built up by these men of God.

What happened next? A star rose not from the political or materialistic horizon but from the celestial skyline of Faith and spirituality which always comes to the aid of falling humanity, in the person of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi Mujaddid Alf Thani (971-1034 AH), who was paid a tribute by Iqbal in these words:

He was the custodian of Millat's wealth in Ind,

Whom Allah had awakened at high time.

Before Jahangir who refused to bend his neck,

His breath was a touch to the quick.

This mendicant, sitting in his retreat, resolved to fight the most gruesome conspiracy hatched against Islam by highbrow intellectuals. He decided to raise his voice against the fetters placed on Islamic thought and an Islamic way of life, and the Muslims right to live and prosper in this country.

The outcome of his efforts is known to you all. When the seventh century began, the atmosphere was somewhat changed. The future of Islam was by then protected in this country for the next two or three centuries. The Shaikh had fallacies of neoplatonist spacious reasoning against the apostle ship of Muhammad and the transcendence of the *Shariah* and *Sunnah* and, thereby, the restrengthened confidence in them. Thus, the danger sweeping Islam off its feet in India was averted. But, what was his strategy? No propaganda, no beating of drums and no armed resistance to Akbar's power was planned. The Qur'anic wisdom had told him that he would be crushed in no time if he came forward as an adversary of established power and that he would not get the opportunity of performing the task he had taken upon himself. Instead, the Shaikh decided to entreat before God, to collect the most sincere and capable persons around him, to train and guide them in such a way that they could not be purchased at any price, to teach them to disdain power and self and to touch the heart-strings of those who occupied the highest positions in the court of Jahangir. He tried to make them realise that Islam was passing through a critical time in the country, its life and death was hanging in balance and that they ought to do something in an intellectual and constructive manner to save the situation.

Mujaddid started writing letters to those who were in authority. The list of his addresses is long enough but two of these notable persons who deserve to be mentioned here were Abdur

Rahim Khan Khanan and Nawab Murtaza Khan, alias Syed Farid. The result was that within a quarter of a century the whole atmosphere was changed. Indian Muslims came to the intellectual forefront and not only in this country but in the entire world of Islam. India came to occupy the central place in pursuits pertaining to perfection of the spirit as well as in intellectual fields with erudite scholars of Arabic lexicography and the traditions, which were earlier regarded as the preserve of the Arabs. It was because of Mujaddid that India became a temple of learning and produced great scholars and researchers.

This tradition of learning continued until a scholar of Shah Wali Ullah's (1114-1176 A.H.) stature was born in India who gave a new look to the science of dialectics, explained the essentials of the Caliphate and produce a blue-print of Islamic government as was never attempted before. he also tried to inject new vigour and fresh blood in the decaying Muslim Empire, for he had already foreseen the dangers of political and moral anarchy likely to overtake India after the downfall of that Empire.

Shah Wali Ullah's sons, among whom Shah Abdul Aziz was the most outstanding, popularised the education of the traditions and the scripture as well as endeavoured to reform the morals and rituals of the people. The *Jihad* movement of Syed Ahmad Shaheed (d. 1246 A.H.) and Maulana Muhammad Islami (d. 1246 A.H.) was an extension of this same spirit of reform and regeneration. This great movement was so eminently successful building up popular enthusiasm for virtuous living and perfection of spirit and morality that it caused the deeds performed in the earliest phase of Islamic history to be re-enacted again in this subcontinent. It was, in fact, such a great and comprehensive revivalist movement aiming at the transformation of the entire Muslim society of this part of the globe as had never been witnessed before in any land of the Islamic world.

Thereafter came the educational movement which resulted in the establishment of the Darul Uloom Deoband, Madrasa Mazahiril Uloom, Shaharanpur, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow and numerous other institutions propagating the teachings of the *Kitab* and the *Sunnah*.¹⁵ These religious education institutions went to long way, as their founders had originally envisaged, in reforming the erroneous beliefs and customs of Indian Muslims and imparting a sense of Islamic identity to them. The products of these religious institutions not only had the privilege of contributing to the intellectual endeavours of Indian Muslims but also of participating in the struggle for the freedom of the country. Because of them contrary to the situation in certain other Muslim countries, there was no cleavage between Religion and politics and nor did the modern educated classes disown the leadership of the religious scholars.

The endeavours of India's religious scholars made this country the centre of culture and learning. There was even a time when students came to India from Yemen and Morocco to learn the science of traditions. Similarly, one desirous of spiritual perfection normally took the road to India. Maulana Khalid Rumi, born in the northern area of Iraq and Syria, now forming part of Turkey received his education in the cities of Shahrzoor and Damascus, yet when he wanted to learn about the facts of mute reality for the perfection of his Faith and spirit, he came to the hospice of Shah Ghulam Ali (d. 1240) in Delhi. With the training and guidance in mysticism which he obtained in this country, he was able to infuse a new life of virtue and spirituality in Iraq, Syria and Turkey; the marks of which are still visible in these lands today.

So far, I have told you about the reformatory and revivalist movements of India. Now I propose to speak about the great reformer of Arabia, Shaikh Abdul Wahhab (115-1262), who was a contemporary of Shah Walilullah.¹⁶ His movement was singularly successful owing to a variety of causes, political and historical as has seldom been achieved by others. His movement gave birth to a school of thought which influenced a whole generation and the state of Arabia in particular as also that of other countries too. At the same time Yemen enjoyed the influence of Allama Muhammad Ali ibn Ali al-Shaukani (1172-1250 A.H.); in Asir there was Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Idris Hasani, the founder of the Idrisiyah order; and Syed Muhammad ibn. Ali al Sinnausi (1206-1276) who was born in Libya. All of them took up the task of reformation and the propagation of Islamic teachings, and in so doing infused a spirit of *Jihad* among their people. European Orientalists normally dub all these reformers as the followers of Shaikh Abdul Wahhab. Their attempts, however, are unsuccessful, as they cannot produce any evidence in support of such contention. In actual fact Western scholars cannot appreciate the fact that the study of the Qur'an and the a hadith, coupled with sincerity of purpose, can produce reformers in every age reformers who are always willing to fight the forces of vice and waywardness.

This will continue to be the case in all times. Now, to return to my theme, Syed Jamal Uddin Afghani (d. 1314/1897) came on the scene shortly thereafter to raise his voice for the unity of the Islamic world with such vigour and force that it caused a flutter in the hills and deserts of Egypt, Syria and Turkey. His worthy disciple, *Mufti Muhammad Abduh* of Egypt (d. 1323/1905) also played a memorable role in the intellectual awakening of the rising generation of Muslims in his time.

The fourteenth century of *Hijrah*, viewed from the standpoint of Muslims, in a century of both success and defeat, mistakes committed and efforts to make amends, the naiveness of the Muslim peoples in being duped by the West as well as the emerging political consciousness and freedom won by a number of Muslim countries. It is also a century which had seen several powerful Islamic movements; the variety and contradictions evinced by the events and happenings of this century are not to be found in previous centuries.

When this century opened its eyes it saw the glory of the Ottoman Empire, an empire which provided the protection of the Caliphate to the Islamic world, with Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan II (1291-1327 A.H.)¹⁹ as the reigning monarch. He was severely criticised and be smirched by Western writers in the first half of the twentieth century, yet facts recently brought to light in several research articles published in Arabic and Turkish journals go to show that in spite of his weaknesses (perhaps due to his being at hereditary monarch or resulting from the internal and external conspiracies against him), he was a courageous man and a zealous Muslim. During his rule European powers were unable to succeed in fragmenting the Turkish Empire or to carve out a national home for the Jews in Palestine. He disdainfully rejected the offers of the Jewish deputation, saying: "*Baitul-Muqaddas* is much too precious; I am not prepared to give even a lump of Palestine's dust. In short, the Sultan inspired new zeal, gave a new life to the Caliphate and created the urge for unity in the Islamic World.

The Ottoman Empire was the custodian of the holy places and was further honoured with the mantle of the Islamic Caliphate. With all its internal weaknesses and external conspiracies to dismember its possessions, it was a citadel of power and protection to the Arab world. Had it been there, the lands of the Arabs would not have been apportioned like evacuee property. At the beginning of this century by Ottoman

Empire extended from Yemen and Asir in the east to Albania in the west and included Tripoli, Tunisia and Fazzan in Africa. Its southern limits encompassed Aswan, Egypt and Barqa, while all the lands of Bulgaria, Balqan, Trabzun and Idrianople in the north were within its limits. The Ottoman Empire held a major portion of Asia Minor and Syria including present day Palestine, Lebanon and Transjordan, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and Cyprus. This sick man of Europe then represented something of a terror to the West. Alas, the Muslims could not appreciate this blessing of God given to them in the shape of a vast Empire. The dethronement of Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan, in 1901, was by no means a tragic event of such proportions that Islamic history should have changed its course as a result. His deposition might have been brought about by conspiracies against him, but Sultan Rishad, Sultan Wahid Uddin Khan and Sultan Abdul Majid Khan each ascended the throne after Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan's demise. But a greater calamity was yet to follow these happenings one which brought adversity, shame and humiliation to the entire Islamic world and resulted in the loss of Jerusalem. It was this unfortunate event which, according to Maulana Shibli, gave the enemies of Islam the opportunity to cast their covetous eyes even on the holy Mosques of Mecca and Madina. It was this happening which turned the Arab lands of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the northern portion of Africa into protectorates of Western powers— perhaps the Arabs are still serving the term of punishment for this— and it consisted in the actions taken by the Arabs during the First World War. Duped by the Christian minorities of their own lands who raised the cry of Arab nationalism, the Arabs were taken in by false promises made by the Allied Powers. They took up arms against the Turks on 10th June, 1916, with the net result that Syria and Palestine were lost by the Turks in 1917. Egypt the became a dependency of the British, who also occupied Jerusalem on the 9th December, 1917. On the 1st October, 1918, Sharif Husain's son, Amir Faisal, and General *Alenby entered Damascus triumphantly, but the French General Guru kicked the grave of Sultan Salah Uddin, saying: "Salah Uddin, we are here now, we have conquered Syria. How long would you sleep?"* by October 1918, all the Arab lands of Hijaz, Syria, Lebnon and Iraq had passed from Turkish hands to the Allies.

The entire world of Islam felt disturbed by this state of affairs but the Indian Muslims were even more agitated. They also gave expression to their discontent in a powerful manner: this was the time when the great *Khilafat* movement launched under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Basri, Shaikh-ul-Hind Maulana Mohammad Hasan, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan shook the whole of India. The subconscious impulses of Indian Muslims, coupled with their lofty idealism, charged them with such intense emotion that it burst out like a volcano against Western domination. it awakened the spirit of India and created a hatred for everything Western. Mahatma Gandhi actively cooperated with this movement and toured the country with the *Khilafat* leaders to revive the moral and self-confidence of Indian Muslims.

However, the declaration terminating the Caliphate made by Mustafa Kamal on the 3rd March, 1924 came as a bolt from the blue so far as Indian Muslims were concerned. Iqbal said on that occasion:

Simpleton Turk tore apart the *Khilafat* mantle;

How naive is Muslim and see the enemies wangle!

The times I am referring to were as depressing and gloomy as the first half of the seventh century when the savage Tartars destroyed Muslim kingdoms and their centres of culture and civilisation. But this was only an onslaught of a barbarous people, a debacle which had ensued because of the inability of ease-loving Muslims to withstand their charge. The Tartars had nothing to offer by way of intellectual thought or culture. By contrast, the offensive launched by Western powers during the first half of the fourteenth century of *Hijrah* or the twentieth of the Christian era was entirely different. The enemy was now armed with a new philosophy of life, had a new system of education, brought with it a new set of values based on rejection of God and was the propagator of a new religion, namely materialism.

Then came the Bolshevic Revolution of March, 1917, as if to put the finishing touches on Western depredation. This Revolution was not only to change the political scene by cutting across the history and geography of the world, nor was it confined to economic and political thought, but it also endeavoured to pull down all the accepted principles of creed and morality. It laid claim to a new edifice, one which demolished the existing pattern of life and human consciousness. Naturally, Islam was to suffer most from it because it believed in asset of unalterable values which required positive faith in ultimate reality. Unfortunately, there were few among the Muslims who could sense the danger or could do anything to contend it. They perhaps lacked the "wisdom of Faith" that had always warned them of even lesser dangers on earlier occasions. In the western part of the Islamic world, the ex-Defence Minister of Turkey, Envar Pasha (1881-1892), was the first to perceive the danger. He organised the people of Turkistan and fought a number of battles against the Bolshevics during 1921 and 1922. On the 4th August, 1922, he attacked the Russians near Kochgin village; the enemy was overwhelmingly large in size, and Envar Pasha fell fighting valiantly on Friday, the seventh of *Zil Hijja*, 1340 A.H.

The Bolshevic Revolution extended its sway over all the Muslims lands in Central Asia including Chinese and Russian Turkistan and laid open its population not only to cultural and intellectual apostasy but also endeavoured to make the Muslims under its domination renounce their Faith. The history of Spain during the ninth century was thus re-enacted. This communist danger confronts not only this sub-continent, but has cast its shadow on the entire Islamic world and forced to take a position of friend or foe to its power. Certain Arab countries not only import its manufactured goods and armaments but also its ideology and philosophy and have become its trusted votaries. Very recently, it trampled down Afghanistan which had been a reservoir of Islamic zeal and valour and which had supplied India with able administrators, scholars and godly saints in bygone ages. Afghanistan was also once the outer line of defense against onslaughts and India and this has now been laid open; the danger now looms large at on doorstep.

However, in the darkness that engulfed the Islamic world by the middle of the fourteenth century, a ray of new hope, a silver lining of new awakening also became visible. Iqbal has truly said:

Fresh blood was flushed in the dead limb of East,

It is a secret incomprehensible to Avicina and Alfarabi:

Muslims discovered themselves by the tempest of the West,

The circling waves of water bring out the precious pearl.

Bit by bit, positive signs of political awakening all over the world of Islam and standards of freedom against alien domination were raised which caused Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco to regain their independence. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan also came into existence, and furthermore Indian Muslims also took part in the struggle for the freedom of their country and made sacrifices for it. Now there are 45 independent Muslim countries of which 24 members of the United Nations and their flags flutter proudly at its Headquarters. Muslims now carry weight in international affairs but if they were to unite, they could stop several injustices and help poor and weak nations the world over. If God were to bless these countries with sincere and deep-hearted leadership, they could enforce Islamic laws within their countries and reform their societies according to the precepts of Islam. They could create the ideal spiritual-moral society, now seen in the pages of history alone. Such a social order can show a new path to humanity, bring about a real understanding between the Eastern and Western Blocks and pave the way for the propagation of Islam. If these leaders were to realise their own political importance and use it in a wise and effective way, they could save humanity from the destruction towards which it is heading. The leaders of the Indian Muslims can also serve their community through their own unity and sincerity of purpose and provide a morally conscious leadership to the country. They can, thus, save their country from the intellectual and moral anarchy which is now assuming gigantic proportions.

We must also not forget that this century gave birth to several reformist and revolutionary movements in this Islamic world. Some of these have been more powerful and comprehensive than in bygone centuries, and they are capable of influencing the educated and intellectual classes of Muslims and satisfying and created a new confidence in Islam. They provide an intellectual base and transcend the limits of geographical boundaries. It is also noteworthy that the educated among these movements are very often more eager to restore the fundamental bases of Islam than even those who are religious minded. The *Al-Ikhwān* of Egypt, the *Nuri* movement of Turkey, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* of Jordan and Palestine, the *Majsumi* Party of Indonesia and the *Tablighi Jamat* and *Tahrik Islami* of the Indian sub-continent are some of the movements that we can cite in this context. One may differ with one or all these movements but no one can deny their popularity and effectiveness. Apart from these organisations, the spirit of revivalism seen in the present day Islamic World owes its existence, to a large extent, to the powerful and elegant verses of Iqbal; a poetry which is without parallel in the Islamic literature of previous centuries.

The fifteenth century has now spread its wings. Had the Islamic world been deprived of the great treasurers of Faith and thought, political influence and material wealth, independent states and powerful movements and also its great manpower, there was still nothing to make one despair of God's mercy for the Muslims still possess the Divine Scripture and His Eternal Message in the shape of Islam. These two are still capable of working miracles and of giving new life to even listless peoples.

The Muslims are the only refuge for suppressed humanity, they are the custodians of the last Message of God. perhaps, this century will bring a turning point when the whole of mankind will realise the worth and importance of Islam. There is, thus, no reason to despair of God's Mercy. Humanity has reached the lowest ebb of its degradation, and it can only attract Divine Compassion for a major change in the existing state of affairs.

Western civilisation is doomed. It has become rotten to the core, and if it is still surviving it is not at all due to its latent qualities of strength and endurance but because no other civilisation is at present ready to take its place. Other civilisations in the world are, at the utmost, its own

hazy carbon copies or third class caricatures or they are so weak and decrepit that it is beyond their power and ability to stand against it, face to face. Now, if a Muslim country or the world of Islam, as a whole, can muster enough strength and competence to fill the void that will be created by the fall of Western civilisation then it can re-establish its claim to the leadership of mankind which, according to the unchanging practice of the Lord, always goes to those who are earnest, deep-hearted and resolute. Muslims, therefore, ought to decide whether it is more honourable to approach the West with a begging bowl or assume the exalted position of the stewardship and guidance of humanity, a role in which there is no greater glory in the world after Apostleship.

I will now conclude this brief survey of the past with the call given to you by the poet of the East.

O Builder of Haram, rise to re-construct the world anew,

Awake out of your deep slumber, and rise again.