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Limitation of Human Knowledge

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

The Qur'an protests against the materialistic view of epistemology which regards human intellect as infallible and capable of encompassing all sectors or phases of reality. This concept of knowledge asserts its capacity to discern the secrets of nature as well as mysteries of the vast heavenly bodies and planetary system, lands and oceans, beings and creatures and the designs and workings of supernatural forces. It tries to plumb directly the secrets of the creation of life and unlock the mysteries of past and future. The votaries of this view of human knowledge are arrogantly proud of it although the sum total of their knowledge is no more than a speck of dust. The tragedy, however, is that this very undue arrogance, over-confidence and excessive reliance on human knowledge coupled with the contemptuous defiance and outright denial of unseen realities has been the root-cause of man's vanity and self-conceit, narrow-mindedness and fanaticism. It is, indeed, this concept of human knowledge which is responsible for belief in the primacy of matter, its indestructibility and creativeness.

It is, again, this view of human knowledge, having its roots in the aberration of human nature, which has always induced man to claim the mastership over his fellow beings and to oppress those who do not agree to this concept. All of its salient features have been brought out by the parables told in the Surat-ul-Kahf, as, for instance, its spiteful enmity with those who are blessed with a true faith and the gnosis of God, like the Companions of the Cave: its love of earthly possessions and disrespect for the poor and lowly as exhibited by the owner of two gardens: its denial of everything not adequately comprehended by the limited human intellect as illustrated by the story of Khidhr and Moses. It is not unoften that the erring' knowledge of man produces an entirely false impression. Zul-Qarnain thought that the sun was setting in the spring of murky water. ■

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Wisdom of Qur'an

“Human beings, We created you all from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

(Al Qur'an – 49:13)

This ayah warns mankind against the prejudices on the basis of race, colour, language, country, and nationality. These prejudices make man discard humanity and draw around himself some small circles and regard those born within those circles as his own people and those outside them as others. These circles are drawn on the basis of accidental birth and not on rational and moral grounds.

In some cases their basis is family, tribe, or race, and in some particular geographical region, or in a nation having a particular colour or speaking a particular language. Then the discrimination between one's own people and others assumes the worst forms of hatred, enmity, contempt and tyranny.

In this ayah, Allah draws our attention to three cardinal truths: (1) The origin of all of us is one and the same; (2) In spite of being one in origin it was natural that we should be divided in nations and tribes; and (3) The only basis of superiority and excellence that there is, or can be, between man and man is that of moral excellence. Thus, all men are equal, for their Creator is One, their substance of creation is one, and their way of creation is one, and they are descended from the same parents. ■

Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety (taqwa) and good action.”

(Bukhari)

Islam rejects certain individuals or nations being favoured because of their wealth, power, or race. God created human beings as equals who are to be distinguished from each other only on the basis of their faith and piety.

One of the major problems facing mankind today is social inequality. The developed world can send a man to the moon but cannot stop man from hating and fighting his fellow beings. Ever since the days of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be to him), Islam has provided a vivid example of how racism can be brought to an end. The annual pilgrimage (Hajj) to Makkah shows the real Islamic brotherhood of all races and nations, when about two million Muslims from all over the world come to Makkah to perform the pilgrimage.

In another hadith the Prophet has said: “You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from the dust. Let the people give up boasting of their ancestors, otherwise they will stand more degraded than a mean insect in the sight of Allah.”

In yet another hadith he said: “Allah will not enquire about your lineage on the Day of Resurrection. The most honourable in the sight of Allah is he who is most pious.” ■

Madrasas in India

The madrasa, which literally means a school for the ulema, has recently been in the news in the Indian media. There are allegations that many of these institutions have foreign funding and have become the den of activities not conducive to nation's well-being. So far no substantial evidence has been provided for any such charges. Yet, the concerted aspersions cast on their status and role in Indian society has indeed brought unnecessary bad publicity. This has no doubt caused as much concern to the community as to the government. As the state and community scrutinise madrasas, it is evident that the basis of much of the negative propaganda has been ignorance about their role in society. It is therefore imperative that we understand the historical process of the emergence of the madrasas and their objectives in India.

It is interesting that the arrival of Muslim rule in India in the 13th century did not see a sudden mushrooming of madrasas in India. In Mughal India for instance education was informal. A student who wanted a religious career would learn Persian and Arabic from the learned and pious in his family and neighborhood. Both the Quran and Hadis knowledge (manqulat) and the rational sciences (ma'qulat) he acquired in this informal way. It is to be noted that the emphasis even in a religious career was always on rational sciences as well. In fact the Mughal ulema were famous for this branch of knowledge. Mughal Delhi was regarded as an important centre for ma'qulat. It was thus not surprising that religious career did not cripple a student in the material world. Indeed those who completed scholarly training sought out official positions or grants and endowments offered by kings and aristocrats.

The tradition of combining religious and secular learning continued after the collapse of the Mughal Empire. Its best examples can be traced in Awadh (part of modern day Uttar Pradesh). Here, the Firangi Mahall madrasa combined effectively the ma'qulat and manqulat instructions. The Shiah Nawab of Lucknow patronised the madrasa precisely because it did not produce merely Sunni ulema but also offered training for bureaucrats. Preparing qazis and Muftis, the legal officials required by the court, was the speciality of Farangi Mahall. Indeed this madrasah systematised the informal curriculum followed for training ulema in Mughal India. The syllabus was called Dars-e- Nazamiya. The name was taken after Mulla Nizamuddin who was the son of the madrasah's founding member Mulla Qutbuddin. This syllabus that combines religious and secular learning has dominated religious teaching in south Asia to the present. In other words it means that the madrasas that follow this syllabus lay stress on both religious and rational sciences learning. It is therefore not surprising that the madrasas that were set up under British rule also adopted this syllabus. For instance, the Madrasa-i-Aliyah in Calcutta established under British patronage in 1780, had the Dars-e-Nizamiya as its curriculum.

After the 1857 revolt as the British state clamped down heavily on all sections of Indian society, the focus of activity for the Ulema shifted away from the big cities like Delhi and Lucknow and localised in qasbahs. It was in the qasbahs of Awadh that many new Madrasas sprung up in the late 19th century. Some of these followed the traditions of Muslim

learning set-up in the big cities and others followed more revivalist or reformist agendas. These centres were clearly responding to the challenges posed by the British government to both the community and the nation. It is here that one can see the emergence of Deoband madrasa in 1867. Maulana Rashid Ahmad, Maulana Muhammad Qasim and others set up this madrasa and used it as the base of their activity to take up the formidable challenge the British posed to the nation. They modelled their institution on patterns of the British educational institutions with which they were familiar. The goal of the madrasa was to train well educated ulema that would be dedicated to reformed Islam. Such Ulema would have many roles: prayer leaders, writers, preachers and teachers. The medium of instruction was Urdu. In its teaching style and open minded approach to learning it was broadly very much on the lines of the westernised Aligarh college and the Delhi college. Thus the madrasa had a popular appeal because it was in tune with the times. And this appeal and use of modern instrumentation was used to pursue the goal of training Muslims in religious classics so as to spread Islamic norms and beliefs that would connect them to the changed times.

These madrasas have produced eminent writers, historians and social reformers who have brought glory to the nation. Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Abdul Hai Hasani and Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi are some of these Madrasa products who have made a place for themselves in their respective fields.

The greatest achievement of these establishments is that they help poor and backward class of students to study and mould themselves as an asset to the society. Many a students of Madrasas later joined Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru and others in getting India liberated.

This brief trajectory of madrasa education in India reveals their very positive and outward looking attitude. It is quite clear that through history madrasas have endeavoured to make Muslims understand better the changed times through rigorous learning and accept the challenges of western modernity. Indeed it is in this role of negotiating western modernity that the madrasa could never remain isolated from the nationalist leadership of the country that had similar agendas. Thus they have been a critical bridgehead between state and society. This critical role of mediation is something that they should ideally continue to play in independent modern India as well. Most of them are already sensitive to this responsibility. It is in recognition of this responsibility that the government of India funds a wide range of madrasas every year. We hope, that they continue their constructive role in society and provide no reason for a misplaced campaign against them. ■

S.A.

We solicit articles for publication in The Fragrance of East. Suitable remuneration will be paid to writers. We prefer receipt of articles on:
e-mail: shariq_alavi@yahoo.com
along with a hard copy, duly signed, by post.

Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

The foundation of Nadwat-ul-Ulama was laid in 1892. It was founded by Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungeri and guided by 'Allama Shibli and Syed Sulaiman Nadwi. Many scholars of distinction guided its destiny as Rectors (Nazim) and Deans of different faculties.

The basis of this movement was that the syllabus is a changing and progressive instrument of education and training which should be formulated according to the changing times and needs (of course, with all the safeguards in religious spirit and fundamental principles). According to the founders of Nadwa the syllabus should have the capacity to change and expand like a living body instead of being static and fossilised. No doubt the religion of Islam is an eternal truth which does not admit any change, but knowledge is like a tree which continues to grow. Islam is a universal and eternal religion and a way of life which is immutable and inviolable. That is why it is confronted with different stages of ups and downs in human thought. It is necessary for it to provide guidance in the changing conditions, thought process and remove doubts and suspicions of the skeptics. It is, therefore, incumbent for the syllabus to keep on expanding (which prepares the

exemplars of Islam and its interpreters) in scope and proves that it (Islam) is a living force and has the capacity to meet the exacting demands of changing times and conditions.

Thus keeping this in mind the founders of Nadwa kept the Greek logic and philosophy to the required minimum and made alterations and additions in Islamic scholasticism ('ilm-i-kalam) which was mainly based on refutation of Greek mythology. They introduced Geography, History, Mathematics and English in a limited way and the text of the Glorious Qur'an instead of limiting it to the books of exegesis.

The founders of Nadwa took another bold step in teaching Arabic as a living and current language and effective vehicle for 'Dawah' in speech and writings which in the orthodox system consisted of a few examples of prose and poetry and memorising a few difficult words. The underlying idea in making this departure was for the students to acquire such proficiency in Arabic that they could impress the Arabs and be in position to meet the challenge thrown by dominance of the west and modernism. It so happened that these scholars made the challenge of Arabic Nationalism, the purpose of which was

to take the Arabs back to pre-Islamic 'jahiliyah' when there was no difference between belief (iman) and unbelief (kufr) Islam and Christianity. The 'Al-Baath' (a monthly Arabic magazine and an official organ of Nadwa) opposed tooth and nail the movement of Arab Nationalism of which Presidents of Egypt, the late Jamal Abdul Nasir and Anwar Sa'adat and the Baath party of Syria were the protagonists in the immediate past. This diatribe against Arab Nationalism by the scholars of Nadwa was acknowledged by Arab scholars and readers in eloquent terms. The scholars of Nadwa played an important role in the propagation of Islamic culture compilation of the biography of Prophet Muhamad (peace be on him), achievements of Islam in different fields of arts and sciences, its educational attainments and penmanship. Nobody can afford to disregard the services of Allama Shibli and his talented disciple and successor Syed Sulaman Nadwi. The world renowned Darul Musannefeen, Azamgarh and Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow has produced such Islamic literature which have made a deep impact on highly educated persons and thinkers and of which there is no parallel in Arab and Islamic countries.

The syllabus prepared by Nadwat-ul-Ulama is being taught in Arab schools, colleges and universities which

is not only a matter of pride for Nadwa and Araoic schools but for India as a whole.

A very good image was created in Arab and Islamic countries on account of these literary activities and these activities were highly appreciated and its scholars were looked upon with respect in those countries. The poet of the east 'Allama Iqbal realised it and acknowledged it in the following words:

"I have been feeling for some time past that the Muslims in India, who cannot help other Islamic counties in the field of politics, can help them intellectually. It should be not the matter of surprise that Nadwa may prove more successful than Aligarh (Muslim University) in the eyes of Islamic India.

The Arab scholars too have expressed similar feelings. We give a few specimen of their impressions and statements issued by them after visiting Nadwa or otherwise.

'Allama Abdul' Aziz, an eminent political leader and litterateur of Tunisia visited India in 1932. He said "Gentlemen, the Muslims of India have a special place (of honour) in Islamic world. If they organise themselves properly, they can form the nucleus of progress for the world of Islam. They can change the course of history once again.

The Rector of the world famous

Azhar University Cairo, Dr. Shaikh Abdul Halim Mahmood paid his tribute to Nadwa in his presidential address on the occasion of 85th Anniversary of its foundation on 31st October 1975, in the following words:

“Today the entire world of Islam realises the praise worthy endeavours of Nadwa with appreciation and looks up to the services which are being rendered here (in the field of Islamic literature) with admiration. We have a high regard for the ulama (of Nadwa), and their achievements, who are busy in scholastic pursuits and striving in the Way of Allah.”

It will not be out of place to mention here in connection with the eighty fifth anniversary celebrations that never in the immediate past, so many scholars, intellectuals, thinkers, highly placed executives and representatives of schools and universities had come to India. The number of foreign delegates which included representatives from Russia and Iran besides Arab countries was seventy-one. It may also be pointed out here that this anniversary was held at a time when India was in the grip of Emergency.

It would be enough to quote the impressions of the most eminent Arab author and polymath of the present times, ‘Allama Shaikh ‘Ali Tantawi

(former Professor, University of Baghdad and Judge, Court of Appeals, Damascus, now settled in Saudi Arabia). He writes:

“Nadwa is an institution which is following a moderate and middle path. It did not leave the straight path nor deviated from it. It is the median way but a perfect synthesis in between the orthodox schools like Azhar and modern universities in which there is no rigidity of the orthodox schools nor modernity of the present-day universities, It has adopted the golden mean and succeeded in it.

“I was giving an interview on T.V. and was asked where I would like to pass the remaining days of my life. I said, if I could not go to Damascus and did not have the good fortune to stay in the neighbourhood of the House of God (Makkah) then I would prefer Lucknow and further I would like to stay in Darul Uloom Nadwa which has a literary environment and where the company of ulama is available.”

I have already mentioned that the syllabus prepared by Nadwa is being taught in Arab schools and universities. It is also a matter of pride that the scholars of Nadwa hold the position of President and Secretary in International Arab Societies and Organisations of which India should be rightly proud. ■

(Cont. from page 15)

was no material or record to show any violence had taken place. There can be no doubt that advocating any cause, however unpopular or uncomfortable it may be, must be permitted. Majoritarianism cannot be the law. Even the minority has the right to express its view peacefully.

The law of sedition is more often abused and misused. Citizens who criticise those in power are arrested by police officials at the drop of a hat. Even if the person gets bail, he has suffered the ignominy of being sent to jail. Criticism can be a crime only when there is incitement to violence or public disorder. Sadly, day in and out, we read of people being arrested for making not so complementary references about those in power.

In many countries, recognising the right of freedom of speech, the laws of sedition stand repealed. In England, the crime of sedition was abolished in 2009 on the ground that sedition and seditious and defamatory libel are archaic offences – from a bygone era when freedom of expression wasn't seen as the right it is today.

Our country, Constitution and national emblems are strong enough to stand on their own feet without the aid of the law of sedition. Respect, affection and love is earned and can never be commanded. India is loved by all its citizens. We are proud to be Indians. We, however, have the right to criticise the government when we feel things are not moving in the right direction. In a country governed by the rule of law and which guarantees freedom of speech, expression and belief to its citizens, the misuse of the law of sedition and other similar laws goes against the very spirit of freedom for which the freedom fighters fought and gave up their lives.

The shoulders of those in power should be broad enough to accept criticism. Their thinking should be wide enough to accept the fact that there can be another point of view. Everybody may not use temperate or civilised language. If intemperate, uncivilised and defamatory language is used, then the remedy is to file proceedings for defamation but not prosecute the person for sedition.

Criticism of the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, the bureaucracy or the armed forces cannot be termed sedition. If we attempt to stifle criticism of such institutions, we shall become a police State instead of a democracy and this the Founding Fathers never expected this country to become. If India has to progress not only in the field of commerce and industry, but become a world leader, it must also progress in the field of human rights and be a shining example of an effective, vibrant democracy. Then the voice of the people can never be stifled and there can be no place for the law of sedition in a true democracy “where the mind is without fear and the head is held high”. ■

(Courtesy: The Hindustan Times, 13-5-2022)

Importance of Sectarian Unity

- S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi*

Muslims as compared to others have a greater capacity for establishing rapport – sympathy, - brotherhood, unity and spirit of national integration—that unites them as a whole. But it is unfortunate that presently they have developed slackness in keeping up their traditional virtues and are divided in different sects.

Needless to add that brotherhood, fraternity and natural love as ordained by Almighty Allah helped Muslims to be one among themselves and obliterated any difference and confusion within in them. Any untoward incident that occurs in any part of the east or the west has an effect in other parts of the Islamic world. This is the spirit which we have inherited from our forefathers who have been following the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): “A believer is like a strong building sharing its roof with other believer. Similarly, if any part of his body feels pain, other parts of the body share its agony.”

Unfortunately Muslims pay scant attention to this sense of larger bonding that they share with Muslims of the world. In the past such negligence caused irreparable loss to them. If they had not made such mistake, the horrible events of their dethroning from Spain would not have taken place. Despite their radiant history in Europe this event occurred there.

It should be noted that causes

* Rector, Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow.

responsible for the decline which Muslims fell prey to in the last days of Spanish Government, are reflected amongst present day Muslims as well.

Muslims are confronted with the enemies of Islam. It is felt by them that they are prone to be divested of their Islamic glory, pomp and show. The main aim of opponents is that Muslims may give up their own culture and civilization even their thoughts and ideologies and their hearth and home, and live somewhere else. They are being subjected to oppressions, atrocities and violence. No stone is being left unturned by opponents of Islam to achieve success in their plans. But Islam (which is an everlasting religion) is a miracle of this nation. Islamic spirit and religious passion has infiltrated in the hearts of Muslims and it does not allow them to bow down before these perils. On the contrary they set an example of patience and steadfastness and put up with these atrocities and oppressions hoping for Allah’s guidance and His aid. As soon as flames of oppressions and violence disappear, the dormant spark of religious spirit flares up. Islamic governments in Soviet Countries are living example of it. True Muslims have always practiced Islam. They did not only carry out the ordinance of Allah and divine Shariah which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought with him for guidance of people but they kept always this trust in their hearts.

Look at Muslims of Chechnia and Bosnia, they proved themselves bold and brave and stood as rock before their enemies. Muslims demonstrated time and again unity and concordance in such a way that it reinforced in solving different issues of Muslims throughout the world.

By grace of God due to this unity of Muslims of Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia and so on, Muslims hailing from other parts of the world developed courage and audacity to combat scores of difficulties and endured hardness and stiffness to achieve this goal.

In fact, Arabs rendered praiseworthy services and made extraordinary contribution on the way of their steadfastness, reinforcement and stability. Because of their strength and stamina a host of oppressed persons who were deprived of their rights, were competent to perpetuate on their Islamic identity and distinction.

This is the result of these efforts that a wave of Islamic awareness and awakening started surfacing in Muslim community particularly in civilized sections. Besides they began to regard the book of Allah (the Quran) and sayings of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) precious assets of their lives. They started searching these essences in the light of guidance. They treated these sources as if they were religious luminaries and pious Muslim scholars who are playing a constructive role in assimilating Islamic passions and feelings and providing religious and spiritual provision.

Efforts are being made by western countries to tarnish Islam and its followers. With the result that an effective reaction is seen in Muslim educated youths. This mutual cooperation, sympathy and good treatment of the followers of Islam will indeed provide more strength, and awakening throughout the world. The wide range of their co-operations will bring good result in the entire Islamic world.

This fact is not hidden from any one. Today Muslims are pulverizing in the whirlpool of Imperialist forces. Their main purpose is not only to annihilate Muslims but to obliterate Islam and its distinctions and identities as a whole. This is the biggest peril and greatest challenge of the modern world. The need of the hour is to combat this menace. In fact it is a bounden responsibility of all of us. There are two ways to perform this call. The first method is that moral resources should be used to face the mental and ideological prevalence and power of the opponents. The second is that basic teachings of Islam should be imparted amongst Muslims to such a great extent that they may easily face the challenges and ideological invasions of enemies of Islam.

We should not shirk from this fact for a while that the ratio of fascist forces is several times more than that of Muslims. Hence, if Muslims will not come forward to combat these imperialist forces with wisdom and shrewdness, it is impossible for them to get rid of these menaces which are confronting them from all sides since long. ■

The Man And Recognition of Allah

- S. Bilal Abdul Hai Hasani Nadwi*

The description of Allah's wisdom and His unprecedented power is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. It "frequently urges human beings to ponder over myriad scattered signs in their own souls and farthest regions of the universe and try to recognize their real Creator. It is described in a verse of Surah al-Baqarah that Creator of all things is only one Allah and the phenomena of His capability and ability are manifested everywhere. Hence, Human beings think and contemplate that when the Creator of the entire world is only One Allah and who else can be deserved adoration except Him. The Qur'an says, "O ye people! worship your Guardian Lord, Who created you and those who came before you that ye may become righteous. Who has made the earth your couch, and the Heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know the truth." (S.2,A.21-22)

The earth is one of the biggest phenomena of Allah. The people live on it, construct buildings, plough the fields but how many people think about this great blessing of Allah.

It is Allah Who treasured all necessary things of life, made different

* *Nazir-e-Aam, Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow*

seasons, created the sun which gives them light and the moon scatters its light through which the produce grow in an accelerated way and various benefits are also found. Allah made the stars to help people demarcate the directions and made high mountains and set rivers and canals and arranged so much stock of sweet water under the earth from which people draw continuously but it never dries up. Does the mankind ever think that from where these treasures came? Had only the rain may stopped, the life of the people would have become very difficult. This green land would have turned into the scorching and burning desert.

It is a well-known incident that during the time of Imam Abu Hanifa an atheist dubbed all things of the world came into being accidentally. Once he said, "I have some questions if anyone answers them I will believe in God." Imam Abu Hanifa accepted his challenge and decided one place and time for it. Intentionally, the Imam reached there too late, seeing him the atheist became annoyed and told that you did not come in time how would you answer. On hearing it the Imam said that first you listen to my excuse then you have right to say everything. The matter is that there was a river on the way. Unfortunately, no boat was there. I waited for a long time but found no boat.

All of a sudden I saw a tree fissured itself in no time and the planks came out from it and a boat prepared itself automatically and I boarded it and finally crossed the river. He said what nonsense you uttered. How could such a thing exist itself automatically. The Imam said, "It is the answer of your basic question." The entire world and its vast system took place thoughtlessly. If someone has an iota of wisdom and sagacity will say that there is One Who created it.

A man seeks reasons and searches one reason after another but having reached a stage his intellect stops functioning and is bound to say that some biggest power is behind it.

It is unfortunate that many a man concocted Allah's false names but Allah chose His pious slaves and revealed to them so that they may lead human beings to the right path and make them aware of their true Creator. The Holy Book states, "The most beautiful names belong to Allah: so call on Him by them but shun such men as distort His names: for what they do, they will soon be requited." (S.7,A.180)

Allah has accorded intellect to human beings so that they use it in proper way and recognize Him through it. But Allah fixed its limits. He sent messengers to guide the mankind. And they taught them such a host of things which were beyond their sense and intellect.

An ordinary man thinks that when the system is broad authority needs his helpers while all are under his supervision but sans them the work is impossible. Under these circumstances most of people are in deception. He thinks same about Allah and joins others with Him and imagines that the position of Allah is like that of a king. With the result of that adoration of creature began to start. When he imagines that such and such persons can solve his problems then he started appeasing them. Generally, it is observed that they perform so many acts without knowing the king. Unfortunately, human beings guess Allah on their experiences and sensations and forget Allah's astounding power, dignity and grandeur. That is why "the Holy Qur'an reiterates that there is no God but Allah, He has no partner and none is equal to Him.

The following verses of the Holy Qur'an vividly address all people to contemplate on the whole world and know the supreme power of Allah and worship none but Him. The Holy Quran says, "Then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know the truth". (S.2,A.22) It is Allah Who controls the entire system of the universe. "Verily, His are the creation and the command" (S.7,A.54) "The Command is for none but Allah: He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him: that is the right religion, but most men understand not." (S.12,A.40) ■

(English Rendering: O.R. Nadwi)

Sedition Law Has No Place In A Democracy

- Deepak Gupta

In the Preamble to the Constitution, "We the people of India" promise to secure for all citizens liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. Article 19 guarantees the right of free speech and expression to every citizen. There cannot be any democratic polity where citizens do not have the right to think as they like, express their thoughts, have their own beliefs and faith, and worship in a manner they feel like.

The right to freedom of opinion and freedom of conscience, by themselves, include the extremely important right to disagree. No doubt, the State has the power to impose reasonable restrictions on such rights in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of the country, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality.

Dissent is an essential part of democracy and no citizen should have to fear the government. They should be able to freely express views which may not be liked by those in power. Criticism must be expressed in a civilised manner without inciting violence, but the mere expression of such views cannot be a crime.

According to Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, a person is guilty of

sedition if he or she brings into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection against the government. This provision was introduced when the country was ruled by a foreign, imperialist colonising power that brooked no dissent. Mahatma Gandhi, when charged with sedition, said:

"Affection cannot be manufactured or regulated by law. If one has no affection for a person or system, one should be free to give the fullest expression to his disaffection, so long as he does not contemplate, promote or incite to violence."

The constitutional validity of the provisions of Section 124A was challenged before a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) in Kedar Nath Singh's case, on the grounds that it was inconsistent with Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. The SC held that no offence of sedition is made out unless the words – spoken or written – have the tendency to create disorder or disturbance of public peace by resorting to violence.

The SC in the 1995 Balwant Singh case held that raising slogans such as "Khalistan Zindabad", "Raj Karega Khalsa", by themselves did not amount to an offence of sedition because there

(Cont. on page 10)

Islam And Environment

- Mohammad Aslam Siddiqui*

"Islam is a complete code of life. It encompasses every aspect of human life including the entire natural world. The main plank of Islam is to lead mankind from darkness to light. As Allah Himself said, "This is a Book which We have revealed unto you (O Muhammad!) in order that you might lead mankind out of darkness into light" (Ibrahim:1) "As regards the environment, Islam lays immense stress on the preservation of the environment. Conserving the environment is a religious duty in Islam. It teaches that every Muslim is the custodian of the nature. Muslims are instructed to protect the environment and natural resources in every possible way and not to damage it in any form. Allah Himself calls upon human beings to reflect on His signs which include all spheres of nature such as trees, mountains, seas, animals, birds, stars, the sun, the moon and our own hearts. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught his followers that all natural resources were created by God and were set by Him in perfect equilibrium.

Natural resources are gifts of God to all mankind. No one can monopolize them. It was narrated that Muhammad (PBUH) stated that the people have equal share in water, grass (green cover) and fire (energy) except what was officially privatized. Muhammad (PBUH) set a general rule of protecting the natural resources, preserving the environment and securing people when he said to his companions: "You are not to harm or to be harmed" (Muhammad Biography and Pictorial Guide, page 170)

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Any Muslim who sows a seed that grows to a level, people or animals or birds can benefit or

eat from it, then this act is considered as a Sadaqa (a charity that is rewarded by God). "He further said, "Faith in God can be branched into more than 70 parts topped by testifying the oneness of God. The last part is removing harm from people's way."

It should be noted that water plays a crucial role in sustaining the environment. That is why Islam vehemently condemns wastage of water and its unnecessary spending. The Holy Qur'an says, "Out of water, We made every living creature." (S.2,V.30) "Verily the spendthrifts (squanderers and over spenders) are brothers of devils (evil ones) and the devil-Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord." (S.17,A.27) "Eat and drink with no extravagance. Certainly He does not like the prodigals (those who waste and overspend)." (S.17,V.31) "The crux of the matter is that on this planet world animals and other all creatures are the parts of this environment like human beings. And so it is imperative for us to treat them well. It is forbidden to detain or confine animals for no genuine reason. Even lashing animals or hitting them on their faces and overloading on them are also prohibited.

It is clear from the above mentioned Qur'anic verses and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that Islam pays how much attention to respect nature and care for the environment. Being stewards of the earth and custodian of the environment, it is incumbent upon us to live with harmony with other creatures and save the environment from all sorts of pollution, contamination and blight. "In 1972, the UN General Assembly designated 5 June as World Environmental Day on the first day of the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment. Hence, since then the World Environment Day is observed on 5 June every year across the world to spread awareness about environmental protection. ■

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The First Pillar of Islam

- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

Pronouncement of faith that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger is called "Kalima." After uttering this Kalima, one enters into the fold of Islam and becomes a Muslim. It is the quintessence of Islam. It consists of two parts. The first is no deity except Allah and only He deserves to be worshipped. The second affirms that Muhammad is Allah's messenger. This Kalima is called Kalima e-Towheed (The creed of oneness of Allah)

It should be kept in mind that only uttering this Kalima is not sufficient. Apart from it one must believe in two Kalimas (Imans) i.e. Iman Mujmal (Iman in brief) and Iman Mufassal (Iman in detail) Iman Mujmal is:

Amantu billahi kama Huwa bi Asmaihi wa sifa tihi wa qabiltu jamia Ahkamihi. (I affirm my faith in Allah as He is with all His names and attributes and I accept all of His Commands)

Iman Mufassal is:

Amantu billahi wa malaikatihī wa kutubihī wa Rusulihī wal Youmil Akhiri wal-qadri kharihi wa shar-rihi minal lahi taala wal bathi badal maut. (I affirm my faith in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement, in that the fate good or bad is predetermined by Allah and in coming to life after death (resurrection).

Now let us ponder over the first

part of the Kalima "Laillaha Illallah". As a religion Islam stands for complete submission and reposing faith in Allah. Accordingly, Muslims are not allowed to worship or bow before anyone or anything except Almighty Allah. Unlike other religions, Islam is a pure monotheistic one. For instance, if someone bows down before others except Allah, it would be an act of polytheism. In Islamic concept polytheism is an unforgivable sin. It is contumacious treason against Allah by putting up Allah's creatures in rivalry against Him. This is a rebellion against the Creator. Allah forgiveth not that partners should be setup with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed," (S.4.A, 48)

Due to such sensitive and delicate points of Islam, Muslims raise their voice against "Vande Mataram", Surya Namaskar and other such type of polytheistic songs and acts.

As regards other religions, they can bow their heads to idols, deities, images and so on. Such kind of worship is not considered polytheism in their religious concept. Above all, the concept of polytheism is not found in other faiths except Islam. But it is unfortunate that Muslims also do not understand this sensitive issue.

It may be recalled that in late 1990s when U.P. Government made it compulsory for students that every morning they recite 'Vande Mataram' Late S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (RAH) strongly opposed it and ultimately Government had to withdraw the order.

No doubt, this event shows that Islam is not a bundle of dogmas and doctrines but is a complete code of life and indicates that Muslims are bound to bow only before Allah.

Shah Waliullah writes in the Hujjat Allah-il-Baligha:

It ought to be known that the belief in Tauheed can be divided into four grades:

1. To take only God as the Necessary Being for there is no other necessary save Him.
2. To consider God alone as the Creator to empyrean, sky, earth and everything having an existence. It consists of two grades but the revealed scriptures have not deemed it necessary to discuss them, not pagans of Arabia or the Jews and Christians held a contrary view. The Qur'an is explicit that both these grades were plain truths even to them.
3. To hold the view that the management of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in-between, rests with Allah.
4. The fourth stage is to hold that none

except God deserves to be worshipped. Both these latter stages hold together and synchronize with each other. The Qur'an has discussed them in detail and allayed the doubts of disbelievers in the most satisfying manner.

This shows that it is shirk to hold anyone on terms of equality with God. It rather means to adopt the attitude or conduct oneself towards anyone in a way that God has made exclusive for His Exalted Being. It covers all the different forms of divine service, such as, prostration before any created being, making sacrifices for someone, entreating anyone to do something, asking for help in difficulties, taking anyone as omnipresent, considering anyone to have a hand in the governance of the universe etc, all these involve shirk and make a man polytheist. Even if such a person believes that the human being, jinn or the angel before whom he is prostrating, or offering sacrifice, or asking for help occupies a position inferior to God and is His creature, he shall be deemed as a polytheist. The prophets, saints, jinn, devils or evil spirits to whom such an attitude is adopted make no difference. This is the reason why the Jews and Christians who exaggerated the position of their rabbis, clergymen and monks were all denounced by God as polytheists for ascribing divine powers to them. (A Guidebook for Muslims, P, 69-70)

The second part of the kalima is "Muhammad Rasulullah:". One cannot be a Muslim without reposing trust in it. Almighty Allah said: "say: if you do love Allah follow me: Allah will love you and forgive your sins; for Allah is oft Forgiving, Most Merciful" (S 3A 31). Our progress and prosperity lies in carrying out the teachings and instructions of holy prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Hence, it is imperative for us to follow the path shown by him in letter and spirit.

In his book "Muhammad the Benefactor of Humanity", Naeem Siddiqi has rightly observed, "The Prophet's life is not the story of Rostam and Sohrab or the tale of a Thousand And One Nights. It is not the story of an imaginary character and its study is not to be treated as a literary pastime! It is not the life of a person but the story of a historical force which appeared in the form of a man. It is not the story of a Darves who cut himself off from the world and sitting in seclusion had devoted himself to self purification. On the other hand, it is the biography of one who was the moving spirit of a movement. It is not the story of a man but of a man-maker. It covers the noble deeds of the builder of a new world. The achievements of a whole community, a revolutionary movement and a collective effort are comprised in it. The prophet's life from the cave of Hira to the cave of Thaur, from the sanctuary of the kaaba to the market of Taif, from the closets of the Mothers of Muslims to the battlefield,

is all-embracing. His impress is the hallmark of many lives. Abu Bakr, Omar, Usman, Ali, Ammar, Yasir, Khalid, Bilal and Suhail are different chapters of one life. There is a whole garden where every flower and petal narrate the gardeners' life".

Syed Sulaiman Nadwi writes, "A model which can serve for every class of the people acting under different circumstances and states of human emotions will be found in the life of Muhammad (peace be upon him). If you are rich, there is the example of the tradesman of Mecca and the master of Bahrain's treasure; if you are poor, you can follow the internees of She'eb Abi Talib and the emigree of Medina; if you are a king, watch the actions of the Ruler of Arabia, if you are a vassal, take a look at the man enduring hardships imposed by the Quarayash of Mecca; if you are a conqueror; lay your eyes on the victor of Badr and Hunayn; if you have suffered a defeat, take a lesson from the one discomfited at Uhad; if you are a teacher, learn from the holy mentor of the school of Suffah. If you are a student, look at the learner who sat before Gabriel; if you are a sermoner, direct your eyes to the discourser delivering lectures in the mosque of Medina; if you are charged to preach the gospel of truth and mercy to your persecutors, observe the helpless preacher explaining the message of God to the pagans of Mecca; if you have brought your enemy to his knees, look at the

conqueror of Mecca; if you want to administer your lands and properties, discover how the lands and groves of Bani an-Nadir, Khaybar and Fadak Were managed; if you are an orphan, do not forget the child of Amina and 'Abdullah left to the tender mercy of Halima; if you are young, see the character of Mecca's shepherd; if you have a traveling business, cast a glance at the leader of the caravan under way to Busra; if you are a judge or arbiter; look at the umpire entering the holy sanctuary before the peep of dawn and installing Hajr' Aswad in the K'aba, or the justice of peace in whose eyes the poor and the rich were alike; if you are a husband study the behaviour of the husband of Khadija and 'Aisha; if you are a father, go through the biography of Fatima's father and the grandfather of Hasan and Husain; in short whoever and whatever you may be, you would find a shining example in the life of the Prophet to illuminate your behaviour. If you have the life of the Prophet before you, you can find the examples of all the prophets, Noah and Abraham, John and Jonah and Moses and Jesus. If the life and character of each prophet of God were deemed to be a shop selling the wares of one commodity, that of Muhammad (peace be upon him) would verily be a variety store where goods of every description can had to still the tastes and needs of all" (The Apostle of Mercy, p,440-441)

That is why Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is loved by all Muslims and not a

single absurd word against him can be tolerated by them. He is dearer to their own lives.

Hussein Haykal wrote in his book "The life of Muhammad," Muhammad, God's peace and blessing be upon him! This noble name has been on the lips of countless million of men. For almost fourteen centuries, millions of hearts have palpitated with deep emotion at the pronouncement of it. Many more millions of people for a period as long as time will pronounce it and will be deeply moved thereby," (An Encounter with Islam, P, 16)

In short, Islam is summed up in Kalima. After uttering this Kalima, one enters into the fold of Islam and becomes a Muslim. Who is Muslim? Prophet says: "A Muslim is one from whose hand and tongue other Muslims feel secure and a believer is one from whom the life and property of others remain unthreatened. "The holy Prophet further said: "The excellence of Islam is that a man gives up every frivolity."

We should introspect ourselves. Are we really good Muslims? If we are not so as the Prophet described about believers. We should try to become like them. After iman, it is improper to involve in anti-social activities and unholy acts. Almighty Allah says: "O ye who believe! enter into Islam wholeheartedly; and follow not the footsteps of Satan for he is to you an avowed enemy." (S. 2.A 208). ■

West Is Driving The World Into Poverty

- Harsha Kakar*

TS Tirumuti, India's permanent representative to the UN, stated at the UNSC last week: "The conflict (in Ukraine) is having a destabilizing effect with broader regional and global implications. Oil prices are skyrocketing and there is a shortage of food grains and fertilizers. This has had a disproportionate impact on the Global South and developing countries." India continues to demand "cessation of hostilities and pursuing a path of dialogue and diplomacy".

The Russo-Ukraine war has been ongoing for ten weeks. While Russian armed forces suffer losses, Ukraine faces unprecedented destruction to its cities. It has lost control of its southern region giving Russia road connectivity to Crimea, while battles rage in the east, which is primarily Russian speaking and mineral-rich. Western nations continue to back Ukraine with weapons and equipment while imposing sanctions on Russia. Russia has begun targeting Ukrainian bases where Western weapons are being delivered, sending a message that these actions are unacceptable.

The West has realized, rather late, that its sanctions on Russia have had

limited impact. Europe's oil procurements of approximately 3-3.5 billion barrels a day were providing Moscow with US\$ 450 million daily. It is now considering banning Russian oil from flowing into Europe over the next six months. However landlocked nations like Hungary and Slovakia would take longer to arrange alternate supplies. The Czech Republic and Bulgaria are placing similar demands, making consensus difficult.

Russia, on the other hand, has been working to divide the EU. It temporarily halted oil flows into Poland and Bulgaria, pushing European unity to the limit. There are already reports of a few landlocked nations willing to pay for Russian oil in rubles. There is no mention of the EU considering stopping gas flows from Russia, for which Europe pays \$400 million daily. The West's plan to degrade the Russian economy appears to have faltered. The Russian ruble, backed by gold, stands at a steady 68 to a dollar.

The EU, UK and the US are now pushing their companies from stopping services including insurance for ships carrying Russian oil. Marine insurance is largely controlled by European companies. This will impact the movement of Russian oil, except where pipelines exist. Russia has been

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warning the West that attempts to ban its energy exports will hit global oil prices. Already oil prices have touched \$ 109 per barrel.

PM Narendra Modi had rightly stated in Europe that there are no winners in this war. He said: "We believe that there will be no winner in this war, and all will suffer losses. Therefore, we are on the side of peace." He Modi added that apart from rising oil prices there is a global shortage of food grains and fertilizers. He stated, "Every family in the world is feeling the pain but the impact will be on poor and developing countries." The West supports Ukraine, ignoring other economically weaker nations impacted by the war. India is providing nations with food grains but that also has a limit.

With the Saudis and their allies not increasing oil production and economic sanctions on Venezuela and Iran continuing, global oil prices will not witness a downward trend. This will impact inflation. In many developing countries inflation is sky-rocketing. Sri Lanka, which currently has foreign exchange reserves of just \$500 million, faces shortfalls in oil, fertilizers and food grains. Inflation is at 23 per cent in Sri Lanka and 70 per cent in Turkey. There are protests in Peru due to rising prices. India will back its neighbourhood but there would be no one to support nations in Africa, South America or other parts of Asia.

Europe and the US continue to fund and arm Ukraine. The Biden administration recently announced a grant of \$33 billion in military aid to Ukraine. It did so when it realised that economic sanctions have had a limited impact and that drawing Russia into the conflict for a prolonged duration would serve its strategy better. Mercenaries from the West are fighting in Ukraine. Western leaders have flown into Kiev to meet the embattled Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Weapons being provided are with the intention of prolonging the war, rather than bringing it to an end. Backed by the West, Zelenskyy has almost brought talks with Russia to a standstill. No quantum of military weapons can reverse Russian gains. They may only delay the inevitable and enhance destruction in Ukraine.

The West appears to be shifting its goalposts from defending Ukraine to degrading Russian capabilities and economy, thereby containing it. Mr. Biden has openly hinted at regime change in Moscow. Western aims may not succeed as far as Russia is concerned but they will ensure large-scale destruction of Ukraine and the economic collapse of many weaker nations. In case Europe switches away from Russian oil and imposes curbs on Russian oil exports by hitting its shipping, global oil prices will remain

high. European oil demands will ensure that. The world will suffer because of Europe and US's fixation on the war in Ukraine.

Western powers should have set aside their egos and worked to bring peace to Ukraine, not only to save its populace and infrastructure but to prevent the war from hurting weaker nations. However, they are exploiting the invasion to contain Russia. While this may or may not succeed, many other nations will land under increased debt. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated, "The crisis (Ukraine war) could plunge up to 1.7 billion people, more than a fifth of humanity, into poverty and hunger on a scale not seen in decades."

India's refusal to join the Western bandwagon in condemning Russia and imposing sanctions is, apart from its own interests, based on the impact Western actions have on economically weaker nations. Russia can never be brought under as it remains the world's most mineral-rich nation, but many others will fall into debt traps. Ultimately, the West and Ukraine would be forced to negotiate with Russia. By then it would be too late. Ukraine would have been destroyed, thousands would be dead and large parts of the developing world would be paying the price for Western adventurism aimed at containing Russia. This is Western selfishness at its worst. ■

(Courtesy: The Statesman, 10-05-2022)

(Cont. from page 38)

transformed not only Arabia but all of mankind for all time to come and which heralded the birth of the most brilliant civilization in the world cost no more than 750 lives, mostly opponents, in the various battles. Yet the Prophet is sometimes maligned as a man of violence by those who have exterminated thousands of people in pursuit of their civilizational ideals.

The Prophet performed his only Hajj in the tenth year after migration to Madinah. In the Plain of Arafat, he gave a sermon of unsurpassable beauty and lasting value: 'No man has any right to lord over other men; all men are equal, whatever their origin, colour or nationality.'

A few months later, in the eleventh year after Hijrah, the Prophet Muhammad died. He was buried in the house in which he had lived in Madinah.

The Prophet possessed a character of exquisite beauty and charm. He was merciful, kind and compassionate. He loved children and taught kindness to animals. He spoke softly, never abused anyone, forgave even his worst enemies. He lived a very simple life. He repaired his own shoes and clothes. He lived frugally, sometimes for days no food was cooked in his household.

Such is Muhammad. According to every standard by which human greatness can be measured he was matchless; no man was ever greater! ■

Azan Controversy Reveals The Degree, Intensity of Intolerance

- Mohammad Naushad Khan

Azan row and Hanuman Chalisa in Maharashtra and in other parts of India is a new divisive tool derived from anti-Muslim mindset aimed at polarising the sentiments of the people and provoking one community against another, primarily for vested political interests. India, which was earlier known for its unity in diversity, has become so intolerant that today Azan has also become a problem for so people.

The incident started when Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray served the state government with an 'ultimatum' to remove loudspeakers from mosques by May 3. If the demand was not met, he threatened to play Hanuman Chalisa outside the mosques. The BJP agreed with this call. But the Uddhav Thackeray administration challenged the MNS move that would disturbed the social ambience.

As per figures available in public domain, in Mumbai as many as 72 per cent of mosques have stopped using loudspeakers for the morning Azan or prayer. It was because of MNS chief Raj Thackeray's demand that loudspeakers on mosques in Maharashtra be removed by May 3, and because of the resultant political controversy in the

state.

On the Azan controversy and the way forward, Dr. S.Q.R Ilyas, member All India Muslim Personal Law Board and President of Welfare Party of India said, "The controversy related to Azan has been raked up with no substance and appears to be politically motivated. On the use of loudspeakers, there is already a Supreme Court Judgment that it should not be used from 10 pm to 6 in the morning at public places and it is applicable not only to Namaz, but to all forms of use of loudspeakers like Bhajan kirtan, marriage and so on during the prohibited period.

He added, "In Mumbai and in other places, Muslims have decided to abide by the judgment of the Supreme Court. By this yardstick only the morning Azan may get affected. Azan is basically a call for prayers and in the fast changing digital world and in the age of internet or App, Muslims are trying to send the voice of Azan to every household in order to serve the purpose."

Noted social and human rights activist, John Dayal said, "This year in particular has become tainted with a governmental push to islamophobia and targeted action against Muslims. While the BJP and Sangh Parivar's political

animus continues, governments at the state and city levels have started operations to injure the economy of the Muslim community and to bring suffering to the families.”

He added, “In Maharashtra, Delhi and several other states, town and cities, as political bay for the elimination of the minority communities, municipal corporations are razing houses and shops of Muslims. In the guise of acting against love jihad and forced conversion, young men are being targeted in stages as far away as Karnataka apart from Uttar Pradesh.”

On the loudspeakers, Dayal said, “One may not cavil against the removal of loudspeakers from places of worship irrespective of religion, if it was done in a fair and transparent manner. I wonder why police did not act to stop processions that deliberately passed by mosques while playing loud music.

“I would still appeal to the Prime Minister to find an occasion and say in no uncertain words that he, his government and his party will act summarily to end Islamophobia and targeted hate. Perhaps then, even the Supreme Court will bid bold and act.”

Professor Ram Puniyani, an academician and noted social and human rights activist, said, “Today Muslims are being suppressed and

oppressed through various means and are being subjected to hate and violence. The Azan on loudspeakers and Hanuman Chalisa controversy in Maharashtra is a very dangerous thing for the society. We need to think that things have reached to such a stage where people have become intolerant against Azan and it is very harmful for our socially rich and diverse fabric. It is high time to talk about the core values of Islam which are peace, brotherhood, justice and welfare of mankind. If we can find out an amicable solution to such controversies through some flexible approach and without compromising our dignity and core values of Islam, it could be a way forward in the right direction.”

Advocate Anastasia Gill, former member of Delhi Minorities Commission, while sharing her perspective on the issue, said, “Personally I feel if loudspeakers have to be banned, it should apply to all. Not just for few communities. It’s definitely a conspiracy against few by the majority. These are only symptoms but deep rooted problems are much more serious. First, it was Hijab controversy and now it is loudspeakers. We have to raise bigger issues of targeting few in the name of religion. Fanaticism and Majoritarianism by RSS outfits seem to be the real problems for a democratic country like ours.” ■

Who Is Muhammad

- Khurram Murad

1. The Prophet Muhammad Today

One in every five persons on this earth firmly believes that the Prophet Muhammad is the last Messenger of God. He was a Muslim and there are more than 1.3 billion such Muslims today.

Not only individuals but entire countries take pride in declaring their allegiance to him. There are 54 such Muslim states today, ranging from those as large as Indonesia and Bangladesh, with populations of 200 and 125 million respectively, to those as tiny as the Maldives or Brunei with populations of 230,000 and 260,000. Even in non-Muslim countries, large Muslim populations constitute significant minorities; as much as 120 million in India and 20 million in China. Indeed, within the last half century, Islam, the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad, has become the second largest religion in most European countries, as also in America and Canada.

Black and white, red and yellow, followers of the Prophet Muhammad come from all human races. Whether in Asia or Europe, Africa or America, in every nook and cranny of this globe, you are sure to find Muslims. They live in the most advanced, sprawling megalopolis as well as in the most primitive nomadic

tent, village, hamlet, and even in the bush.

As now so always, down the centuries, across the planet, from end to end, billions and billions of men and women have lived all their lives, loving the Prophet and trying to follow in his footsteps, as no one else has been so loved and followed. They have lived and died, believed and acted, married and raised families, worshipped and ruled, made war and peace, even eaten and dressed, walked and slept, just as he did or taught them to do.

Indeed, never in history has a man influenced mankind, even beyond his death, so deeply and so pervasively as he has. He brings light and peace to countless hearts and lives. They love him more dearly than their own selves. In him they find their greatest source of inspiration and guidance. He is the ultimate norm and the perfect example for them. Faith in him is their mainstay, and he is their chief source of support and comfort in all personal vicissitudes and tribulations. To him they also look to lead them through social and political turmoil. He has always inspired them to greater and greater heights of spiritual and moral upliftment and civilization achievements. And still does.

In short, they believe that through him, a human like themselves, God has

spoken to them, and guided him to live amongst them, setting an example and a model for all times to come. Even today he motivates and induces whole populations to yearn and strive to shape their private lives, politics and policies according to his teachings. Who, then, is this man Muhammad?

2. Early Life in Makkah

It was in the year 570, after Jesus, that Muhammad was born in Makkah, in what is now Saudi Arabia. Arabia, by all accounts, is the cradle of the human race. All the oldest human remains so far found come from the area of its location.

Hemmed in by red, black and brown volcanic hills about 80 kilometers to the east of the Red Sea, stands the city of Makkah. It was then a small merchant town on the ancient 'incense' route through which passed the great trade caravans between the south and north.

However, Makkah was, and remains, important for an altogether different reason. For here lies the Ka'bah, the 'first House' ever set up for mankind to worship only God. More than 1,000 years before the Prophet Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, his ancestor, the Prophet Abraham, aided by his elder son the Prophet Ishmael, raised its walls on very ancient foundations.

Close by the Ka'bah lies the well

called Zam Zam. Its origin, too, goes back to the Prophet Abraham's time. It was this well which sprang up miraculously to save the life of the infant Ishmael. In the words of the Bible:

And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her: 'What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Arise, lift up the boy, and hold him in your hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. (Genesis 21; 17—20)

Or, as the Psalmist sings:

As they pass through the dry Valley of Baca, it becomes a place of springs;

the early rain fills it with pools.

(Psalms 85: 6)

Makkah never had, nor does it have now, any worldly inducement to offer for settlement. It is a barren, desolate place, where even grass does not grow! There were springs and wells of abundant water nearby in Taif, and a short distance away in Madinah. But it was the first House of God, architecturally an unremarkable cube, but spiritually and civilizationally the

most remarkable fountain and spring of life — which made it supremely important, a place of attraction for people from all over the world. Forever, therefore, Makkah has been a great centre of pilgrimage.

By the time Muhammad was born, the Ka'bah's latest guardians, the tribe of Quraysh, had more than 300 idols installed in and around the Ka'bah to be worshipped as lords, gods and intercessors besides the One God. Muhammad was a direct descendant of the Prophet Abraham through the Prophet Ishmael. He belonged to the financially poor but politically strong and noble clan of Banu Hashim from the tribe of Quraysh. As guardians of the Ka'bah, the House of God and the centre of pilgrimage for all Arabia, the Quraysh ranked higher in dignity and power than any other tribe. Hashim held the high office of levying taxes and providing the pilgrims with food and water.

Muhammad was born an orphan. His father, Abdullah, died before he was born. His mother, Aminah, too, passed away when he was only six years old. Doubly an orphan, his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, took him into his care. Only two years later, however, the orphaned boy was bereaved of his grandfather as well, leaving him in the care of his uncle, Abu Talib.

After his birth, the infant child was sent to the desert to be suckled and weaned and to spend part of his

childhood among one of the Bedouin tribes, Bani Sa'd ibn Bakr, who live in the southeast of Makkah. This was the usual custom of all the great families in Makkah.

As Muhammad grew up, to earn his livelihood he pastured sheep and goats, as have done most prophets. His uncle and guardian, Abu Talib, also took him along with him on his travels with the trade caravans to greater Syria. He, thus, gained experience in trading. Because of his great honesty and diligence and the business acumen he showed in trading, he was soon being sought after to take charge of other people's merchandise, i.e. for those who could not travel themselves, and to trade on their behalf.

At the age of 25, Muhammad married a lady named Khadijah. A widow, Khadijah was 15 years older than Muhammad. She was a rich merchant of Makkah, and Muhammad had managed some of her trade affairs. It was she who proposed marriage. Khadijah remained Muhammad's wife and his closest friend and companion all her life till her death 25 years later. She bore him six children, of whom four daughters survived.

Until he was 40, Muhammad led a very uneventful life, showing no signs of the Prophet in the making that he was suddenly to be. What set him apart from his compatriots was his absolute truthfulness, trustworthiness and

integrity, his sense of justice and compassion for the poor, oppressed and downtrodden, as well as his total refusal to worship any idol or do anything immoral. He was popularly acclaimed for these qualities. Al-Amin, the Trustworthy, the Honest, al-Sadiq, the Truthful, were the titles on everybody's lips for Muhammad, which itself means the Praised One.

At a very young age, Muhammad enthusiastically joined a pact of chivalry for the establishment of justice and the protection of the weak and the oppressed made by certain chiefs of the Quraysh. He took part in the Oath when they all vowed 'that henceforth they would stand together as one man on the side of the oppressed against the oppressor until justice was done, whether the oppressed were a man of the Quraysh or one who had come from abroad.'

In later years, at Madinah, Muhammad used to say: 'I was present in the house of Abd Allah ibn Jud'an at so excellent a pact that I would not exchange my part in it for a herd of red camels, and if now, in Islam, I were summoned to a similar pact, I would gladly respond.'

A testimony to Muhammad's character was given by his wife Khadijah as she comforted him at the time when the first Revelation came to him. He said later: 'I fear for my life.' She replied: 'By no means! I swear by God

that God will never lose you. You join ties of relationship, you speak the truth, you bear people's burdens, you earn for the poor, you entertain guests, and you help against the vicissitudes which affect people's rights.'

Muhammad's wisdom was also acknowledged by all. Once, while repairing the Ka (bah, various clans of the Quraysh disputed violently as to who should have the honour of placing the Black Stone in its place. As they were about to unsheathe their swords and go to war, they made the Prophet their arbitrator and he brought them peace. He placed the Black Stone on his cloak and asked all the clan chiefs to hold its edges and raise it, and then he placed the Black Stone in its appointed spot with his own hands.

3. The Prophet at Makkah

Muhammad was not only a wise, just, compassionate, honoured and respected man, but also a profoundly contemplative and spiritual person. As he approached the age of 40, increasingly he came to spend more and more of his time in retreat, in contemplation, worship, prayer, in the Cave of Hira in Jabal al-Nur, sometimes for several days at a time.

It was here that one night before dawn, in the last part of the month of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting for Muslims, the Angel Gabriel appeared before him in the form of a man, and said to him: 'Read', and the Prophet

said: 'I am not a reader.' Thereupon, as he himself told it, 'the Angel Jibrail overwhelmed me in his embrace until I reached the limit of my endurance, Then he returned me and said: 'Read.' Again I said: 'I am not a reader.' Thrice the same thing happened. The third time, after releasing me from his embrace, the Angel finally said:

Read in the name of your Lord Who has created. He has created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is the Most Bountiful: He who has taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not. (al- 'Alaq 96: 1—5)

He recited these words after the Angel. And, then, the Angel said to him: 'You are the Messenger of God.'

Overawed by the unique experience of the Divine and overwhelmed by the huge burden of truth and message, he came out of the cave, his body trembling and his heart quaking. The Prophet returned home. 'Cover me! Cover me!' he said to his wife Khadijah. She quickly covered him with a cloak. Wrapped in the cloak, he told her what had happened in the Cave of Hira, how he had come to be appointed as God's Messenger.

The event in Hira, as narrated by Muhammad, was the supreme and most crucial event of his life. All that happened later has been happening over the centuries, and all the positions that he enjoys in the eyes of his followers, or his detractors, hinges on

the veracity, truthfulness, authenticity and nature of this event in Hira.

Yet the only thing to support his claim in this respect was and remains his own word. Was he truly a Messenger of God? Was what he saw real and true? Or, was it an hallucination? Was he a man possessed? Did he just compose in words as poets do, the ideas he found in his heart?

These questions are raised today, as they were raised by his compatriots then. Of these his wife of 15 years was to be the first judge. She knew him too well to doubt even for a moment that he could say anything but the truth. She also knew character. So, she believed in him without a moment's hesitation.

As with his wife Khadijah, so his closest friend Abu Bakr, his adopted son Zayd, his cousin Ali who lived with him, in short all who knew the Prophet most intimately, believed in his truthfulness most spontaneously.

Khadijah took the Prophet to her cousin Waraqah, who had converted to Christianity, and acquired great learning in Christian Scriptures. Both the Jews and Christians had been expecting the coming of the last Prophet as foretold in their Scriptures. Had not Moses, just before he died, been told: 'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth' (Deuteronomy 18: 18)? Who could be the brethren of the sons of Israel except the sons of

Ishmael?

Who could be the mysterious Shiloh but the Prophet Muhammad, about whom Jacob prophesied immediately before his death, that to him would be transferred the Divine mission in 'the latter days': And Jacob called his sons and said, gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days ... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him the gathering of the people be.' (Genesis 49: 1, 10)

And, whom did Jesus mean other than Muhammad when he said: 'If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you . . . he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak' (John 16: 7—14)?

Waraqah therefore had no doubts that the last Prophet had come; so, he, too, believed in him.

But most of the people of Makkah who had acclaimed him as the Trustworthy (Al-Amin) and the Truthful (Al-Sadiq) could not bring themselves to believe in him. Nor could the Jews and Christians who had for so long been living in expectation of his arrival. Not that they doubted his truthfulness or integrity. But they were not prepared to turn their whole established way of life upside down by submitting to his simple but radical message:

When I recite the Qur'an, I find the

following clear instructions: God is He who has created you, and the heavens and the earth, He is your only Lord and Master. Surrender your beings and your lives totally to Him alone, and worship and serve no one but Him. Let God be the only God.

The words I speak, He places in my mouth, I speak on His authority. Obey me and forsake all false claimants to human obedience. Everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to God; no man has a right to be master of another man, to spread oppression and corruption on earth. An eternal life beyond awaits you; where you will meet God face to face, and your life will be judged; for that you must prepare.

This simple message shook the very foundations of the Makkah society as well as the seventh-century world. That world, as today, lived under the yoke of many false gods: kings and emperors, priests and monks, feudal lords and rich businessmen, soothsayers and spell-binders who claimed to know what others knew not — all lorded over man. Not only that: man-made gods of their own desires, their tribal loyalties, their ancestors, and the powers of nature, like the nations, cultures, science and technology today all lorded over man.

The Prophet's message challenged them all, exposed them all, and threatened them all. His immediate opponents in Makkah could do no better

than brand him unconvincingly as a liar, a poet, a soothsayer, a man possessed. But how could he who was illiterate, he who had never composed a single verse, he who had shown no inclination to lead men, suddenly, have words flowing from his lips, so full of wisdom and light, morally so uplifting, specifically so enlivening, so beautiful and powerful, that they began to change the hearts and minds and lives of the hearers? His detractors and opponents had no answer. When challenged to produce anything even remotely similar to the words Muhammad claimed he was receiving from God, they could not match God's words.

First privately, then publicly, the Prophet continued to proclaim his Message. He himself had an intense, living relationship with God, totally committed to the Message and mission entrusted to him. Slowly and gradually, people came forward and embraced Islam. They came from all walks of life chiefs and slaves, businessmen and artisans, men and women — most of them young.

Some simply heard the Qur'an, and that was enough to transform them. Some saw the Prophet, and were immediately captivated by the light of mercy, generosity and humanity that was visible in his manners and morals, in his words and works, and in his face too.

So also the opposition continued

to harden and sharpen. It grew furious and ferocious. Those who joined the Prophet as also the Prophet himself were tortured in innumerable ways: they were mocked, abused, beaten, flogged, imprisoned, and boycotted. Some were subjected to much more inhuman tortures: made to lie on burning coal fires until the melting body fat extinguished them, or were dragged over burning sand and rocks. Yet such was the strength of their faith that none of them gave it up in the face of such trials and tribulations.

However, as the persecutions became unbearable, the Prophet said to them: 'If you go to Abyssinia, you will find there a king, a Christian, under whom no one suffers wrong.' About 80 of his followers, therefore, forsook their homes and emigrated to Abyssinia, where the Christian king gave them full protection despite the pleadings and machinations of the emissaries sent by the Quraysh chiefs. This was the first emigration of Islam.

All the while, the Prophet and his Companions continued to nourish their souls and intellects and strengthen their character and resolve for the great task that lay ahead. They met regularly, especially at a house near the Ka'bah called Dar al-Arqam, to read and study the Qur'an, to worship and pray, and to forge the ties of brotherhood.

Ten years passed, but the people of Makkah would not give their

allegiance to the Prophet's Message nor showed any signs of mitigating their persecution. At the same time, the Prophet lost his closest Companions and his wife Khadijah, as also his uncle Abu Talib, his chief protector in the tribal world of Makkah.

The Prophet now decided to carry his Message to the people of the nearby town of Taif, known for its wealth. In Taif, too, the tribal leaders mocked and ridiculed him and rejected his Message. They also stirred up their slaves and the street urchins to insult him, mock him, and throw stones at him. Thus, he was stoned until he bled and was driven out of Taif. And yet when his Companion, Zayd, requested him to curse the people of Taif, and when God placed at his command the Angel of Mountains to crush the valley of Taif if he so wished, he only prayed for their being guided. Such was the mercy and compassion of the one who is the 'mercy for all the worlds'.

The Taif episode was the hardest moment in the Prophet's life. It signaled the advent of a new era for him, when his mission was to find a secure base, and was to ascend higher and higher in the coming days until the end of time.

To mark that, one night the Prophet was awakened and taken, in the company of the Angel Gabriel, first to Jerusalem. There he was met by all the Prophets, who gathered together behind him as he prayed on the rock in

the centre of the site of the Temple, the spot where the Dome of the Rock stands today. From the rock, led by the Archangel, he ascended through the seven heavens and beyond. Thus he saw whatever God made him see, the heavenly worlds which no human eye can see, and which were the focus of his Message and mission.

During this journey, the five daily Prayers were ordained for his people. Furthermore, it was then that the Prophet was given the charter for the new society and state soon to be born, which, too, was prophesied and which is described in Surah al-Isra' (Chapter 17) of the Qur'an.

4. The Prophet at Madinah

The Message that Makkah and Taif rejected, found responsive hearts in Yathrib, a small oasis about 400 kilometers to the north of Makkah. Now known as Madinatun Nabi, the city of the Prophet, or Madinah Munawwara, the radiant city, it was destined to be the centre of the Divine light that was to spread to all parts of the world for all times to come.

In quick succession, the Prophet suffered the terrible loss of Khadijah, his intimate and beloved companion for 25 years, and of Abu Talib, his guardian and protector against the bloodthirsty Makkan foes, and encountered the worst ever rejection, humiliation and persecution at nearby Taif. As the Prophet reached the lowest point in his

vocation, God brought him comfort and solace. On the one hand, spiritually, He took him during the Night of the Ascension to the highest of highs, realities and divinities, face to face with the Unseen. And on the other, materially, he opened the hearts of the people of Yathrib to the Message and mission of Muhammad.

Soon after Muhammad's return from Taif and the Night Journey, at the time of the Pilgrimage, six men from Yathrib embraced Islam. They delivered the Message of Islam to as many as they could, and at the time of the next Pilgrimage in the year 621 CE, 12 persons came. They pledged themselves to the Prophet, that they would make no god beside God that they would neither steal nor commit fornication, nor slay their infants, nor utter slanders, nor disobey him in that which is right. The Prophet said: 'If you fulfill this pledge, then Paradise is yours.' This time the Prophet sent Mus'ab ibn (Umayr with them to teach them the Qur'an and Islam and to spread the Message of Islam.

More and more people over the course of a year tribal leaders, men and women — in Yathrib became Muslims. At the time of the next Pilgrimage, they decided to send a delegation to the Prophet, make a pledge to him, and invite him and all Muslims in Makkah to Yathrib as a sanctuary and as a base for spreading the Divine Message of

Islam.

In all 73 men and two women came. They met the Prophet at 'Aqabah. They pledged to protect the Prophet as they would protect their own women and children, and to fight against all men, red and black, even if their nobles were killed and they suffered the loss of all their possessions. When asked what would be theirs if they fulfilled their pledge, the Prophet said: 'Paradise'. Thus, the beginning was made the foundations of the Islamic society, state and civilization were set.

The road was now open for the persecuted and tortured followers of the Prophet to come to the House of Islam that was to be Madinah. He, therefore, instructed them to emigrate, and gradually most of them found their way to Yathrib.

Their Makkah foes could not bear to see the Muslims living in peace. They knew the power of the Prophet's Message, they knew the strength of those dedicated believers who cared nothing for the age-old Arab customs and ties of kinship, and who if they had to would fight for their faith. The Makkans sensed the danger that the Muslims' presence in Madinah posed for their northern trade caravan routes. They saw no other way to stop all this but to kill the Prophet.

Hence they hatched a conspiracy: one strong and well-connected young man was to be nominated by each clan,

and all of them were to pounce upon and kill the Prophet one morning as he came out of his house, so that his blood would be on all the clans' hands. Thus, the Prophet's clan would have to accept blood-money in place of revenge.

Informed of the plot by the Angel Gabriel, and instructed to leave Makkah for Madinah, the Prophet went to Abu Bakr's house to finalize the travel arrangements. Abu Bakr was overjoyed at having been chosen for the honour and blessing of being the Prophet's Companion on this blessed and momentous, sacred and epoch-making journey. He offered his she-camel to the Prophet, but the Prophet insisted on paying its price.

On the fateful night, as darkness fell, the youths selected by the Quraysh leaders to kill the Prophet surrounded his house. They decided to pounce on him when he came out of his house for the dawn Prayers.

Meanwhile, the Prophet handed over all the money left by the Makkans with him for safe keeping to Ali. Ali offered to lie in the Prophet's bed. The Prophet slipped out of his house, threw a little dust in their direction, and walked past his enemies, whose eyes were still on the house.

He met Abu Bakr at his house, and they both travelled to a nearby cave, the Jabal Thur. When the Quraysh realized that the Prophet had evaded them, they were furious. They looked for

him everywhere and on all roads; they also offered a reward of 100 she-camels for anybody who would bring them the Prophet, dead or alive.

A tribal chief, Suraqa, sighted the Prophet and followed him, hoping to earn the reward. The Prophet, with bloodthirsty foes in pursuit and an uncertain future ahead of him in Madinah, told Suraqa: 'A day will soon come when Kisra's golden hand bracelet will be in Suraqa's hands.' Thereafter, Suraqa retreated, and the Prophet proceeded towards Madinah.

This was Hijrah, the emigration — a small distance in space, a mighty leap in history, an event that was to become a threshold in the shaping of the Islamic Ummah. This is why the Muslims date their calendar from Hijrah, and not from Hira or from the birth of the Prophet.

In Qubah, 10 kilometres outside Madinah, the Prophet made his first sojourn. Here he built the first mosque. Here he also made his first public address: 'Spread peace among yourselves, give away food to the needy, pray while people sleep - and you enter Paradise, the house of peace.'

Three days later, the Prophet entered Madinah. Men, women, children, the entire populace came out on the streets and jubilantly welcomed him. Never was there a day of greater rejoicing and happiness. 'Come is the Prophet! Come is the Prophet!', sang the little children.

The first thing the Prophet did after arriving in Madinah was to weld the Emigrants (called Muhajirs) and the hosts, called the Helpers (or Ansar) into one brotherhood. Still today this brotherhood remains the hallmark of the Muslims. One person from the Emigrants was made the brother of one from amongst the Helpers. The Helpers offered to share equally all that they possessed with the Emigrants.

So the Muslims were forged into a close-knit community of faith and brotherhood, and the structure of their society and polity was being built. The first structure was also raised. This was the Mosque, or Masjid, the building consecrated to the worship of One God — called Masjid al-Nabawi, the Prophet's Mosque. Since then the Masjid has also remained the hallmark of the Muslims' collective and social life, the convenient space for the integration of the religious and political dimensions of Islam, a source of identification, a witness to Muslim existence.

At the same time, steps were taken and the required institutions built to integrate the entire social life around the centre and pivot of the worship of One God. For this purpose, five daily Prayers in congregation were established.

Ramadan, fasting every day from dawn to sunset for an entire month, was also prescribed. Similarly, to establish 'giving' as the way of life, zakat, a

percentage of one's wealth to be given in the way of God, was made obligatory.

As long as there was no different instruction from God, the Muslims followed the practices observed by the Jews and Christians. Hence, they used to pray with their faces turned towards Jerusalem. But soon this direction to which the Muslims faced in Prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah. This historic episode signaled the formation of a new Muslim community, charged with Divine trust and the mission of God's guidance, replacing the earlier Jews and Christians, and following the most ancient message of Abraham, turning towards the most ancient House of God, built by him.

5. Attacks by the Makkans

The Prophet, after arriving in Madinah, first formed an alliance with the Jews. Next, he approached all the nearby tribes and tried to persuade them to make an alliance or at least enter into a no war pact. Many did. Thus the small group evicted from Makkah assumed strategic importance.

The Makkans who had earlier planned to kill the 'Prophet, were now determined to annihilate this nascent community of Islam. Having failed in all other ways they decided on a military solution.

A heavily armed Makkan force marched towards in the second year after Hjah, on the pretext of protecting

their trade caravan. The Prophet, despite his community's small number and lack of arms, decided to face their threat boldly. On the 17th of Ramadan, at Badr, the two forces met and fought a battle in which 313 Muslims defeated the 1,000 strong Makkan army.

Seventy of the Makkan chiefs who had been most active and vehement in persecuting the Muslims were killed; many others were taken prisoner, later to be released for ransom. For the first time, prisoners of war were treated humanely and kindly; they were fed and housed in the same way as their captors ate and lived.

In the third year after Hijrah, a 3,000-strong Makkan force again marched on Madinah, both to avenge the defeat at Badr and to make another attempt to defeat the Muslims; 700 of them were mailed and 200 mounted. The Muslims numbered only 700. The two sides met just outside Madinah near the Uhud Mountain. The initial Muslim victory was, however, reversed; the Muslim contingent posted to protect the rear, violated the Prophet's instructions and abandoned its position, The Quraysh attacked from behind, and victory was turned into defeat, resulting in the deaths of about 65 Muslims. The Makkans, however, failed to pursue their advantage and clinch victory.

The Makkans now planned to make a final assault on Madinah to settle the matter once and for all. All

Bedouin tribes, Jews, and hypocrites within Madinah joined forces with them. In the fifth year after Hijrah, 24,000 of them advanced on Madinah. It was impossible to fight them on the open battlefield, or defend Madinah which was without walls. The Muslims therefore defended themselves by digging ditches all round Madinah. After laying siege to Madinah for 25 days, due to inner dissension, lack of supplies, cold weather and high winds, the Makkan army was forced to withdraw. This was the turning point in the history of confrontation with the Makkans. Madinah was never to be attacked again.

From the beginning, the Jews were given full rights of citizenship, yet they still committed acts of treason and treachery. Some had to be expelled; some were killed as a result of judgments given by an arbitrator appointed by them. However, subsequent generations of Jews were never held responsible for the misdeeds of the Jews of Madinah, as they were in Christendom for 2,000 years, for the crucifixion of Jesus. Instead, the Muslims always treated them justly and kindly. The next year, the sixth after Hijrah, the Prophet and 1,400 Companions journeyed to Makkah to perform umrah, the lesser Pilgrimage, in accordance with several traditions of the time. They were unarmed. The Quraysh chiefs, against all established and accepted traditions, refused them

admission. However, the Quraysh were now so low in morale and strength that they had to sign a peace treaty with the Prophet, the Hudaibiyah Treaty.

Though the terms appeared highly unfavourable, even humiliating, for the Muslims, they made tremendous gains by virtue of this Treaty. They, who were driven out of Makkah and attacked thrice, were now recognized as an equal force, to be treated respectfully, taken seriously. Peace provided an opportunity for the wavering and the neutral, even the hostile, to witness Islam at first hand, and many sensed the imminent victory of Islam. The result was that many Makkans and Arab tribes either embraced Islam or made peace with the Prophet.

As soon as the Hudaibiyah Treaty was signed, the Prophet sent letters to various neighbouring Arab and non-Arab rulers, including Chosroes of Iran and Heraclitus of the Byzantine Empire. He invited them to Islam, and assured them that he did not covet their kingdoms or riches. They could retain both, but only if they surrendered themselves to serve and worship the One God.

The Quraysh, however, soon broke the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. It was, thus, time to deal with their continuing hostility. The Prophet marched to Makkah, and captured the town. The fall of Makkah witnessed unparalleled acts of mercy, forgiveness and generosity.

Not a single drop of blood was shed. Everybody who remained indoors was granted security of life and property. The Prophet forgave all who had been his bitterest foes all his life, who had persecuted him and planned to kill him, who had driven him out of Makkah, and who had marched thrice to Madinah to defeat the Muslims.

The neighbouring Byzantine Empire now prepared to attack and destroy the Muslim community in Madinah. However, when the Prophet marched to Tabuk on the northern border, his determination, courage and timely response made the enemy lose heart and withdraw.

6. Society Building

Throughout those years, when the Prophet was surrounded by hostile forces and ultimately triumphed over them, he continued to purify the souls and uplift the morals of his followers and lay the foundations of a just and compassionate family, society and state. His mission was now complete: he had created a new man, and changed the lives of multitudes of men and women by bringing them in total surrender to their Creator. He had created a new society: one based on justice. In his own life example, and in the Qur'an, mankind was given the light and way of a godly life.

It is remarkable that this entire epoch-making revolution which

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Around the World

Bush Calls Iraq War ‘Unjustified, Brutal’ in Ukraine Speech Gaffe

Former US President George W Bush mistakenly described the invasion of Iraq as “brutal” and “unjustified” before correcting himself to say he meant to refer to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Bush made the comments in a speech, while he was criticising Russia’s political system. “The result is an absence of checks and balances in Russia, and the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq,” Bush said, before correcting himself and shaking his head. “I mean, of Ukraine.” He jokingly blamed the mistake on his age as the audience burst into laughter. In 2003, when Bush was president, the US led an invasion of Iraq over weapons of mass destruction that were never found. The conflict killed thousands of people. The remarks went viral on social media and stoked anger among Iraqis who criticised the former president. “The moment of truth has come — the invasion of Iraq is a lifelong nightmare that plagues your conscience,” one user Hamza Qusai wrote.

‘Will Oppose Nordic Nations’ Nato Bid’

Sweden and Finland’s efforts to seek NATO defence bloc membership could possibly prove unsuccessful after Turkey confirmed that it will oppose their membership applications, accusing them of failing to take a clear stance against terrorism. Any membership bid must be unanimously approved by NATO’s 30 members. The Nordic nations plan to jointly apply in NATO as Russia’s war in Ukraine ends a long-held stance of military non alignment for the two countries. “We will not say ‘yes’ to those (countries) who apply sanctions to Turkey to join security organisation NATO,” Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

This comes on a day when Sweden prime minister Magdalena Andersson made an official announcement to seek NATO membership.

Turkmenistan Bans Beauty Services For Women: Report

Turkmenistan has reportedly introduced a ban on several beauty services and “sexy” fashion accessories for women that include dying/bleaching their hair, or using false nails or eyelashes. Restrictions have also been imposed on women undergoing cosmetic surgeries, such as breast augmentation, lip fillers, and even eyebrow microblading, which is widely popular among Turkmen young women. Authorities reportedly introduced the ban in April to mitigate “foreign” trends harming “Turkmencilik” (Turkmen traditional values).

UAE’s Prez Sheikh Khalifa Dies Aged 73

United Arab Emirates president Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan died on Friday aged 73, the government said in a statement. The UAE announced a 40-day mourning period and a three-day suspension of work in the government and private sector. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled Sheikh Khalifa’s death and India has announced one day of state mourning on Saturday, with the national flag to be flown half-mast.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the man who has long controlled the levers of power in the UAE, has succeeded his late brother as ruler.

The UAE’s federal council elected Sheikh Mohammed, commonly referred to as MBZ, as the country’s president, according to state media on Saturday. Sheikh Mohammed has frequently used his clout to intervene in regional conflicts with one of West Asia’s best equipped militaries. ■

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