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Religion as Guardian of Life

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Time is a proportionate and balanced mixture of stability and change, stagnation and movement. If it loses either of these characteristics, it will lose its relevance. Islam as a religion accepts this fact and is ready to make necessary accommodations, but it holds the position that as religion it has to guide life, not simply follow it. Religion, as Islam pleads, does not have to passively approve all changes. It is not lifeless like the needle of a barometer which moves up or down mechanically to measure the pressure of the atmosphere, or a weather-cock fixed on the top of a building which moves to show the direction of the wind. The function of religion is not simply to acknowledge and show the changes which are occurring at a time. Its obligation is to check whether a change is healthy or unhealthy, constructive or destructive. It has to evaluate the effect of a change on mankind at large and on its promoters in particular. It judges all pros and cons of a change before it approves it. It, therefore, will discourage a change if it is destructive. It may even oppose the latter kind.

At this point we can see a clear difference between religion and morality. Religion feels obliged to oppose wrong inclinations, whereas morality simply identifies them. ■

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Wisdom of Qur'an

A Great Sign of Allah

"Had you looked at them in the Cave it would have appeared to you that when the sun rose, it moved away from their cave to the right; and when it set, it turned away from them to the left, while they remained in a spacious hollow in the Cave. This is one of the Signs of Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides, he alone is led aright; and whomsoever Allah lets go astray, you will find for him no guardian to direct him."

(Al-Qur'ân – 18:17)

At the time when the People of the Cave had to take shelter in the mountains, the town of Ephesus was a major centre of idolatry and magic in Asia Minor. The splendid temple to the goddess Diana, which then adorned the town, was famous the world over. The sorcerers, soothsayers and amulet-writers of Ephesus were well-known. The Jews also had an important share in this business. The plight of righteous people in this atmosphere – an atmosphere charged with polytheism and superstition – was summed up in the verse 18:20.

The presence of some people in a dark cave in a mountainous area, guarded by a dog, presented such an awesome spectacle that those who observed them would have run for their lives, presumably assuming them to be robbers. This was one of the main reasons why the truth about these people remained a mystery for so long. No one simply had the courage to enter the cave and find out the truth of the matter. This was indeed a great Sign of Allah. ■

Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

Secret of Divine Favour

Abu Hurairah relates that the Holy Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) said: "While a man was walking through a waterless piece of land, he heard a voice coming from the cloud saying, 'Give water to the garden of So and So.' On this the cloud proceeded in a certain direction and retained water over a rocky piece of land. The water running through small rivulets flowed into a large channel. This man followed the channel till it encircled a garden and he saw the owner standing inside the garden working with a shovel distributing the water. He asked the owner of the garden: 'O servant of Allah! What is your name?' He told him his name, which was the same as he had heard from the cloud. The owner of the garden then asked him: 'O Servant of Allah! Why did you ask my name?' He replied: 'I heard a voice from the cloud, from which this water has rained, saying: 'Water the garden of So and So; may I know as to what you do to your garden to become entitled for this favour.' He said: 'Now since you have asked me, I will let you know: when the produce of this garden is ready, I give away one third in charity, earmark another third for myself and my family and use the remaining third in sowing and another crop in the garden."

(Sahih Muslim)

The hadith throws light on the lifestyle of a pious person, who earns money by fair means and spends it on others. ■

DESTRUCTION OF HUMAN VALUES

The decline of human values and degradation of morality are a global phenomenon and Indian continent cannot escape from their effects. In the name of modernity we are sacrificing all those precious values which distinguish us from other creatures. The world has gradually moved away from the way of nature towards perverse directions that are inevitably leading us to destruction. The present day chaos is the result of our losing the human values.

In recent time we have seen how so called powerful nations have killed hundreds and thousands of innocent men, women and children in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Palestine. That crime was committed at global level but coming down to our surroundings we find that people of the same nation are nursing hatred from each other on the grounds of caste, region and community. Considering Indian problems we find that till middle of the fourth decade of last century major communities viz Hindus and Muslims were united as their main aim was to drive away Britishers. But in later years of that decade due to demand for separate home-land for Muslims and subsequently its creation created lot of bad blood resulting in large scale riots, murders and arson. However, situation could stabilize after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

In mid 1950's subdued passions again erupted and in many parts of the country communal riots badly affected the Muslim community. To crush that demon of communalism noted Islamic scholar Syed Abdul Hasan Ali Nadwi aka Ali Miyan came out of his religious conclave and in 1954 laid the foundation of "Payame Insaniyat". Pandit Sunder Lal, Pandit Vishambhar Nath Pande and many other non Muslim secular minded leaders joined him. He sought the help of Acharya Vinoba Bhave also.

The team travelled extensively and held mammoth public meetings to make public aware of human values and instil love of humanity in their hearts. Maulana achieved great success in his mission and thankfully after him his successor, other followers are carrying out that message of peace and tranquility.

In furtherance of that cause Maulana Azad Memorial Academy arranged a seminar on April 22, 2013 at Shaheed Smriti auditorium, Mahanagar Lucknow. The topic was the relevance of human behaviour in present day life. Apart from prominent religious representatives of different communities a good number of Social activists spoke on the occasion. Addressing the huge gathering Rev. Father Agnesh quoted from his holy book Bible relevant verses highlighting the ordain of God to His disciples to maintain peace on earth. Sardar Devendar Singh referred to Guru Granth Sahib and emphasized that Sikh religion is an amalgam of what Baba Fareed, Sant Kabeer, Guru Ravidas and others practised and preached. Mr. S.R. Arun in his address laid emphasis on a perfect human behaviour quoting from Dalai Lama and Maulana Azad's Sayings he asked to shun religious bigotry and throw away the garb of communalism. President of All India Muslim Personal Law Board and a very learned Islamic Scholar Maulana Syed Mohd. Rabey Hasani Nadwi in his speech warned the disruptive elements to shun their activities. Help in removing distrust between different communities. He quoted late Maulana Ali Mian who always said that for the progress and unity of the nation we must preserve secularism and make the democracy strong. ■

S.A.

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The Message of the Quran

-S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

And be not like those who forgot Allah, and He caused them to forget their own selves.

(al-Hashr 59:19)

Man is by nature self-centred. His own interests preoccupy him. His love for others is prompted by selfish ends. Therefore, he loves those who love him: He is not drawn to those who hate him, even though he may be a paragon of virtue. Self-love activates man to undertake numerous pursuits. All his actions are centred on this. Man may forget everything but his self-interests are always close to heart. He may disregard even his wife, children, family members and relatives at the expense of ensuring his own welfare. This is often observed in an hour of crisis. It is an everyday occurrence, for it is rooted deep in human nature. One who contends against this observation is most likely to be refuted by everyone. For it is quite an event, to find someone practising self-abnegation while working for the welfare of others. The one who disregards his own interests for the sake of others inevitably becomes the centre of attention. At times, he may risk his own life to rescue others; Let us therefore discuss this phenomenon at some length.

The Qur'an proclaims that those forgetful of Allah are liable to forget their own selves. Once man banishes God from his life, his orientation is disturbed. He is wholly given over to worldliness. He is seen hankering after material objects, oblivious to higher truths. Material things become an end in themselves. Lost in this maze, he forgets his own self. This obviously results in a crisis, bringing an end to such a person's feelings and emotions. No longer does he regret the loss incurred by him. Rather the malaise is on account of a shift in focus, as man replaces God with his own self. The more he turns away from God, the greater is the risk of self-destruction.

In our times the thrust of this Qur'anic passage has become much more pronounced, in comparison to earlier times. For man is now totally self-centred. He is given to newer and more means of entertainment and luxury; Self-centredness has assumed the form of a whole philosophy of life, one that is publicised on a very wide scale. It is common knowledge that whereas man is much concerned over each and every issue, he pays scant attention to his ultimate end. He hardly seems to care about his final

destination. His enjoyment of life is little, though he spends all his time on worldly pursuits. He is reduced to a cog in a wheel. He leads his life like a robot, shorn of real feelings and emotions.

His life has become too mechanical, with his basic needs thus being met. He is bound ruthlessly to social customs, obliged to lead a certain standard of life, as he works for others. All his time and energy are for others. His movements are governed by others as well. What he lacks is real joy, nutritious food, healthy surroundings, spiritual solace, peace of mind, and such love and joy which may satisfy him. He has little time and energy to reflect on the higher issues of life. His mechanical life enervates him so much, sapping his heart and mind, that he is not even aware of his loss. He does not even have control over himself and his surroundings.

The divine punishment for banishing God from both our private and public lives is terrible. What a great pity then that vast empires populated by millions of men and women are guilty of this heinous crime. There is a sense of general apathy everywhere. No one seems concerned about such open rebellion of God. There is no sense of loss over the material way of life, which turns us blind to noble objectives. Nor is there any real wealth or comfort. On the one hand, there is an abundance of food items and

medicines and on the other, no one enjoys good health. Fast modes of transport are meant for comfort. Yet speed now has become a goal unto itself. There are problems of all sorts, both natural and man-made. Whilst it is easy to travel, man has lost his sense of direction. In the past, it was hazardous to undertake a journey but today the risks of travelling have been reduced considerably. However, the objective of travel has become meaningless. Where once it was hard for one town to communicate with another, now there are swift means of communicating. Nonetheless, human relationships have become devoid of love and affection. Selfish motives dictate every move. While it was once quite a task to gather news, now, people are tired of false and tendentious information. Such abuse of the means of communication has reduced technological equipment to a nuisance, rather a curse. Life has lost its meaning, purpose and direction.

The Qur'anic view is that this malaise stems from our forgetting God. Our only way out therefore consists in seeking God. Faith, obedience, submission are the only solution. Mankind should shun rebellion and revolt, disobedience and indifference to God. The sooner mankind turns to Allah, the better it will be. ■

Holy Qur'an and the Natural World

-Mohammed Shihabuddin Nadwi

The holy Qur'an is not a book of history, philosophy or science. Nevertheless the Book does comprise history, philosophy and science too. Of course the narration and description are not purely historical, philosophical or scientific. Its basic view point culminates towards admonition and discernment. It aims to draw the man towards worshiping God and keep him away from revolting or heresy. This is one of the features of Qur'anic guidance, and it leads the reader towards reasoning and reflection. It can thus be authentically concluded that while this Divine Book is a Code of Life as far as the doctrines of faith are concerned, it is equally a guide in case of scientific and reflective thinking. It safeguards man from wandering wildly in the realms of philosophy and sciences. It is thus a complete guide from every angle. This is a weighty, reasonable and convincing proof for its being from the Creator Himself.

The Divine Signs

Since the holy Qur'an is a book of guidance for mankind for all the times, its convincing arguments for worshiping Him appeal and affect the minds belonging to any period. Its

discursive and logical arguments appeal the common man while the modern inquisitive minds are convinced by its scientific and scholarly approach. Both these types of arguments are referred as AYAATH or SIGNS in the holy Book. These are the Natural Signs that lead man into seeking insight deep into the matter and material objects, so that he can unravel the secrets of Nature through continuous and untiring research and experimentation.

From this point of view the natural phenomena and their complete systems serve as milestones in the realm of knowledge. It is for this purpose alone that at innumerable places, the Qur'an wants man to reflect on and about the Earth, the Heavens, the Moon, the stars, the rivers, the mountains, plants, minerals, animals and everything that reiterates the creativity of the creator and arrive at the fundamentals through logical and scientific view points. In fact at many places man has been urged forcefully not to deviate or run away from such scientific results that do declare loudly the existence of a Being Who is all-powerful, creative and administrative. The following references from the holy Qur'an are quite convincing:

On the earth are Signs (proofs for the natural phenomena) for those of assured Faith, as also in your own selves: will you not then see?

(Zariat 20-21)

Verily, in the alternation of the Night and the Day, and in all that Allah has created, in the heavens and the earth, are Signs for those who fear Him.

(Yunus: 6)

And in the creation of yourselves and the fact that animals are scattered (through the earth) are Signs (physical and biological proofs) for those of assured Faith.

(Jathiya: 4)

Here the word *Ayaath* has been used. It is the plural of *Ayah*. It refers to all such natural signs and symbols that are so distributed that whenever the material objects and their controlling systems become the subject matter of research and study, they spring up as logical manifestations of the creativity and providential powers of sustenance of the One and Only God. Thus the Universe is an Open Book wherein the Most Exalted Creator has imprinted His Signs.

Three Basic Units of Divine Faith

Speaking rationally and from the *Shariah* point of view, guidance refers to the details involved in the righteous living on the divine principles. These

details are based on three fundamental units. They are Unity of God, Prophethood and the Day of Resurrection. These units constitute the essence of Islamic faith. They may as well be described to constitute the fundamentals of the teachings of all Prophets. These three units are the pillars on which the edifice of worshipping the One God rests. Unless these are justified the process of worshipping does not start at all. For this purpose the Qur'an takes up the course of rational, logical and scientific reasoning.

Because the holy Qur'an is an eternal Book of Guidance, the scientific and intellectual arguments presented therein hold good for the evolutionary needs of every epoch. This will help in convincing every sceptical mind about the Unity of God, the Prophethood and the Resurrection Day. The holy Qur'an is thus equipped fully to meet all future challenges with regard to developing sciences or creative problems. Then can only the Book be Guidance to the entire humanity and for all times. It thus has a full description of even such natural sciences and problems that have gained unparalleled importance in the modern times. There is no room for any confrontation or contradiction between the laws of nature and divine laws as laid down in the holy Qur'an. In fact there is complete coordination and consistency between them. The

holy Qur'an argues about all natural phenomena and convinces the human mind. This undoubtedly is a characteristic proof of it being a complete code of life for the entire humanity and all times. Such logical and scientific diction is lacking in religious scriptures other than the holy Qur'an.

Coordination between Natural and Divine Laws

Almighty Allah has divined two types of laws in the universe. One - the religious and divine laws and the other, the natural and physical laws. The holy Qur'an is actually the book of religious and divine laws but it discusses the universe and the laws associated with its existence and governance too. However the planning is such that it is left to the man himself to work on the natural and physical laws which eventually substantiates the divine laws. One must not forget that much on the similar lines as the divine laws for guiding the human life He has drawn a natural system for controlling the universe and for which the principle and rules have already been set. This fact has been revealed in the holy Book at several places. For example,

It is He Who created all things, and ordered them in due proportions.

(Furqan: 2)

Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure.

(Qamar: 49)

He rules (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth.

(Sajda: 5)

As and when the man utilises his instinctive research capabilities to explore the universe, he comes across such astounding facts that speak themselves for the high workmanship of the Creator thus proving convincingly the validity of the Divine Laws. And so a complete coordination and harmony is established between the physical and divine laws. One should note here that science only unravels the secrets of the nature or the divine secrets. It does not create anything on its own. The creator of this universe is one who has made it according to a definite plan. Whenever the natural laws are expounded they confirm the main and fundamental principles laid down in the Book. The holy Qur'an says:

Say: 'It (Qur'an) has been sent down by Him Who knows the mystery (that is) in the heavens and the earth!'

(Furqan: 6)

Should they not prostrate before Allah (worship), who brings to light what is hidden in the heavens and the earth?

(Naml: 25)

Confirmation of Qur'anic Claims

The relationship between the holy Qur'an and Science rests on the facts that are revealed through modern research and experimentation. It is established that such confirmation is found aplenty in the natural phenomena. Based on this alone, the holy Book exhorts repeatedly to study, reflect and exploit nature, matter and the theories that control all physical, chemical and biological processes. Through such study the unity, creativity, divinity and the cherishing capacities of Al-mighty Allah have been established. For example:

Among His Signs (proofs of the natural phenomena) is this, He created you from dust, and then behold, ye are men scattered (far and wide)!

(Rum: 20)

And among His Signs (cherishing symbols) is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and in your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know.

(Rum: 22)

And among His Signs (power and strength) is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the living creatures that He has scattered through them

(Shura: 29)

Howsoever one reflects on this material universe and its wonderful

working system, everywhere would one discover the presence of an all-powerful mind. Whether he studies the heavenly bodies or dissects an atom or observes human bodies and their colour differences or reviews the biological systems or examines the minerals or explores the space, he will simply be enthralled by the craftsmanship and artistic control of the Almighty God over them. In every physical, chemical, biological, geological and celestial system, he will find an unparallel orderly arrangement, superb industry, technical perfection and artistry. Any system governing the functioning of these systems is flawless absolutely. It points to an expert engineer, administrator and technician.

The above discussion has made it crystal clear that there is neither any conflict nor controversy between the holy Book and the modern sciences. All scientific researches, discoveries and inventions that are purely technical and logical, all confirm the Qur'anic versions. The conflict, if any, is only between religion and heresy. There is no contradiction whatsoever between Qur'anic deliberations and natural laws, facts and systems. It is the interpretation of these facts and working systems from purely materialistic viewpoint that is objectionable since it curbs the realities. The scientific discoveries only strengthen the Qur'anic claims. They

confirm, expound and expand the arguments, statements and urgings of the holy Book. In fact they point out the systematic planning of the Master Craftsman Who inspires and induces man to take up the study himself so that the study itself can assert the claims of the Creator. This verse points to the same fact:

We shall show them Our Signs in the universe and in their own selves until it becomes manifest to them that this (Qur'an) is the truth. Is it not sufficient in regard to your Lord that He is a witness over all things?

(Fussilat: 53)

The Significance of Nature's Study

In conclusion it can be well said that there is great significance of the study of nature and universe. It is only through systematic argumentation that the laws of nature can assert the Unity of God, Prophethood and the Day of Resurrection. Then only can the heretics be made to realise their folly and rectify themselves fully convinced. The divine arguments about this aspect are:

... this is only a Reminder and a plain Qur'an, that it may give warning to him who is living (wise) and that the Word may be justified against the disbelievers.

(Yasin: 69-70)

Blessed be He Who sent down the Criterion (of right and wrong i.e., this Qur'an) to His slave

Muhammed that it may be an admonition to all creatures.

(Furqan: 1)

... Say (O Muhammed!) 'This Qur'an has been revealed to me by inspiration, that I may warn therewith you and whomsoever it may reach.'

(An'am: 19)

On this basis alone it has been claimed that the holy Qur'an has, in principle, a clear description about everything that distinguishes Truth from Falsehood and which serves as an indication of all such scientific achievements that man can encounter in future.

And we have sent down to you the Book (Qur'an) as an exposition of everything and a Guidance and a Mercy and Glad Tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah as Muslims).

(Nahl: 89)

It is hence ordained that those who avoid the study of nature or run away from the binding laws of nature that control, propagate and allow the material world to grow, should be condemned. They will not be granted any excuse for their carelessness and negligence.

And how many Signs (of His Cherishing Capacities) in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away

from them!

(Yusuf: 105)

Do they not look in the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all things that Allah has created and that it may be that the end of their lives is near. In what Message after this will they then believe?

(Araf: 185)

Need for Compiling the Argumentative System of the Qur'an

The significance of the study of nature and universe in detail can be ascertained from the fact that according to Imam Ghazzali, the famous master and scholar of Islamic jurisprudence, there are 763 verses in the holy Book wherein the attention of the reader has been drawn convincingly towards this aspect.

This particular branch constitutes one of the five main topics of the holy Book. It must also be noted that the words Ayah and Ayaath have been used 382 times in the holy Book. A majority of these verses are those that remind human beings to study and reflect on this universe and the systems prevailing in it. Man has been advised to utilise knowledge, science, wisdom, mediation, discriminating capacities, observation and inquisitiveness while making this study.

Thus the compilation of the argumentative system of the holy Qur'an becomes imperative. This is the need of the hour. This will certainly help to bring out the modern man from the snares of modernism and waywardness.

The Marvel of Islam and the Duties of Ulema

As can be seen Islam is a perfect code of life. It has such a complete and comprehensive constitution for the whole life that the functioning becomes harmonious on both religious and scientific planes. In fact, it proves that the source of both of these studies is one and the same, and they corroborate each other and so the society can progress in real sense provided both are allowed to function hand in hand. It was the Church that had bifurcated them. Humanity has suffered enormously from such bifurcation. It has helped humanity to land in the lap of heresy and materialism. Such a grave mistake must never be repeated. There is need for presenting a consolidated system and code of life by correlating the sciences and the Divine Laws in the light of the Qur'anic wisdom. And such a service can be rendered by our Ulema confidently. They must come forward and deliver the goods so that humanity is saved from falling into the pits of heresy, discontent, disharmony and annihilation. ■

The Arab World – an Arab Perspective

-Zafrul-Islam Khan*

The Arab region is called the "Middle East" these days though it is an incorrect term. "Middle East" and "Levant"/"Near East" are colonial terms coined by the Europeans. The British coined the term "Middle East" around 1850. Since "Middle East" does not cover the whole Arab region, they now add North Africa to it - so it becomes Middle East & North Africa - MENA for short, a term preferred by the American administration in a conscious effort to avoid using the word "Arab". Here in India we use the term "West Asia" which, too, is inaccurate and can at best include Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and the Asian part of Turkey. The Arabs themselves call their region "Al-Watan Al-'Arabi" (The Arab Homeland) or "Al-'Alam al-'Arabi" (The Arab World). It is a coherent region united by language, religion, culture, history and heritage.

The Arab countries occupy 14,291,469 km² which is around 10.2% of the world's land mass. Out of this, 72.45% is located in Africa and 27.55% is located in Asia. The distance from east to west of the Arab World is 6000 kms and 4000 kms, from north to south.

The Arab world today has a population of 338 million. Despite all

the wealth and resources, 30% of them are illiterate. There are around 18 million Arabs living in the diasporas (mahajir). The majority population is Muslim following Sunni Islam with sizeable Christian minorities in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. Jews are found in Yemen. Earlier, there were flourishing Jewish communities in Egypt, Iraq and Syria but most of them left for Israel after its emergence in 1948.

This region comprises of two distinct parts, eastern and western, which are referred to as "Al-Sharq Al-'Arabi" (The Arab East) and "Al-Maghrib Al-'Arabi" (The Arab West). Broadly, the Asian part of the Arab World is the Arab East while the African part is the Arab West although Egyptians commonly visualise themselves as part of the Eastern flank.

Beside the Arab hinterland countries, the Arab League embraces Somalia and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and Comoro Islands in the Indian Ocean. There are other countries which too speak Arabic but have not been invited to join the Arab League like Eritrea, Niger, Chad, Mali and Senegal.

The Arab World consists of four distinct regions which are as follows:

- a. The Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Yemen, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.
- b. Fertile Crescent: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.
- c. North Africa: Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara and Mauritania.
- d. East Africa: Somalia, Djibouti and Comoro Islands.

The Arab League

The Arab World has its own UN-like organisation called the "League of Arab Countries". It was established in 1945 with a view to further Arab unity. Today, it consists of 23 countries including Palestine which was allowed full membership of the Arab League during the League's Rabat Summit Meeting in 1974 when PLO was recognized as the "sole representative" of the Palestinian people and PLO offices were accorded the status of full-fledged embassies. Outside the Arab World, India was the first country to recognise the PLO in 1975 and accorded it the status of a full-fledged embassy in March 1980.

After the unprecedented oil price hike as a result of the short-lived oil embargo in 1973 against countries supporting the Israeli aggression, unprecedented wealth came to the oil and gas-producing Arab countries. This wealth was squandered on building

world's biggest mosques, biggest towers and on thousands of unproductive show-pieces which run thanks to millions of imported cheap labourers from neighbouring countries. The total Arab GDP in 1999 was US\$ 531.2 billion. The total Arab exports were US\$ 1066 billion in 2008 while the total imports were only US\$ 653 billion.

The Arab countries possess enormous human, material and natural resources. But there is no strong economic cooperation between them despite umpteen agreements and covenants. Railway lines do not connect one Arab country with another. There is no common electrical grid. There is no agricultural cooperation although the fertile lands of only one country, Sudan, are sufficient to feed all the Arabs and more. A programme for common arms production with Egypt and Saudi Arabia as main partners could not take off. There is a customs union between the Arab countries although it exists on paper as still there are no agreed customs rules.

Apart from the petrochemical industry, which is totally established and manned by foreigners, there is no serious industry in the Arab countries. There is no Arab university in the world's top 500 universities, although there are a number of Israeli universities and research institutes in that list.

Almost the whole Arab World, from east to west, was part of the powerful Ottoman Caliphate for over four centuries (since 1570 CE). This is why the Arab countries, though very close to Europe, could be colonised only towards the second half of the nineteenth century when the Ottoman State became weak and unable to defend its far-flung frontiers. France occupied Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881 and turned Morocco into a protectorate in March 1912. The British occupied Egypt and Sudan in 1882. Italy occupied Libya in 1912. From 1763 until 1971, the British Empire maintained varying degrees of political control over some of the Persian Gulf states, including the United Arab Emirates (originally called the "Trucial Coast States") and at various times Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar through the British Residency of the Persian Gulf (earlier through the British administration in Bombay). Aden (or South Yemen) was occupied in 1839. Other Arab countries like Palestine, Syria, including what it now Lebanon, and Iraq could be colonised only in 1918 after the Turkish defeat in the First World War, largely as a result of the Arab treachery known as the "Arab Revolt" led by Lawrence (of Arabia), a British officer.

The Arabs remained under the colonial yoke for a relatively short period compared to other African and

Asian countries. Egypt became independent in 1922 and Iraq in 1932. Lebanon was carved out of Syria by the French as a Christian state and given freedom in 1943. Syria and Jordan became independent in 1946, Libya in 1951, Morocco and Tunisia in 1956, Kuwait in 1961, Algeria in 1962, and UAE in 1971. Saudi Arabia emerged as a "Kingdom" in 1932 after occupying Hijaz while it existed earlier as the Sultanate of Najd & Its Dependencies which included Al-Ahsa (the present Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia) since early twentieth century. Hejaz and Najd were never occupied. Yemen ceded from the Ottoman State in 1918. Aden, or South Yemen, became independent in 1967 and later united with the Arab Republic of Yemen in 1990. Oman had been independent since the eighteenth century but was occupied briefly by the Iranians (967-1154) and the Portuguese (1507-1650).

There are parts of the Arab World which are still occupied like Palestine (occupied in 1948-49 and 1967), Syrian Golan Heights (occupied in 1967), and a small tract of Lebanon known as "Sheb'a Farms" occupied by Israel in 1982. Iskandarun and parts of north Syria, which were ceded by France to Turkey in 1937. In the west, Spain continues to occupy parts of Morocco, viz., Canary Islands, Sabta (Ceuta) Malilla (Melilla) and Al-Hosaima (Al Hoceima). In the east, Iran occupies

the small islands of Abu Musa, Tunb Al-Kubra and Tunb Al-Sughra in the Persian Gulf since 1971 immediately after the British withdrawal. These islands are claimed by UAE. The most serious of these was the emergence of Israel which stunted the Arab march to progress and continues to suck resources and energies ever since.

Arab Nationalism and Arab Unity

The formation of the Arab League in 1945 was an affirmation by the Arab leaders that they want to achieve a kind of unity. Unity was and remains a popular demand but it remained a mere slogan as the Arab leaders never wanted to dilute their absolute and sovereign powers.

The agreed Covenant of the League was such that to take any action, consensus is required. Thus, Arab unity remains a charade to this day because there is no consensus on almost anything. The Unified Arab Military Command and the Arab Supreme Court, unified Arab currency etc. never saw the light of the day.

A unilateral pact of unity was signed between Egypt and Syria in 1958 but it soon fell apart in 1961. Likewise, a union of sorts between Egypt and Yemen did not survive long — 1962-1967 to be exact. For years, Libya's Col. Mu'ammar Gaddafi tried in vain to convince Egypt, Tunisia etc. to unite with his country.

Russia was able to penetrate the Arab world since the Czech arms delivery to Egypt in September 1955, exploiting the Western embargo of arms imposed on the Arabs in a bid to ensure Israeli military superiority. Slowly Russia emerged as the ally and protector of Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. But the West, especially the U.S., regained its previous position after the Arab defeat in June 1967.

Bilateral problems

By early 1960s, the Arab World was roughly divided into "reactionary" and "progressive" blocs led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively. This mostly ended after 1967 as a result of the strong Saudi support to Egypt and Syria vis-à-vis the Israeli aggression and occupation of Arab lands. The post-1967 period witnessed a gradual slump in Arab solidarity, e.g., Jordan's attack on the Palestinian freedom fighters in what is known as "Black September" (1970), Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990, dispute over the Western Sahara between Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco, and the dispute between Sudan and Egypt over borders.

Recognition of Israel

The Israeli "pre-emptive" aggression in June 1967, during which it occupied lands of Egypt, Jordan and Syria in addition to the remaining 22 percent of Palestine known as "West Bank" (of the River Jordan) and Gaza

Strip. This new situation paved the way for the eventual Arab recognition of Israel. Historical Palestine, 78 percent of which was occupied by Jews during 1948-49, was now forgotten and the issue since is limited to the demand the withdrawal from the territories occupied by Israel in June 1967. But Israel, with American and western blind support, has continued to reject umpteen Arab and other peace proposals.

The idea of a single Arab Nation and Arab Unity effectively died after the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat concluded a unilateral peace with Israel. It was signed at Camp David in the US on 17 Sept., 1978. Egypt was temporarily suspended from the Arab League and the League's headquarter was moved from Cairo to Tunis in 1979 where it remained until 1989, when all was forgiven, Egypt was welcomed back into the Arab fold without changing its policies and the Arab League moved back to its headquarters overlooking the now famous Tahrir Square. In protest against his pro-Israeli policies, President Sadat was killed by his own soldiers on 6 October 1981.

Narrow country-based nationalisms, like the Egyptian nationalism, prospered during this period side by side with Arab nationalism which was championed by Iraq's Saddam Husain and Libya's Mu'ammarr Gaddafi.

During this period of schism and uncertainty, a regional Arab bloc called "Gulf Cooperation Council" was founded in 1981. It includes Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, which shared tribal and political affinity. Interestingly, their immediate neighbour, Yemen, was not invited to join GCC while Jordan and Morocco were invited though both chose not to join this new regional bloc.

With the Egyptian unilateral peace with Israel, the Arab commitment to Palestine was weakened. The consensus till then was that no Arab country will recognize Israel until the Palestinian issue was solved and this put pressure on Israel and its western backers. Soon, in 1994, Jordan too made peace with Israel while some other countries like Tunisia, Morocco, Qatar and UAE started a kind of backdoor relationship with Israel. Post-"Arab Spring," both Egypt and Tunisia have toned down ties with Israel to the bare minimum. Israel's future, as a militarist Western checkpost in an Arab and Muslim ocean, is once again in doubt. Commentators in the West are now openly saying that Israel may not survive beyond 2025.

The PLO was already marginalized since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and dispersal of PLO forces to a number of countries away from Lebanon and Jordan. The new situation after the Egyptian and

Jordanian peace with Israel forced the PLO under Yasir Arafat to start secret negotiations with. As a result, the Palestinian Authority was established in West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1993 with an Israeli commitment to recognise Palestine as a sovereign state within five years. Contentious issues like borders, status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and exploitation of resources within the proposed Palestinian state like water, were to be decided by negotiations during this period. Israel which led to the conclusion of the Oslo Accords in 1992.

These negotiations, euphemistically called "Peace Process," continue even today without any hope whatsoever of a settlement acceptable to the Palestinians in the near or distant future while Israel continues chipping away at Palestinian lands in West Bank and continues building totally illegal Jewish settlement on them. It continues changing the demography of Jerusalem, confiscating Arab land there on a regular basis and has already expelled around 30 percent of Jerusalem's Arab population.

Back in 1980, the Israeli parliament, Knesset, had passed a law proclaiming that Jerusalem is the "eternal capital" of Israel. An apt commentary at the time in *Crescent International* of Toronto (Canada) described it as an "eternal capital" for

a temporary state.

"Arab Spring"

Dictatorships ruled all Arab countries without exception backed by a huge security and secret police apparatus. The stifling police state was omnipresent everywhere in the Arab World. There was no difference between monarchies and republican regimes in suppression of civil and political rights. Arab governments seriously cooperated only in one field: security. The annual conferences of the Arab interior ministers have been punctual and security has been the only field where Arab regimes seriously cooperated with each other. The Freedom Index of 2010 shows Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian Authority as "Hybrid Regimes", while all other Arab regimes have been classified as "dictatorships". Freedom House's survey of 2011 described Comoro Islands and Mauritania as "electoral democracies", Lebanon and Kuwait as "partially free" and all others as "not free". This is slowly changing after the Arab Spring.

Israel and West's rejection of the Hamas victory in the elections of January 2006, blockade of Gaza Strip since June 2007, the 22-day Israeli War on defenceless Gaza Strip during 27 December 2008-18 January 2009, coupled with total Arab silence, rather collaboration with Israel, added to the

popular anger and unrest in all the Arab countries. The Arab rulers were utterly out of sync with their masses. Earlier the American attack on Iraq in March 2003 had exposed the Arab rulers' collaboration and complicity with the American and western powers. The stagnating economic conditions were directly caused by systematic looting of resources by the ruling elites.

The Arab street was now ready for a popular revolution. The Tunisian uprising, which started on 18 December 2010 and led to the ousting of long-time President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, was the starting point. Egypt followed suit on 25 January 2011, soon to be followed by Yemen, Libya and Syria. A similar movement in Bahrain has been contained for the moment as a result of GCC military intervention. Tremors have been felt in Sudan, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Morocco. As a result of this popular uprising, a number of well-entrenched Presidents, each ruling for over three decades, fell like a pack of cards - viz., Zainul Abedin Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Ali Abdallah Saleh of Yemen and Mu'amar Gaddafi of Libya. Incidentally, all of them were former army officers who came to power pledging a free and fair government.

The most important and meaningful gain was in Egypt where free and fair elections ushered in an

Islamic government and a President from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood. A new democratic constitution has been passed. President Muhammad Mursi has been able to neutralise the overbearing Army and omnipresent Mukhabarat (Intelligence) but remnants of the fallen regime and political forces rejected by the voters have united to defeat the new government. Subtle foreign help to the rejectionists is discernible. Similar attempts are being made to destabilise the Islamic government in Tunisia. Chaos still prevails in Libya while Syria is facing a protracted civil war since March 2011, where the ruthless Baathist regime, with Russian and Chinese support, continues to murder its own civilians. The death toll in Syria has crossed 70,000 and there is no end in sight. Clearly the "Arab Spring" - again a foreign, rather western, term - is still in progress. But it is clear that the spark which started in Tunisia will not stop before Arab people regain their rightful freedom and democratic rights. ■

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(Courtesy: The Milli Gazette)

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) As Educator

- M. Fethullah Gulen

THE EDUCATIONAL ATMOSPHERE

Consider the following verse:

It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger of their own, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, although they had been, before, in manifest error. (62:2)

Some of these words are very interesting. Allah is mentioned in the third person, because the ignorant, primitive, and savage Arabs did not know Him. As there was no "He" in their minds, Allah first emphasizes the darkness of their nature, their great distance from Him, and indicates that they cannot be addressed directly by Him.

Then Allah calls them *unlettered*. They were not all illiterate, but they had no knowledge of Allah and the Messenger. Allah, by His infinite Power, sent to this trifling community a Messenger with the greatest willpower, the most sublime nature, the deepest spirituality, and the highest morality, by means of whom He would instruct them in how to become geniuses who would one day govern humanity.

The word *among* shows that the Messenger was one of them, but only in the sense of being unlettered. Being chosen by Allah, he could not possibly belong to the Age of Ignorance (pre-Islamic Arabia). However, he had to be

unlettered so that Allah would teach him what he needed to know. Allah would remove him from his people, educate him, and make him a teacher for all unlettered people.

The phrases *to recite to them His signs and to purify them* point out that He teaches them about the meanings of the Qur'an and of creation in a gradual manner, and informs them how to become perfect human beings by striving for spiritual perfection. He guides them to higher ranks by explaining the Qur'an and the universe to them, and showing them in minute detail how to lead a balanced and exemplary life in every sphere of activity.

The sentence *although they had been before in manifest error* indicates that Allah would purify and educate them even though they had gone astray. He did all of this through an unlettered Messenger and by teaching them the Qur'an. Throughout history and even today, this Book has met the needs of countless brilliant scientists, scholars, and saints.

After the Prophet, humanity saw his flag waving everywhere for centuries. Those who follow him, both now and in the past, reach the highest spiritual realms on wings of sainthood, piety, righteousness, knowledge, and science. Those who climbed the steps of good conduct and spirituality, and knowledge

and science, both now and in the past, saw in each step the "footprints" of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and greet him with "Allah bless you."

They will do the same again in the near future. All so-called original ideas will disappear one by one, like candles blown out, leaving only one "sun" -the Qur'an-that will never set. Its flag will be the only one waving on the horizon, and every generation will rush to it, breaking the chains around their necks.

ISLAM ADDRESSES ALL HUMAN FACULTIES

As is explicit in the above-mentioned verse, the Messenger's method of education does not just purify our evil-commanding selves; rather, it is universal in nature and raises human hearts, spirits, minds, and souls to their ideal level. He respected and inspired reason; in fact, he led it to the highest rank under the intellect of Revelation.

The universal truths of the Qur'an also state this fact. Moreover, the Message touches all of our inner and outer senses, makes its followers rise on the wings of love and compassion, and takes them to places beyond their imagination. His universal call encompasses, in addition to the rules of good conduct and spirituality, all principles of economics, finance, administration, education, justice, and international law. He opened the doors of economic, social, administrative, military, political, and scientific institutions to his students, whose minds and spirits

he trained and developed to become perfect administrators, the best economists, the most successful politicians, and unique military geniuses.

If there had been any lack in his teaching of humanity, the aim of his Prophethood could not have been realized so fully. He said:

Each Prophet before me built some part of this marvelous building, but there was a gap that needed to be closed. Every person passing by would say: "I wonder when this building will be completed." The one who completes it is me. After me, there is no longer any defect in the structure.

The Qur'an affirms this: *This day I have completed your religion for you* (5: 3). In short, the Prophet reformed, completed, and perfected the ways of life that had been lacking, had become deficient, or had deviated from the Will of Allah.

All previous Prophets were sent to a certain people and for a fixed time. However, as Allah chose Prophet Muhammad and Islam for all times and peoples, Islam is the perfection of His universal favor upon His creation. He fashioned Islam in such a way that it pleases everybody. Therefore, rather than trying to find fault with the Message and the principles relayed by the Messenger, people should seek these truths and principles in order to design their lives according to them.

The Prophet was a man who completed, perfected, and reformed. He

transformed an illiterate, savage people into an army of blessed saints, illustrious educators, invincible commanders, eminent statesmen, and praiseworthy founders of the most magnificent civilization in history.

An educator's perfection depends on the greatness of his or her ideal and the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of his or her listener. Even before Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) death, the instructors and spiritual guides he dispatched were traveling from Egypt to Iran and from Yemen to Caucasia to spread what they had learned from him. In succeeding centuries, peoples of different traditions, conventions, and cultures (e.g., Persians and Turanians, Chinese and Indians, Romans and Abyssinians, Arabs and some Europeans) rushed to Islam. An educator's greatness also depends on the continuation of his or her principles. No one can deny that people all over the world accept Islam and adopt his principles. By Allah's Will and Power, most of humanity will embrace Islam soon.

Remember that the Messenger appeared among a wild and primitive people. They drank alcohol, gambled, and indulged in adultery without shame. Prostitution was legal, and brothels were indicated by a special flag. Indecency was so extreme that a man would be embarrassed to be called human. People were constantly fighting among themselves, and no one had ever been able to unify them into a strong nation.

Everything evil could be found in Arabia. However, the Prophet eradicated these evils and replaced them with such deep-rooted values and virtues that his people became the leaders and teachers of the civilized world.

Even today we cannot reach their ranks. This has been acknowledged by such Western intellectuals as Isaac Taylor, Robert Briffault, John Davenport, M. Pickhtall, P. Bayle, and Lamartine.

Allah creates living things from lifeless things. He grants life to soil and rock. The Prophet transformed "rocks, soil, coal, and copper" into "gold and diamonds." Just consider the cases of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, Ali, Khalid, 'Uqba ibn Nafi', Tariq ibn Ziyad, Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi'i, Bayazid al-Bistami, Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi, Biruni, Zahrawi, and hundreds of thousands of others, all of whom were brought up in his school. The Messenger never allowed human faculties to remain undeveloped. He developed them and replaced weakness with marvelous competency. As a great thinker recalled:

"Umar had the potential to be a great man even before he embraced Islam. After his conversion, he became a powerful yet very gentle man who would not step on an ant or kill even a grasshopper."

We cannot eradicate such a small habit as smoking, despite all our modern facilities and practically daily symposia and conferences to combat it. Medical science says smoking causes cancer of

the larynx, mouth, esophagus, windpipe, and lungs; however, people insist on smoking. On the other hand, the Messenger eradicated countless ingrained bad habits and replaced them with laudable virtues and habits. Those who saw them used to say: "My Allah, his followers are superior even to the angels." When these people pass over the Bridge above Hell with their light spreading everywhere, even the angels will ask in awe: "Were they Prophets or angels?" In fact, they are neither Prophets nor angels; they are the educated people of the Prophet's nation.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had a holistic view of each individual. He took all of their mental and spiritual capacities and developed them, turning his own wretched people into paragons of virtue. His wisdom in assessing such potential is another proof of his Prophethood.

EDUCATING BY EXAMPLE

Allah's Messenger represented and expressed what he wanted to teach through his actions, and then translated his actions into words. How to be in awe of Allah, how to be humble, how to prostrate with deep feelings, how to bow, how to sit in prayer, how to cry to Allah at night—all of these he first did himself and then taught to others. As a result, whatever he preached was accepted immediately in his house and by his followers, for his words penetrated all of their hearts. After him, humanity saw his standard carried everywhere by people raised on the wings of sainthood,

purification, devotion to Allah, and desire to be close to Him. Wherever they went, they walked in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Others will do so in the future.

In the house of the Messenger there was a permanent sense of awe. Those who caught a glimpse of him could feel the allure of Heaven and the terror of Hell. He swayed to and fro during prayer, trembling with the fear of Hell and flying on wings of the desire of Heaven. All who saw him remembered Allah. Imam al-Nasa'i narrates: "While the Messenger was praying, a sound, like a boiling pot, was heard." He always prayed with a burning and weeping heart. 'A'isha often found him in the presence of his Master, prostrating and trembling.

His behavior inspired and benefited everyone around him. The children and wives of every Messenger had the same awe and fear, as the Messengers preached, ordered, related what they practiced and experienced, and gave examples through their actions. We can assess a person's impact through his or her behavior while at home. If all pedagogues gathered and merged their acquired knowledge about education, they could not be as effective as a Prophet.

Many of his descendants have shone among their respective generations like a sun, a moon, or a star. He brought up his Companions so perfectly that almost none of them became heretics. None of his progeny

has ever become a heretic, which is a distinction unique to him. Heretics and apostates have appeared among the households and descendants of many saintly people, but none of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) descendants have betrayed the roots of their household. If there have been a few exceptions unknown to us and history, they do not negate the rule.

ESSENTIALS OF A GOOD EDUCATION

A real educator must have several virtues, among them the following:

First: Give due importance to all aspects of a person's mind, spirit, and self, and to raise each to its proper perfection. The Qur'an mentions the evil-commanding self that drags people, like beasts with ropes around their necks, wherever it wants to go, and goads them to obey their bodily desires. In effect, the evil-commanding self wants people to ignore their Allah-given ability to elevate their feelings, thoughts, and spirits.

The Qur'an quotes the Prophet Joseph as saying: *Surely the self commands evil, unless my Lord has mercy (12:53)*. Commanding evil is inherent in the self's nature. However, through worship and discipline, the self can be raised to higher ranks, to a position where it accuses itself for its evils and shortcomings (75:2), and then still higher where Allah says to it: *O self at peace! Return unto your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing (89:27-28)*.

Higher than the self at peace (at rest and contented) is the self perfectly purified. Those who rise to this degree of attainment are the nearest to Allah. When you look at them you remember Allah, for they are like polished mirrors in which all of His attributes are reflected. The Companions' desire to follow the training provided by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) enabled almost all of them to reach this degree of moral and spiritual perfection; millions of people have followed and continue to follow their example.

Second: An education system is judged by its universality, comprehensiveness, and quality of its students. The students of the Prophet were ready to convey his Message throughout the world. The Message they conveyed, being universal in nature and valid for all times and places, found a ready acceptance among people of different races, religious background, intellectual levels, and age differences from modern-day Morocco and Spain to the Philippines, from the Russian steppes to the heart of Africa. Its principles remain valid. Despite numerous upheavals and changes, as well as social, economic, intellectual, scientific, and technological revolutions, his system remains the most unique and original, so much so that it is the hope of the future of humanity.

Third: An education system is judged by its ability to change its students. The example of smoking was mentioned earlier, as was that of how Islam and the Prophet's spread of it transformed the

tribes of Arabia into their exact opposite within the space of just two or three decades. To those who deny or question his Prophethood, we challenge them to go anywhere in the world and accomplish, within 100 years, even one-hundredth of what he accomplished in the deserts of Arabia 1,400 years ago. Let them take all of the experts they can gather, and then we will wait to see their results.

When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was conveying the Message, Arabia was isolated from its neighbors by vast deserts. In terms of its cultural, intellectual, and moral life, it rightfully could be considered one of the most backward areas of the world. The Hijaz region, where the Prophet was born, had experienced no social evolution and had attained no intellectual development worthy of mention. Dominated by superstitions, barbarous and violent customs, and degraded moral standards, people lived in savagery. They drank wine, gambled, and indulged in what even average societies consider immoral sexual activities. Prostitutes advertised their services by hanging a flag on the doors of their houses.

It was a land without law and a government. Might was right, as in many areas today, and looting, arson, and murder were common. Any trivial incident could provoke intertribal feuding, which sometimes grew into peninsula-wide wars.

These were the people Prophet Muhammad (SAW) appeared among.

With the Message he relayed from Allah and his way of preaching it, he eradicated barbarism and savagery, adorned Arabia's wild and unyielding peoples with all praiseworthy virtues, and made them teachers of the world. His domination was not physical or military; rather, he conquered and subjugated them by becoming the beloved of their hearts, the teacher of their minds, the trainer of their souls, and the ruler of their spirits. He eradicated their evil qualities, and implanted and inculcated in his followers' hearts exalted qualities in such a way that they became second nature to all of his followers.

But this transformation was not limited only to the people of his own time and place, for this process continues even today wherever his Message spreads. It was not only quickly accepted in Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain at its first outburst, but, with the exception of the now-vanished brilliant civilization of Islamic Spain, it has never lost its vantage ground. Since it first appeared, it has never stopped spreading.

Many world-renowned individuals have been raised in the school of Muhammad (SAW). Certainly, we come across numerous great historical figures in other schools of education as well. Allah has honored humanity with great heroes, eminent statesmen, invincible commanders, inspired saints, and great scientists. However, most of them have not made a deep impression on more than one or two aspects of human life,

for they confine themselves to those fields.

But since Islam is a Divine way for all fields of life, a Divine system encompassing all aspects of life—"like a perfect work of architecture all of whose parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure," according the Muhammad Asad, a Jewish convert—its students usually combine within themselves the spiritual and the rational, the intellectual and the material, the worldly with the otherworldly, the ideal with the real, and the scientific and the revealed (by Allah).

At its very outset, Islam abolished tribal conflicts and condemned racial and ethnic discrimination. The Prophet put the Qurayshi chiefs under Zayd's command (an emancipated slave), and innumerable scholars, scientists, commanders, and saints appeared among conquered peoples. Among them was Tariq ibn Ziyad, an emancipated Berber slave who conquered Spain with 90,000 valiant warriors and laid the foundations of one of the most splendid civilizations of world history. After this victory, he went to the palace where the defeated king's treasury was kept. He said to himself:

Be careful, Tariq. Yesterday you were a slave with a chain around your neck. Allah emancipated you, and today you are a victorious commander. However, you will change tomorrow into flesh rotting under earth. Finally, a day will

come when you will stand in the Presence of Allah.

The world and its pomp could not attract him, and he continued to live a very simple life. What kind of education could transform a slave into such a dignified and honorable person?

However, his conquest of Spain was not his real victory. This came when he stood before the treasury of the Spanish king and reminded himself that one day he would die and face Allah. As a result of this self-advice, he took none of the treasure for himself.

'Uqba ibn Nafi' was another great commander who conquered northern Africa and reached the Atlantic coast. There he stood and said: "O Allah, if this sea of darkness did not appear before me, I would convey your Name, the source of light, to the remotest corners of the world."

Before his conversion, Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, may Allah be pleased with him, took care of 'Uqba ibn Abi Mu'ayt's sheep. He was a weak, little man who everyone ignored. After becoming a Muslim, however, he was one of the most senior Companions. During his caliphate, 'Umar sent him to Kufa as a teacher. In the scholarly climate he established there, the greatest figures of Islamic jurisprudence grew up, among them Alqama, Ibrahim al-Nakha'i, Hammad ibn Abi Sulayman, Sufyan al-Thawri, and especially Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the largest Islamic legal school.

Ikrima was the son of Abu Jahl, the harsh and inflexible leader of the Qurayshi unbelievers. Finally, after the Conquest of Makka, he converted to Islam. This event so changed him that he welcomed martyrdom three years later at the Battle of Yarmuk. His son, Amir, was martyred with him, as well.

Hansa was one of the finest poetesses before Islam. Becoming a Muslim, she abandoned poetry because: "While we have the Qur'an, I cannot write poems." She lost her four sons at the Battle of Qadisiyya. This great woman, who had lamented her brother's death before the appearance of Islam with a great poem, did not lament this loss. Instead, she deepened her submission to Allah and said only: "O Allah, all praise be to You. You have bestowed on me while alive the possibility of offering You as martyrs my four sons that You gave me.

The school of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also produced the most just rulers in history. Besides Abu Bakr, 'Uthman, 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with them, and many others who succeeded them, 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, has been recognized in almost every age as one of the world's most just and greatest statesmen. He used to say: "If a sheep falls from a bridge even on the river Euphrates and dies, Allah will call me to account for it on the Day of Judgment." When you compare the pagan 'Umar to the Muslim 'Umar, you easily see the sharp contrast between the two and understand how

radically Islam changes people.

FURTHER REMARKS

Due to misconceptions and secular tendencies, especially in the West in recent centuries, most people define religion as blind faith, meaningless acts of worship, a consolation for life's problems. Such mistaken ideas have developed in Christendom partly due to Christianity's historical mistakes and shortcomings. Some secularized, worldly Muslims have compounded this mistake by reducing Islam to an ideology, a social, economic, and political system. They ignore one fact stated in the Qur'an, the Traditions, and throughout Islamic history: Islam, the middle way between all extremes, addresses itself to all human faculties and senses, as well as to each individual's mind, heart, and feelings, and encompasses every aspect of human life. That is why Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stressed learning, trading, agriculture, action, and thought.

Moreover, he encouraged his people to do perfectly whatever they did, and condemned inaction and begging. For example, he said: "Allah loves a believing, skillful servant." The Qur'an declares:

Say: "Work; and Allah will surely see your work, and the Messenger and the believers" (9:105). As all of our actions will be displayed on the Day of Judgment, we cannot be careless and do something half-heartedly just to get rid of it. Moreover, the Messenger declares: "When you do something, Allah likes you

to do it perfectly.”

Islam encourages people to work, and considers our lawful attempts to earn our living and support our family acts of worship. Unlike medieval Christianity, it does not idealize (nor even advise) life as a hermit. It forbids dissipation and luxury on the grounds that if we live a self-indulgent life here and neglect our religious duties, our prosperity in both worlds will be in jeopardy. The Messenger declares, in a concise saying that summarizes the essentials of a happy economic and social life and prosperity in both this world and the next:

When you are involved in speculative transactions, occupied only with animal-breeding, content with agriculture, and abandon striving in the cause of Allah to preach His religion, Allah will subject you to such a humiliation. He will not remove it until you return to your religion.

This *hadith* gives a very accurate description of the pitiable condition of Muslims over the last few centuries. Speculative transactions signify the dying of a healthy economic life and the resort to unlawful, self-abandoned ways of earning one's living. Contentment with agriculture and animal breeding is the sign of laziness and abandoning scientific investigation-the Qur'an explicitly states that Allah created humanity as His vicegerent and entrusted us with knowledge of the names of things.

This means that we are to establish science and exploit natural

resources by discovering the Divine laws of nature and reflecting on natural phenomena. However, while doing this, we should seek Allah's good pleasure and practice Islam.

The Qur'an contains many verses, such as: *Say: "Are they equal-those who know and those who dont know?"* (39:9), that emphasize the importance of knowledge and learning. It also warns that *among His servants only those who have knowledge truly fear Allah* (35:28), meaning that true piety and worship is possible only through knowledge. Confining knowledge to religious sciences devoid of reflection and investigation inevitably results in contentment with animal breeding and agriculture, in idleness and the neglect of striving in the cause of Allah. The ultimate result is misery, poverty, and humiliation.

The Messenger drew attention to this important fact in some other Traditions, such as: "An hour of reflection and contemplation is better than a year of (supererogatory) religious worship," and "A powerful believer is better and more lovable to Allah than a weak one." Being powerful requires both spiritual and physical health as well as scientific and technical competence. Restricting the meaning of being powerful to physical strength shows one's total lack of understanding of what true power is based on.

In conclusion, being a good Muslim is possible only through being a

good student in the school of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This attitude was displayed by Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet's cousin, who emigrated to Abyssinia to escape severe Qurayshi persecution. He once told the Negus, ruler of Abyssinia: "O king, we used to drink blood, eat carrion, fornicate, steal, kill each other, and plunder. The powerful used to oppress the weak. We used to do many other shameful and despicable things.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) set the best example for his people in belief, worship, and good conduct—in short, in all aspects of life. His people considered having daughters a source of shame, and so buried them alive. When the Prophet came with the Divine Message, women enjoyed their rights fully. Once a girl came to the Messenger and complained: "O Messenger of Allah, my father is trying to force me to marry my uncle's son. I don't want to marry him." The Messenger sent for her father and warned him not to do this. The man promised that he would not do so. The girl then stood up and said: "O Messenger of Allah, I didn't intend to oppose my father. I came here only to find out whether Islam allows a father to marry his daughter to somebody without her consent.

The Messenger warned his Companions not to beg. However poor and needy they were, the Companions did not beg from anybody. They were so sensitive in this matter that they even refrained from asking help. If, for example, one of them dropped his whip

while on a mount, he would dismount and pick it up himself rather than ask someone to pick it up and hand it to him.

Prior to Islam, people worshipped idols and did not give due respect to their parents. Allah's Message told them: *Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship any but Him and to be good to parents (17:23)*. This Divine decree changed them so radically that they began asking the Messenger if they would be punished if they did not return the looks of their parents' with a smile. The Qur'an ordered them *not to usurp an orphans property (17: 34)* and forbade theft. This made them so sensitive to others' rights that history does not record more than one or two thefts in that blessed period of the Prophet's rule.

Murder was extremely widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia. However, when the Prophet came with the prohibition: *Do not kill any soul which Allah has forbidden (17:33)*, this evil was all but eradicated. The Messenger also forbade fornication. This ended all kinds of sexual immorality. However, we do find one incident of fornication during that period. It is as follows:

One day a pale and exhausted man came to the Messenger and exclaimed: "O Messenger of Allah, cleanse me!" The Messenger turned his face from him, but the man insisted, repeating his demand four times. At last, the Messenger asked: "Of what sin shall I cleanse you?" The man replied that he had fornicated. This sin weighed so

heavily on his conscience that he desired to be punished. The Messenger asked those present: "Is he insane?" When told he was not, he told them to see if he was drunk. They examined him and found him sober. In the face of his insistent confession, the Messenger had to order the man to be punished. After it, he sat and wept.

A few days later, the man's partner appealed to the Messenger to cleanse her. Many times he turned away from her and sent her back. In utmost remorse, she insisted on being punished. The Messenger sent her back once more, saying: "You may be pregnant. Go and give birth to your child." The woman did so, and then returned with the same request. The Messenger excused her: "Go back, for perhaps your child needs feeding." After the child had been weaned, the woman came again. When someone reproved her while the punishment was being carried out, the Prophet frowned at him and said: "By Allah, this woman repented of her sin so much that if her repentance were shared out among all the people of Madina, it would be enough to cover them with forgiveness also."

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) established such a magnificent system and formed such an excellent community that not even a Plato, a Thomas Moore, a Campanella, or any other utopian has been able to imagine its equal. Among thousands of other examples, the following illustrates this fact:

Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him, one of the poorest Companions, came to the Messenger. He had not eaten anything for some days. Abu Talha, may Allah be pleased with him, (an Ansari) took him home to feed him. But there was no food in his house except some soup that his wife had made for the children. She asked her husband what she should do, and they decided upon the following: They would put their children to bed without feeding them. As the soup was too little to satisfy all of them, only the guest should have it. While they were sitting at the table and getting ready to eat, Abu Talha's wife would knock the candle over, extinguishing it apparently by mistake. In the resulting darkness, they would act as if they were eating, although Abu Hurayra would be the only one eating. This is what they did. Abu Hurayra ate until he was satisfied, and then left, unaware of what had really happened.

The following day, they went to pray the morning prayer in the mosque. At the end of the prayer, the Messenger turned to them and asked: "What did you do last night, that caused this verse to be revealed in praise of you: *They prefer others above themselves even though poverty be their portion.* (59:9)?" ■

Higher Education of Women in India – Recent Trends and Challenges

- Naseem A. Zaidi*

Higher education in India is passing through a phase of unprecedented expansion in terms of opening new educational institutions in public as well as in private sectors, opening of new colleges for professional education, large increases in enrolments and enormous expansion in infrastructure etc, yet there is a paradox—the expanding system is not benefitting the marginalized sections like the Muslims, SCs, STs, women and the majority of population of the country in rural areas etc. The paradox is clear from the fact that India has the third largest higher education system of the world but is accessible only to 12 percent of the youth in the age group 18-24 years. A larger part of expansion has taken place in private sector where education is too costly to be afforded by the marginalized sections. Government has to fill this gap to ensure fulfilling the objectives of equity and inclusion along with the access and expansion.

Higher Education in the Eleventh Five year Plan

The 11th FYP (2007-12) was a turning point in the education policy of

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the government. While in the earlier stages, the focus was on universalization of school level education, but since the Eleventh Plan importance is being given to higher education. As compared to the Tenth plan, there was a nine-fold increase in the total allocation of funds for higher and technical education in the 11th Plan. Three aspects of higher education viz. access and expansion, equity and inclusion and quality and excellence were emphasized during the plan. Access in higher education is generally measured by **gross enrolment ratio (GER)**; that is the percentage of students enrolled in higher education out of the total population in the age group 18-22 years. The global average of the GER is 24 percent and the average for developing countries is 18 percent. During the Eleventh Plan in India the target was to achieve a GER of 15 percent.

Progress in women education

A large number of women in the country get benefit of higher education from the co-educational institutions in all levels of education but institutions exclusively for women are necessary to serve almost half of the total student

population. This will serve the objectives of access, expansion, equity and inclusion in a better way. The major programmes for promoting women education in the 11th plan were as follows:

a) Capacity building for women managers in higher education

The scheme of capacity building of women managers in higher education was initiated in the 10th Five year plan. It was revised and continued during the 11th plan with the objective of larger participation of women in higher education. The scheme was to be implemented by starting various courses in universities or colleges helping women to become administrators. It was also through arranging training programmes focused on increasing their managerial skills. Vice Chancellor of the universities and principals of the colleges were to be involved for increasing awareness and motivation through workshops and training programmes. 68 universities and 76 colleges took keen interest in promoting this aspect of women education during the 11th Plan.

b) Special programme for financial support

Under the scheme of Post-Doctoral Fellowship for Women, 85 candidates were selected for the year 2008-09 and

for the year 2009-10 and 2010-11, proposals were under consideration. For assisting single girl in the family 'Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl-child' for pursuing higher and technical education was started and during the 11th plan a total of 3,938 scholarships were granted under the scheme.

c) Construction of girls' hostel

If girls go out of the home town, they cannot study unless proper accommodation facilities are available. During the plan the Central government had a target of constructing 2000 hostels in the country. The UGC sanctioned 233 women hostels in 90 districts where GER for girls was lower as compared to the total GER.

Targets in the 12th Five Year Plan

During the 12th plan (2012-17) the objectives of access will be coupled with equity and inclusion by reducing regional and gender disparities. The total GER is to be increased from 17 percent to 25 percent. The infrastructure developed during the 11th plan is to be consolidated during the Twelfth Five year plan. Two main programmes are to be launched during this plan.

a) A major programme in the area of women education is to set up 20 new

universities exclusively for women. This will help women from traditional background and rural and sub-urban areas to enter into higher education. For establishing these universities state governments have to provide land and funds shall be arranged by the Central Government. Preference is to be given to start these universities in districts with larger gender gap in higher education.

b) In order to attract more girl students from the states where rural and urban GER for girls in higher education is more than 5 percent lower than the male GER, a new scholarship scheme *Mahila Uchh Shiksha Britti* is to be introduced during the 12th Plan. This stipend may be awarded to girl students who score higher than a certain grade in earlier public examination and having family income less than a certain specified level.

Major Challenges

If we look into the status of higher education in the country in totality, the situation seems to be satisfactory. A GER at 17-18 percent is comparable with the average of the same in all developing countries at 18 percent. This is largely due to contribution of private sector with 100 private universities, 129 Deemed universities and majority of them are private, and more than 4000 private institutions

imparting professional education in December 2011. These institutions help in pushing up the total GER but fail to reduce imbalances in higher education. The goal of social justice in higher education cannot be achieved unless access and expansion are accompanied by equity and inclusion. If total GER in the country is disaggregated on the basis of gender, region, religion and social group etc. great disparities are there, nullifying the objectives of equity and inclusion. The following disparities have some adverse effects on the participation of women in higher education:

a) Rural/urban male/female disparity

Facilities of higher education are mostly available in urban or sub-urban areas due to cheaper land available in the latter. As 70 percent of the population of the country resides in rural areas, opportunities of higher education for women become limited. Data in Table-1 highlight these glaring disparities:

Table-1 Rural/Urban and Male/Female Disparities in GER, 2007-08, percentage

Region	All	Male	Female
Rural	11.0	13.7	8.3
Urban	30.0	29.6	30.5
All	17.2	19.0	15.2

Source: UGC, (2011): *Inclusive and*

Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education, 12th FYP, 2012-17, November, P.45

Despite the fact that demographically the number of men and women are nearly the same, the GER for male in the year 2007-08 was 19 whereas it was 15.2 for women. While in urban areas male-female disparities were insignificant, there was a wide gap between the two in rural areas; 13.7 for male and only 8.3 for female. This is a deficient area and special attention is required to boost female GER in rural areas

b) Women education in different social groups

Wide disparities are there in the status of higher education among women in different social groups based on religion and classes. The information is given in Table-2.

Table-2, Number of Female Students at Graduation and P.G. levels in different Social Groups, (Out of 1000 students)

Social groups	Under graduatelevel	P.G. level	Total
1- Muslims	14	02	16
2- SCs	26	02	28
3- STs	16	04	20
4- Christians	38	13	51
5- Hindus	22	04	26
6- Sikhs	34	02	36
7- Buddhists	21	08	29

Source: NSSO Report, *Education in India 2007-08, Participation and expenditure, 64th Round, May 2010, Table 13.*

Among the 7 social groups, the level of female education at higher level was found to be the minimum among the Muslims. It may be due to poverty, or due to the mindset of the community members who give low priority to female education. At school level too, the number of the Muslim girls is generally lower as compared to that in other social groups. For examples, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalayas, a chain of girls' residential schools up to class VIII was started in 2004, especially for weaker sections like SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims. In these schools, in March 2011, enrolment of the Muslim girls was only 9.5 percent of the total girls, while it was 30 percent for SCs, 25 percent for STs and 26 percent for OBCs. The low enrolment of the Muslim girls at school and higher secondary level leads to low GER at higher level of education.

c) Low priority to professional education

Due to some social and other bindings, women prefer to go to non-professional courses in Arts, Social Sciences and commerce etc. while their representation in professional courses like medicine, engineering and public administration etc. is very low. Information given in Table-3 reveals

this fact:

Table-3 Faculty-wise distribution of Women Enrolment, All India level, 2009-10

Faculty	Percentage of total female enrolment
1. Arts	45.7
2. Science	20.0
3. Commerce/ Management	16.0
4. Engineering	8.0
5. Medicine	4.0
6. Others	6.3

Source: UGC. *Annual Report 2009-10*, P.51

d) Implementation problem

Only policy statements given in the government documents may not solve the problems of inequalities and exclusion of women from higher education. Monitoring rather than announcements of the schemes may be more effective in reducing disparities and serving the cause of higher education of women in a better way. **Evaluation of the Government programmes**

Here a pertinent question arises whether the government schemes for promoting women education included in the 11th and 12th plans are sufficient to tackle the major challenges of regional, gender and social disparities in higher education in the country. It appears neither the programmes are for a big push in expansion considering

large population in the relevant age group nor these are going to reduce different types of disparities in higher education. In this regard the following points are noteworthy:

1. Setting up universities exclusively for women is a controversial issue. The provision that state governments should provide land for these universities raises many doubts. A university has many disciplines and departments and many courses like engineering and law etc. are not very popular among women. Instead of setting up universities exclusively for women, starting women's degree colleges in rural clusters and sub-urban areas may serve better purpose. Further, reserving a certain percentage of seats for girls in selected courses may be helpful for increasing their participation.
2. Accommodation plays important role for promotion of women education. There was a programme of constructing 2000 hostels during the 11th plan. The grant sanction for the purpose varied between Rs.60 lakh to Rs.1 crore depending upon the capacity of the hostel. But to what extent the government was successful in the scheme is not known in the reports. The only information available in this regard was that UGC approved 233 women hostels in 90 minority concentration districts.
3. A special programme for

financial support for granting post-doctoral fellowships shall not serve the cause of women education in general. What is more important is granting larger number of scholarships particularly for Muslim girls mainly for professional courses as it may benefit larger number of girl students.

4. The scheme of capacity building for women managers emphasized in the 11th plan may be a supplementary rather than a core programme of promotion of higher education among women or reduction in disparities.

5. Apart from the Central Government, the state governments, and Public Private Partnership scheme may play a crucial role in expansion and inclusion in higher education.

6. All the problems cannot be solved only by the actions of the government, or the expansion of higher

education in private sector that seems to be irrelevant for the marginalized sections of society, much depends upon the efforts of society, NGOs or the parents. Underutilization of some facilities by a section of society may be one the reasons for lower GER in some groups. This is truer about higher education of the Muslim girls in rural areas. If enrolment percentage of the Muslim girls is much lower than those in the SCs, STs and OBCs in KGBVs started only for these sections, only Muslim parents are responsible for it. A large number of studies reveal that enrolment of Muslims at lower level of education is not low; it goes down sharply as we go to higher levels of education. Muslim parents have to realize that only educated mothers can bring about a change in the status of the community. ■

Largest Heritage Project in Sharjah

Sharjah: Aiming to retain the feel of the 1950s in Sharjah's traditional areas, the largest heritage project in the UAE and Gulf region, the 'Heart of Sharjah' is currently in progress, aiming to create the first development of its kind. The five-phase, 15-year historical restoration project which aims to restore and revamp the traditional heritage areas of Sharjah, is scheduled for completion in 2025, Gulf News reported. The project plans to feature diverse commercial, cultural and residential projects. It also aims to create tourist and trade destinations, including a boutique hotel, restaurants, retail shops, art galleries, traditional and contemporary markets, archaeological sites, museums, play areas, and commercial offices which will be placed in renovated old or ancient houses. The heritage project in being undertaken by the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), in cooperation with the Sharjah Development of Public Works and a number of government departments in the Emirate. ■

Around the World

OIC TO RAISE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR

The head of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation announced that ministers from OIC states will meet in Saudi Arabia to discuss violence against Muslims in Myanmar. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu said the organisation was "ready to take all necessary measures and actions" in dealing with the impending crisis. Ihsanoglu also urged the government of Myanmar to "put an end to Buddhist extremism and hate campaigns, as well as ethnic cleansing." State media in Myanmar reported that the death toll from communal violence in the centre of the country over the past 10 days has risen to 43, with more than 1,300 homes and buildings destroyed.

"The OIC intends to raise the issue in the Security Council and the Human Rights Council to find a solution that contributes to putting an end to religious persecution against Muslims in Myanmar. The OIC had previously tried to contact government officials in Myanmar to no avail. There has also been an Egyptian proposition to send a special delegation headed by the Secretary General of the OIC, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, and includes a number of foreign ministers of member countries to Myanmar, but this visit has been postponed. The OIC attempted to open an office in Myanmar over the past year to supply aid to Muslims in Myanmar but extremist Buddhists demonstrated against this attempt," an OIC official was reported as saying. ■

QURAN MUSEUM IN MADINAH

Jeddah: The holy city of Madinah will soon have a state-of-the-art Qur'an museum with impressive facilities, said Prince Sultan bin Salman, president of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA). "It will be first of its kind in the world," the prince added. He said, the project dubbed as the "Oasis of the Holy Qur'an" would be established in cooperation with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Madinah governorate and other related departments. The SCTA recently received a valuable gift from Abdul Maqsood Khoja, a Jeddah-based Saudi businessman, representing nine priceless manuscripts dating back to more than five centuries. They are precisely 511 years old. Prince Sultan has issued instructions that such ancient books and manuscripts should be displayed in a museum attached with the name of the donor of the objects in recognition of his/her role and efforts in the preservation of the national heritage. ■

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