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Equality and Brotherhood

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Socially, a most epoch-making change was brought about by the Islamic notion of human equality and brotherhood. There was no division of society into permanent classes and no such community as the untouchables among the Muslims. Their belief was that no one was born unclean into the world nor predeterminedly ignorant and debarred by the very fact of his birth in a certain class from the acquirement of knowledge. No trade of occupation was reserved for a particular section of humanity. On the other hand, they fraternised freely with each other at all levels, the rich strove with the poor in the pursuit of learning and there was freedom of profession for all. The idea of brotherhood was for the Indian mind and the Indian society a novel experience and a call to renewed thinking which did a lot of good to the country. The bonds of the then existing class ridden society were relaxed to a considerable extent and there was witnessed a widespread recoil from the excessive rigidity of the caste system. The advent of Islam acted as a challenge to social reformers in other fields also. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had offered the following comments on the uplifting influence exerted by Islam and Muslims on the Indian social structure:

“The impact of the invaders from the north – west and of Islam on India had been considerable. It had pointed out and shown up the abuses that had crept into Hindu society— the petrification of caste, untouchability, exclusiveness carried to fantastic lengths. The idea of the brotherhood of Islam and the theoretical equality of its adherents made a powerful appeal especially to those in the Hindu fold who were denied any semblance of equal treatment.” ■

CONTENTS

1- The Three Civilizations	- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi	7
2- The Debt of Gratitude Our Women Owe to Ayesha	- S. Sulaiman Nadwi	21
3- Islamic Awakening And Western Callousness	- S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi	25
4- Protection of Faith - A - Big Problem	- S. Bilal Abdul Hai Hasani Nadwi	28
5- Islam And Science	- Mohammad Aslam Siddiqui	29
6- Beloved Nursery Rhymes With Horrifying Origins	- Karan Thapar	31
7- Pursuit of Knowledge	- K.K. Usman	33
8- Haroon Rasheed Siddiqui (1933-2021)	- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi	38
9- Around The World	-	39

Wisdom of Qur'an

“Tell them: ‘Call upon those whom you fancy to be [your helpers] beside Him! They have no power to remove any affliction from you, nor can they shift it.’ Those whom they call upon are themselves seeking the means of access to their Lord, each trying to be nearer to Him. They crave for His mercy and dread His chastisement. Surely your Lord’s punishment is to be feared.”

(Al-Qur'an-17:56-57)

These verses throw a challenge to the unbelievers and polytheists to call upon their self-made deities whom they consider to be their helpers beside God to come to their rescue at times of affliction. They assert that these deities have no power to remove any affliction.

Not only prostrating oneself before someone other than God but also praying to and invoking anyone other than God amounts to associating others in His Divinity, i.e. to polytheism. Prayer and invocation are modes of worship and anyone who invokes someone other than God is as guilty of polytheism as an idol-worshipper.

Nor can anyone other than God avert a calamity or alter anyone’s plight. If someone entertains such beliefs about anyone other than God, then such beliefs are false and betray the fact that he associates others with God in His Divinity. How ironic that those whom the polytheists invoked and whom they sought to intercede with God on their behalf were themselves in need of God’s mercy, dreaded His punishment, and were constantly on the look-out for the means which would bring them close to Him. ■

Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

It is reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas that Muadh said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) sent me (as governor of Yemen) and (at the time of departure) instructed me thus: you will soon find yourself in a community one among the People of the Book; so first call them to testify that there is no god but Allah, that I (Muhammad) am the messenger of Allah, and if they accept this, then tell them that Allah has enjoined upon them five prayers during the day and the night, and if they accept it, then tell them that Allah has made Zakat obligatory for them that it should be collected from the rich and distributed among the poor, and if they agree to it, don’t pick up (as a share of Zakat) the best of their wealth. Beware of the supplication of the oppressed for there is no barrier between him and Allah.

(Sahih Muslim)

The People of the Book never denied the existence of God. Their belief however was not correct as it was alloyed with wrong conceptions and mistaken notions. This shows that mere faith in God is not enough. Therefore, the Holy Messenger asked Muadh to call the People of the Book to testify God, first and foremost. Calling to the prophethood of Muhammad is indicative of the fact that belief in his prophethood is an integral part of the faith. This hadith highlights the practical wisdom with which Dawah should be imparted to the fellow beings. ■

Editor's Note 

Dangerous Trend

India is a secular democratic state where people of different faiths, regions and categories live peacefully. There is a long history of mutual trust, friendship and amity amongst each other. In sixteenth century there were many Hindu Kings and Seventeenth century was dominated by Muslim rulers. India although remained a peace loving country. There had been infits for political reasons but there is no evidence that any major religions skirmish took place.

Now in such a beautiful country presently a group has emerged which wants to take the revenge of what happened in past. There is ample evidence that Muslim rulers helped in the coming up of temples. The temple at Chitrakut is of Mughal structure and Aurangzeb had given the ownership of several villages around it for its maintenance out of the revenue realized from them. But now mosques built in those days are the target. Babri Mosque in Ayodhya has already been demolished and famous mosque of Varanasi and Mathura are being at danger

from the right wing activists.

Recent 'Dharam Sansad' held at Haridwar from December 17 to 19 was attended by a large number of Hindu Saints and Mahants. Speeches delivered there against Muslims, peacefully living in India, were quite alarming. It is said that a newly converted Muslim Wasim Rizvi to Sanatan Dharam actively participated in the deliberation of the Sansad.

Islam and its teachings seem to have been overlooked. There is no evidence that any Muslim Ruler in the past ever tried to establish a Islamic State in India. Had it been so then India would have been a predominantly a Muslim dominated country.

It is hoped that present Government at centre and in state will take suitable steps to rein in the men of destructive mind and not let the country to become a fascist state. ■

S.A.

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The Three Civilizations

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

MATERIALISTIC CIVILIZATION

The social order founded on sensory perceptions and its cognitions is the oldest and most popular. No social order is more satisfying; none so easy to evolve and so readily acceptable to the majority of men in all climes and at all times. It has such an attraction for the masses that its roots need not go deep into the soil, nor is it necessary to raise the level of human intelligence or make any sacrifice for its sake. History bears witness to the fact that no social order has so persistently come to have its sway on humanity as it has done.

Any civilization based on senses will invariably possess the following distinguishing features:

Undue Reliance on Senses

It will deny everything which cannot be perceived through sensory organs. As a consequence, there will be no faith in any power or being which may be imperceptible to the senses and thus inconceivable by the intellect. Without faith in such a power, obviously, there is no question of any fear or hope arising out of it. Even if paganish cults with numerous gods sometimes do exist concurrently with it owing to age-old beliefs and superstitions which die hard, there is hardly any noticeable impact on the intellectual atmosphere created by materialism, as

the former never comes into conflict with the materialistic view-point and utilitarian outlook of life and moral behaviour.

Where sensory impressions are a necessary condition for the acceptance of any existence, there is obviously no room for recognition of any reality beyond the reach of human perception for these cannot be perceived by means of sensorial reactions. Denial of the Hereafter and life after death, or, in other words, of telefinalist morality, follows as a logical conclusion of such an approach, if only because these can be accepted on the basis of evidences other than those furnished by the sensory impressions. Further, the denial of life after death must of necessity make the terrestrial world and life in it an end in itself. Divine retribution has no place in life which, again, is driven to libertarian conduct undaunted by transitory laws and rules of social morality. Just as the senses do not perceive the life after death, they furnish an irrefutable evidence that death is the end of life. As a logical development of this idea, the demand for making the best of the present life becomes unassailable, rationally and intellectually, and all efforts are directed only to make life more comfortable. The conclusion thus arrived at by the sensist intellect is, indeed, reasonable and correct.

During the initial stages of a

materialistic civilization (sometimes even in later stages too) the impulse behind human behaviour is not abstract morality but self-interest. As this civilization progresses, social needs make it necessary to take recourse to certain moral concepts but these too are generally based on epicurean ideals. In other words, the objective remains pleasure and sensual enjoyment. In a more developed stage the ideal changes from pleasure to utility i.e. the moral code of the society aims at the greatest good of the greatest number but pleasure and sensual enjoyment continues to play a dominant role in the determination of utility.

Utilitarian Outlook

Another feature of the sensist and materialistic civilization, in fact a supplementary trait of the one described above, is the preference given to immediate benefit over ultimate gain, owing to proximity of the former to sensory cognition. Preference of the immediate gain requires little thought to be given in deciding any issue. This is the reason why materialistic civilization manifests a peculiar shallowness and ostentation, and its social behaviour is marked by individualism, selfishness and profit-motive.

A natural outcome of such a mentality is exaltation of material gains over principles, morals and faith. How-so-ever lofty principles or ideologies, ethical or moral codes and articles of faith or belief

may be there, they can be jettisoned at the altar of meanest profit and smallest gain. Persons acquiring such an outlook of life and attitude of behaviour are always ready to compromise with every system; they exhibit a wonderful capacity of adaptability according to changed circumstances. They can mould themselves with greater ease than a man made of wax. They can work for any ideology, fight under any flag and die or kill for any cause provided they have something to gain; no matter whether the profit to be had is negligible, or even doubtful. This attitude often develops into a national outlook but in every case its message remains: Go with the time, if the time goes hard for you.

Man—A Social Animal

The sensist civilization accords recognition to sensory organs as the sole media for acquiring knowledge. The sensory perceptions, as already stated, indicate nothing beyond the fact that man is physiologically an animal, albeit of a higher species. It, therefore, goes back to animalism—the gestures dictated by its perceptions—looking forward to the animal for finding the lost chains of human history, the secrets of human behaviour, attitudes and instincts; and prescribes norms of conduct, as it should, animalised in spirit and content for human beings.

The recurrence of the words 'sensist' and 'animal' should not cause any misunderstanding that a sensist civilization

implies a primitive form of social existence bereft of cultural attainments and civilized institutions. In fact I call it sensist because of its origin and spirit even though it is the most developed and sophisticated social order. Under the sensist civilization life is enriched, made comfortable and attractive, and all the available material resources are mobilised for inventions and improvements designed to make life easier to an extent larger than under civilizations springing from intellectual or revelatory ideologies. No other civilization can, indeed, lay a greater claim to material welfare and advancement because this form of civilization is furnished with all the sinews of material progress.

Material progress

The world has at times seen phenomenal progress achieved by this civilization. It has turned barren lands into gardens, constructed canals over mountains raised magnificent buildings and produced such monuments of human skill and ingenuity that one is apt to regard it as an intellectual civilization. Still, the fact remains that it conquers intellect solely for sensual and materialistic comforts.

Denial of God

Adites of ancient Arabia were once the greatest exponents of sensist-materialistic civilization. Their culture was the most advanced of that Age and exhibited numerous features of sensism. The way of their life was marked by denial of God and the life after death. They

constructed palatial buildings, sometimes unnecessarily, merely for ostentation, fame and worldly glory. Their love for life and of the world had taken possession of their soul to such an extent that they considered their nation to be immortal. Their wars were such a display of tyrannical power as if they had placed themselves beyond the bounds of creature lines and denied the control of a Divine power over them.

The Prophet of Adites, Hud (peace be upon him), addressed them thus:

“Build ye on every high place a monument for vain delight?

And seek ye out strongholds, that haply ye may last forever?

And if ye seize by force, seize ye as tyrants”?

(Shu’ara: 128-30)

Their successors, Thamudites, were also so preoccupied with the pursuits of worldly life and its comforts that it was clearly visible that they had lost all faith in everything imperceptible to their senses. Their Prophet, Salih (peace be upon him), told them:

“Will ye be left secure in that which is here before us, in gardens and water-springs,

And tilted fields and heavy-sheathed palm trees, though ye hew out dwellings in the mountain, being skilful”?

(Shu’ara: 146-9)

Idol worship

Sensism, materialism and animism go together. The religious instinct of the nations accepting sensism and materialism finds expression in idol worship; for, those steeped in sensist outlook, attitude and approach towards everything find it extremely difficult to conceive a God that cannot be concretised, seen or brought before them as a symbol for meditation. They create material demi-gods to satisfy the innate divine instinct and thus materialise or falsify the spirituous in them like other phases of their life.

Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) was born in a nation which had gone far ahead in idol worship on its path of materialistic civilization. Al-Qur'an says of them:

“Recite unto them the story of Abraham:

When he said unto his father and his folk:

What worship ye?

They said : We worship idols, and are ever devoted unto them.

He said : Do they hear you when ye cry ?

Or do they benefit or harm you?

They said: Nay, but we found our fathers acting on this wise

He said: See now that which ye worship,

Ye and your fore-fathers!

Lo ! they are (all) an enemy unto me, save the Lord

of the Worlds,

Who created me, and He doth guide me,

And Who feedeth me and watereth me.

And when I sicken, then He healeth me.

And Who causeth me to die, then giveth me life

(again).

And Who, I ardently hope, will forgive me my sin on

the Day of Judgement”.

(Shu 'ara: 69-82)

Perversion of human nature

Increasing emphasis on materialism and sensisms and the exaltation of sensual desires and their satisfaction over moral precepts result into perversion of human nature. The good sense becomes dormant and moral responsibility recedes into insignificance, Human nature degenerates to a level which is shameful even for the beast. Prophet Lut (peace be upon him) was born amongst a people who had reached the same depth moral degradation. He said to his people:

“What ! of all creatures do ye come unto the males,

And leave the wives your Lord
created for you?

Nay but ye are forward folk”.

(Shu‘ara: 165-6)

“For come ye not in unto males, and
cut ye not the road (for travelers), and
commit ye not abomination in your
meetings?

(Ankabbt : 29)

Profiteering

The covetous desire to exact the maximum of profit is a natural outcome of utilitarian mentality. This motive, by its very nature, is incapable of making any distinction between lawful and unlawful gains and prefers personal benefit over that of the community irrespective of the evil effects following in the wake of adopting such a course. Deceit, dishonesty and other malpractices become the secrets of trade.

Midianites were adept traders, well-versed in all these malpractices of the profession. Their Prophet demanded of them:

“Give full measure, and be not of those

Who give less (than the due).

And weigh with the true balance.

Wrong not makind in their goods,
and do not evil,

making mischief, in the earth”.

(Shu‘arä : 181-3)

Moral confusion under Roman Empire

Egypt, Syria, Iran and Greece have been centres of materialistic civilization in different periods of history. The natural corollaries of sensist-materialism found full expression at different times in each of these countries.

The Roman civilization was, however, a masterpiece of sensist-materialistic culture. Sensism regulated its moral behaviour and ethical code while materialistic outlook informed the thought and attitude of its citizens and determined the objectives of social life. Its thought philosophy, social outlook and intellectual precept survived not only numerous revolutions and the ups-and-downs of kingdoms and empires but still animates the modern western civilization. John William Draper depicts a picture of social and moral confusion prevailing during the glorious age of Roman Empire in these words:

“When the empire in a military and political sense had reached its culmination, in a religious and social aspect it had attained its height of immorality. It had become thoroughly epicurean; its maxim was, that life should be made a feast, that virtue is only the seasoning of pleasure, and temperance the means of prolonging it. Dining-rooms glittering with gold and incusted with gems, slaves in superb apparel, the fascinations of female society where all the women were dissolute, magnificent

baths, theatres, gladiators, such were the objects of Roman desire. The conquerors of the world had discovered that the only thing worth worshipping is Force. By it all things might be secured, all that toil and trade had laboriously obtained. The confiscation of goods and lands, the taxation of provinces, were the reward of successful warfare; and the emperor was the symbol of force. There was a social splendour, but it was the phosphorescent corruption of the ancient Mediterranean World.”

Arabian age of Ignorance

The Arabian Age of Ignorance prior to the advent of Islam in the seventh Century A. D., was a purely sensist-materialistic age in thought and attitude, social and moral behavior. It had no concept of the life after death: it had been assumed that the alternation of day and night within the orbit of time and space, heaven and earth, provided the cause behind everything that took place; and that no super-human or super-natural agency had any power to break this chain of automation. Al-Qur'an says about these people:

“There is naught but our life of the world; we die and we live, and we shall not be raised (again).

(Mominun: 37)

“And they say: There is naught but our life of the world; we die and we live, and naught destroyeth us save time.”

(Jāthia 24)

A poet of that age, Shaddakh bin Y'amar-al-Kan'ani, employs the same argument to exhort his tribe to war against another. He asks: “Why be cowards if you have to die like your enemy?’ His argument is an example of the sensist way of thinking and the psychology of its adherents:

“Yea, fight ye tribe of Khoza'ah with your enemies

and don't be cowards.

Thy adversaries, like ye, have hair on their heads ;

Shall they come to life, once dead?”.

Purely materialistic and epicurean attitude of emerges as a logical inference of the denial of the after and this can be noticed in the Arabian Age of Ignorance too. They thought that one has to die in any case, then why waste this brief sojourn on earth by denying sensual gratification or the satisfaction of carnal desires ; for, won't it be better to die contented than to live in want? Another poet of that Age of Ignorance, Tarafa bin al-Abad, epitomises the same concept in these verses:

“O thou, who censurest me for engaging in combats and pursuing pleasures, wilt thou, if I avoid them, insure me immortality?

If thou art unable to repel the stroke of death, allow me, before it comes, to enjoy the good, which I possess.

A man of my generous spirits drinks

his full draught today; and tomorrow, when we are dead, it will be known, which of us has not quenched his thirst”.

In a purely sensist and materialistic age the other object of life—a bit higher than comfort and luxury—is achievement of fame and honour, display of power, courage and manliness. Indeed, an intellect steeped in materialism cannot think of anything nobler. These aspirations find expression in the following lines’ by Tarafa:

“Save only for three things in which noble youth take delight.

I care not how soon rises over me the coronach loud:

Wine that foams when the water is poured on it, ruddy, not bright,

Dark wine that I quaff stol’n away from the cavilling crowd;

And then my fierce charge to the rescue on back of a mare.

Wide-stepping as wolf, I have startled where thirsty he cowers;

And third, the day-long with a lass in her tent of goat’s hair,

To hear the wild rain and beguile of their slowness the hours”.

Ideas like these give birth to a peculiar philosophy of ignorance, for, not even uncivilized and unlettered people can maintain a semblance of social coherence without a philosophy—a view of life in

entirety. Like other branches of its learning, arts and sciences, the philosophy of ignorance does not go deep, it is content to draw inference from the exterior and to adopt the concrete and present in preference to the ultimate and unseen. Ideas, thoughts and emotions expressed by the poets of such an age expound its philosophic view of life. This is more so in the case of Arabian Age-of Ignorance wherein poetry was the only compass of its wisdom. These thoughts, sometimes depicting a truth, are not without the innate spirit and instinct of the age in which they were born. In one of his poems Tarafa holds that after death, prudence and indifference become indistinguishable. He points to the graves of two persons, one extremely cautious and the other frivolous, and says that both have been reduced to dust. The miser and prodigal are here merely symbolic, thereby covering the entire field of human behaviour.

“To my eyes the grave of the niggardly who’s mean with his money,

Is one with the wastrel’s who’s squandered his substance in idleness;

All you can see is a couple of heaps of dust, and on them,

Slabs of granite, flat stones piled shoulder to shoulder.”

With these psychological traits at the base, the social life under ignorance develops a peculiar ethical code suited to its genius. In such societies, unless

historical circumstances give birth to effeminate tendencies, manliness, valour, fights and forays bulk large in the life of the people. War is considered a necessity in people constantly remain at feud for trifles, even if no purpose is to be achieved through it. Sometimes when they have no enemy to fight, they attack their own allies to satisfy their lust for strife and bloodshed. An Arab poet, Qatami, expresses this master-passion of those days in these words:

“And we attack our brethren Banu Bakar, when

Amongst the brothers and allies we have to fight none.”

The instinct to wage war for its own sake or, merely for the display of war-like prowess of any people is an impulse of ignorance, and it very often takes hold of the sensist societies. A poet of Ignorance expresses his savage joy over the fury of war which he hopes to blaze when his horse is able to carry him on its back:

“When my young, ruddy colt is grown up for ride,

May God inflame, between tribes, the flaming furnace of fight;

A fire flaming, that consumes every one, and spares none.”

The cooperation and alliance in an age of ignorance is never imbued with the principles of equity; nor is it bound by the limitations of just and unjust, right and wrong, permitted and forbidden or the like.

Instead, a partisan spirit lies at the back of all transactions of peace and amity. Never paying any heed to the call or the object for which its help is sought, the materialistic civilizations only look to the person giving the call or seeking its help. This sentiment has found a beautiful expression in a verse by an Arab poet who says:

“Help thy brother, whether he be oppressor or the oppressed.”

Again, the poet says:

“In oppression, if I help not my brother,

What help can I, when he is oppressed, render?”

I have indicated the features of sensist-materialistic civilization in some detail for it has almost always been the dominant, widespread and most popular social order of the world.

INTELLECTUAL CIVILIZATION

We do not find in the annals of history any civilization which can be called intellectual, in which nothing ever accepted unless weighed in the scale of reason or commended by human intellect. If such a civilization were to come into existence it would make life an ordeal and would not perhaps last for more than a few days. As a western writer has well said:

“Man is by far more stupid in his actions than prudent”.

It would thus not be correct to claim that reason alone can become the base

of culture and its ramifications. In fact, ideas and thoughts, beliefs and superstitions, habits, customs and usages come into existence first, before any thought is given to them ; thereafter intellect comes to discriminate, accept or reject them, and not unoften it so happens that the intellect assumes the role of an advocate and defender of the existing usages. What reasons were not conceived by the Grecian intellect to vindicate female lewdness and prostitution? No act of human brutality and savagery can rival gladiatorial sports, but, did Roman intellectuals' sophistry not try to prove it inoffensive? Was not Arabian custom of infanticide and suttee in India rationalised by the intellectual pundits of these countries? Nevertheless, these sophistries and rationalisations could neither alter the realities nor intellectualise these customs or the civilizations which produced them.

Even philosophy cannot claim to be completely free irrational traits much less to prefer such a claim on behalf of culture or social order.

Greek philosophy is commonly regarded as the essence of speculative thought but quite a large portion of it was drawn from Grecian mythology and superstitions. Even Aristotle and Plato, with all their claims to free-thought, could not deliver their precepts from the confines of their environment and accepted many an illogical notion of the day.

Materialism in intellectual civilization

Civilizations commonly accepted as intellectual and scientific at the first glance, if subjected to a closer scrutiny, would none-the-less be found to be essentially sensist and materialistic. Among such social orders the present civilization of the West has been the most deceptive, thanks to its crafty propagandists; for, it is regarded as the most scientific and intellectual civilization man has ever known. It was, however, an offspring of the revolt of sensism and pragmatism against the intellectual movement, and its achievements comprise a decisive victory of matter over intellect, senses over spirit and experience over faith. European philosophers, scholars, social scientists and ethicists began their crusade against intellectualism in the seventeenth century. They declared that anything which cannot be experimented, measured, weighed or counted is not acceptable, and, abiding by the same standard, believed that nothing is moral if it has no utility. They sought a rational elaboration of pure perception in order to propound a new theory of cosmology completely divorced of a transcendental, human and metaphysical reality. They denied every power save matter and motion and dubbed the spiritual explanation of cosmic phenomena as essentially irrational and untenable. They propounded the theory of mechanical or natural causation which, in their view, was the only intelligible and scientific explanation of the cosmic order. Every

other explanation, thought and discourse was rejected as irrational or unscientific with the result that gradually pragmatism, natural selection and utilitarianism came to have its sway over the entire field of human life. The new doctrine thus animated the entire human existence, leaving not untouched its remotest corner—the recesses of mind and heart—and accepted utility and pragmatic experience as the cornerstone of social, ethical, economic and political life.

It is undoubtedly correct that the terms “intellect” and “nature” have been used to a far greater extent in the European literature than in other literary compositions of the world. These works have had a magical effect and are still readily acceptable to the western mind but if one were to explore their meanings and examine their application to human life, he would find that intellect stands for animal intellect (if it can be so named); an intellect bound by perceptions and experiences and rejecting everything imperceptible as irrational and unreal. A philosopher of the fifteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci, expounded this view in unambiguous terms Leonardo’s view has been thus expressed by Herold Hoffding in his History of Modern Philosophy.

“..... the results of our knowledge can only acquire perfect certainty by means of the employment of mathematics. Wisdom is the daughter of experience and it is therefore, also a product of time. Leonardo rejects all

speculations which find no confirmation in experience, the common mother of all sciences”.

Human nature thus construed is not different from the nature of the beast; for, it becomes devoid of sublime instincts, moral consciousness, nobleness of heart and intellectual virtue. It is weary of all restraints over its freedom and demands complete mastery over itself in order to satisfy the appetites of flesh; to eat, drink and amuse itself without any intervention from any quarter. The context in which the word “nature” is more often used in western literature leaves no doubt that it does not stand for aught but animal instinct.

Sensist thought and empirical sciences had evolved a hazy concept of social animal for the human being. The European age of materialistic reasoning has unfolded this concept into a perfect and logical postulate of materialism which, since accepted as an article of faith, permeates the intellect and soul of the man, and renders it propitious for him to attain conformity with his true nature i.e. his ancestral instincts.

Epicurean ideals

As a consequence, natural and inevitable, as it should be, pleasure and enjoyment became the ultimate object or ideal of human life. An Arab poet of the Age of Ignorance beautifully renders the same sentiment in these words:

“He is a generous fellow, one that

soaks himself in wine;

You will know tomorrow, when we're dead, where the world exists".

Another poet expressed the same idea when he said: "Enjoy life for it is bestowed only once", but, the oriental symbolism and idiomatic expression being unsuited to the Occidental frankness, the latter spelt out this view unambiguously in the well-known maxim: "Eat, Drink and be Merry ere ye die tomorrow."

This materialistic view-point and selfish disposition pervades all spheres of human life, as, for example, in economics it turns to capitalism, in politics to imperialism. In attitude and thought it chooses between two opposing systems, that which it finds easier, perceptible and nearer to its sensist leanings, as, for instance, its choice fell to the limited geographical and racial nationalism which, being nearer to sensism, is more even though a social order with an ideological base is prone to be universal and more wide-based. Indeed, it could have never conceived of the whole world as the birth-place of human beings and, accordingly, accepted the narrower concept of nationalism in preference to a broader view of humanism. With the gradual attenuation of religion in the West, nationalism established itself as if these were two sides of the same scale—one rose to the extent the other went down.

The contemporary literature of Europe, no doubt, exhibits a keen interest

in spiritualism but it would be erroneous to suppose that this literature interprets any spiritual movement aiming at the purification of hurt or moral refinement; since, the object of these compositions is simply development of certain latent human faculties for the display of wondrous and startling feats. It is treated as an art, or, rather as a science like mesmerism, having nothing to do with the betterment of human morals or the elevation-of soul.

Western materialism

The whole of Europe has, indeed, not renounced religion. A greater part of it still professes Christianity; Church services are attended on Sundays, Christian rites and functions are held with considerable pomp and show in the whole of Europe, many traces of Christian traditions are still visible, yet, the religion of Europe is nothing but materialism.

A right thinking European Muslim analyses the modern materialistic life of Europe in these words:

"The average Occidental—be he a Democrat or a Fascist, a Capitalist or a Bolshevik, a manual worker or an intellectual-knows only one positive "religion" and that is the worship of material progress, the belief that there is no other goal in life than to make that very life continually easier or, as the current expression goes, "independent of Nature". The temple of this "religion" are the gigantic factories, cinemas, chemical laboratories,

dancing halls, hydro-electric works; and its priests ate bankers, engineers, film stars, captains of industry, record airmen.

The unavoidable result of this craving after power and pleasure is the creation of hostile groups armed to the teeth and determined to destroy each other whenever and wherever their respective interests come to clash. And on the cultural side the result is the creation of a human type whose morality is confined to the questions of practical utility alone, and whose highest criterion of good and evil is material success.

In the profound transformation the social life of the West is undergoing at present, that new, utilitarian morality becomes daily more and more apparent. All virtues having a direct bearing upon the material welfare of society—for example, technical efficiency, patriotism, nationalist group-sense—are being exalted and often absurdly exaggerated in their value; while virtues which, until recently, were valued from a purely ethical point of view, as, for example, filial love or sexual fidelity, rapidly lose their importance—because they do not confer a tangible, material benefit upon society. The age in which the insistence on strong family bonds was decisive for the well-being of the group or the clan is being superseded, in the modern West, by an age of collective organisation under far wider headings. And in a society which is essentially technological and is being organised, at a rapidly increasing pace, on

purely mechanical lines the behaviour of a son towards his father is of no great social importance so long as those individuals behave within the limits of general decency imposed by the society on the intercourse between its members. Consequently, the western father daily loses more and more authority over his son and quite logically the son loses respect for the father. Their mutual relations are being slowly overruled and—for all practical purposes—made obsolete by the postulates of mechanized society which has a tendency to abolish all privileges of one individual over another, and—in the logical development of this idea—also the privileges due to family relationship.”

MYSTICAL CIVILIZATION

Mysticism is an antithesis of sensism and materialism. It seeks annihilation of the matter and mortification of the body just as sensism denies existence of soul and its ramifications: the former attacks the body and flesh which, in its view, being the seats of sin, have to be chastened. Asceticism conceives the soul as a bird imprisoned in the cage of human frame, fettered and obstructed from taking wings to the regions, sublime and divine. In its view the soul cannot establish communion with the Ultimate Reality, the fountain-head of its own existence, unless the fetters are broken and soul rendered capable of free movement towards its soul.

Porphyry (233-304) the second greatest exponent of Neo-Platonism holds that the aim of his school of thought is union or immediacy with death; for, the death severs body from soul and thus achieves the ultimate end of life. Another expounder of this school considers pleasure to be the greatest calamity for mankind. In his view it is because of pleasure that soul develops an attachment and concern for the body, weakens its divine content, forgets reality and takes after the ways of the flesh. But the doors of philosophic comprehension are opened only to the pure and unmixed intellect after mortifying the senses. Flesh misleads the soul and so long as soul remains entangled with the matter, it can never penetrate the ultimate and abiding reality.

All those religious and moral orders which had been influenced by asceticism had prescribed self-annihilation, celibacy and repression of sensual pleasures as an essential ingredient of their moral disciplines.

It had become a cardinal principle of these systems that the body and soul were discordant elements which could never unite. Naturally, they considered it propitious for man to ignore and annihilate the body for the sake of his soul.

Consequences of monasticism

Asceticism inevitably generates a willful apathy towards the body and its needs. Not un-often it ignites such a passion against the body as if it were a

stumbling-block in the way of human progress. For it the world becomes an abode of evil, life a dead-weight and social relations a snare. Clearly, such a concept of life cuts at the very root of social existence—it can destroy but not build. Sensism and spiritualism are, no doubt, at the opposite ends of the same pole but there is a difference between the two: one can easily create and sustain a social order of its own but the other cannot bring forth any cultural pattern of civilized social existence even for a short while anywhere in the world.

A logical development of asceticism was that those who accepted this creed became sensists and materialists in their worldly affairs. They had to compromise between their spiritual demands and the needs of the flesh; they were mystics in the monasteries but indulgent materialists on the stage of politics. The world has witnessed many examples of the kind. Ashoka was a devoted and fervent Buddhist, and, at the same time, a successful ruler and a ruthless conqueror. When the Roman Emperor, Constantine, embraced Christianity which had by then degenerated into a mystical and ascetic cult, he had to adopt the same duality. He tried to bring about a fusion of Christian spiritualism with the ignorant and materialistic paganism of his predecessors. Such a synthesis is simply an impossibility and whenever any civilization begins to draw inspiration from a spiritual cult, decay inevitably sets in;

where after either that civilization, culture or nation is effaced from the stage of history, or, if any vitality to defend itself is still left in it, a strong reaction sets in against decadent spiritualism culminating eventually in the victory of sensuous materialism—naked, uncompromising and revengeful—which cannot tolerate spiritualism in any form. This is what had happened in Europe. Christianity had then turned into an ascetic order—to a certain extent more than any other mystic order—first, owing to the impact of Neo-Platonic mystical cults and, secondly, because of the false and misleading interpretation of the Scriptures by the misguided and ignorant clergy who presented Christianity as an unnatural mysticism. Marriage was considered a sin, women a worldly scourge, relationship with the fair sex an impediment in the way of spiritual development; such were the accepted norms of the faith. Learned theologians openly preached celibacy and illustrious monks and priests took pride in abducting children from their homes in order to train them in far off desert monasteries. Numerous examples of hideous and atrocious self-torture then practised by Christian saints and monks have been cited by Lecky: how the monks lived in caves abandoned by wild beasts, dried up wells and graveyards, donned tunics of long hair, crawled on all fours like animals, ate grass, remained standing on one foot for years together; such was the sickly state of the Age which had numbed

humanity and paralysed civilization in the medieval Europe.

Fanatical asceticism, monstrous and cruel, as it was, inundated the whole of Christendom and shook the very foundations of its civilization; the population of Europe began to deplete quickly, disease, death and famine ravaged the land frequently, knowledge and learning perished, cities wasted away, means of sustenance became scarce, and the entire Christian World was encompassed by ignorance, barbarism and darkness so much so that the Medieval Ages in Europe became a Dark Age.

The reaction against this tyrannical gloom of decadent civilization was inevitable but not unnatural. While spiritualism and monasticism were finally thrown over- board in the nineteenth century, modern Europe hastened to materialism as irresistibly as a starving man falls on the food. The materialism of Europe was the revenge of suffering humanity against the atrocities that it had to undergo for centuries together at the hands of Christian clergy and monks. But it was another aberration of human nature and nobody can say which of the two would be more crushing, monstrous and ruthless for the humanity. It is also difficult to predict when a reaction against the present brutal materialism and its attendant concept of mechanical causation will set in and where will it end.■

The Debt of Gratitude Our Women Owe to Ayesha

- S. Sulaiman Nadwi

The greatest favour that Ayesha has done to women is to demonstrate that a Muslim lady, living in Purdah, can actively participate in literacy, religious, social and political activities and by exhortation, counsel and guidance can work for the betterment of the community. Her life is a living example of the status conferred by Islam on women and how it raised them from indignity and inferiority. Among the Companions were men who could be justifiably designated Messiah of Islam or Haroon of the Prophet's era and by the same token Ayesha could be designated as the Maryam of Islam.

The women-folk of the companions used to reach the Prophet through Ayesha and she would put in a word for them. Uthman bin Maz'aun used to live like an ascetic. His wife approached Ayesha and informed her that her husband kept fast every day and spent the whole night in prayers. Ayesha mentioned it to the Prophet who called on Uthman and said to him, "Islam does not advocate monasticism. Could you not follow my pattern? I fear God much greater than you do and take care to fulfil His commands yet I fulfil the duty I owe to my wives."

Hala used to spend whole nights

in prayers. Ayesha mentioned this to the Prophet when she came to meet her. The Prophet advised her, "Do only as much as you can bear to do."

A woman was punished for theft. She became penitent but even so women did not like to meet her. Ayesha would visit her and would even convey her requests to the Prophet.

Ayesha used to get angry if any one considered women as low and inferior. In deciding juristic points concerning women, she used to keep their convenience in view and would cite the Qur'an and Hadith to support her opinion. Her views are followed in most of the Islamic countries. Ibn Zubair held the view that women should cut their hair upto four fingers breadth as a concluding rite of Hajj but Ayesha pronounced that it would be quite adequate for them to cut off a bit from any side.

Before Islam, women had no right in inheritance. Islam gave this right to them. Many of the details are mentioned in the Qur'an but occasions to arise when inferences have to be drawn from the Qur'an and Hadith. One such situation is the state where no son of the deceased is alive and only daughters, grand-sons and grand-daughters are

living. Abdullah bin Masud held that in such a case the grand-daughters would have no share but Ayesha held otherwise.

If a man has declared divorce once or twice, he has to bear the expenditure of his wife during the waiting period but if he had declared it three times, opinions differ as regards the responsibility to maintain the divorcee during the stipulated period that intervenes before re-marriage. Some thought that the only reason for her staying in her husband's house was the possibility that they may reconcile their differences and again enter into wedlock, but this applied to cases where up to two declarations have been made. After the third declaration, the divorce is complete and they cannot remarry without an intervening marriage with another person. The main reason seems to be that it has to be ascertained, if the divorcee is pregnant, the responsibility to maintain the woman rests with the former husband. If anybody forces a person to divorce his wife on pain of imprisonment or death, according to Ayesha, the divorce is not valid. Except for Abu Hanifa, all other leading doctors of law have accepted her view. But for this, it would have been difficult for respectable women to escape the greed and tyranny of unscrupulous rulers.

In the days of ignorance, neither the number of divorces nor the period for return to wedlock were regulated. It was not unusual for men to divorce their wives and take them back before the end of the period of return and to do it repeatedly for some ulterior gain. Such a case came up before Ayesha and she referred it to the Prophet whereupon the revelation came, "A return to each other is permissible up to two declarations of divorce; thereafter an honourable retention or a graceful parting." (Q. 2:229).

The Greatness of Ayesha

History had recorded for us the names of many outstanding women of different ages and countries. Among the famous non-muslim women, figure those who had incidentally performed some spectacular act to gain renown like delivery of brilliant speeches, setting at naught the conspiracy of their enemies or winning a battle through their stratagem and bravery. Some gained fame for their extraordinary beauty or occupation of a throne. Can all these performance stand any comparison to consistent, continuous, planned and life-long fruitful endeavor?

Leaving aside these general considerations if we were to see from the point of view of religion, piety and spirituality we will not find any other star in the firmament of the female world

shedding a light remotely as resplendent. What other woman in the whole world, besides the mother of the believers, who along with righteousness, excellence of character and strict observance of religious obligations, performed splendid deeds in social, political, educational literary and religious fields leaving a valuable pattern for millions of women to follow by her own way of life, devotion to God, advocacy of spiritual ideals, exposition and elucidation of the tenets of religion and Shariah and laws and regulations governing them. Among the Muslim women the only ones who can be compared with her are the other wives and daughters of the Prophet. All the Ulama of Islam are unanimous that the greatest women in the Islamic world are the Khadija, Fatima and Ayesha. Some have ranked them, inter se, in this very order, which is a matter of personal opinion not based on any definite pronouncement of Shariah. Allama ibn Nazm has gone to the length of saying that not only among women, not only among Ahle-Bait but even among the Companions she ranks the highest and he has given a long list of arguments in support of his view. We follow, however, Allama ibn Taimniya and his disciple Hafiz ibn Qaiyyim who have said that if by superiority is meant rank in the celestial world, God alone knows. But from the worldly point of view Ayesha's

attainments are multidimensional. If nobility of the family is the criterion, Fatima occupies the highest place. If precedence in religion, encounter with initial difficulties and support, assistance and befriending of the Prophet in those difficult days are the criteria, then Khadija ranks the highest. But if attainments in knowledge service of religion, propagation of the sayings of the Prophet, guidance and education are the criteria of superiority, Ayesha stands unrivalled.

We know about the greatness of Hadhrat Mariam through the Qur'an, though the Bible's tales give her special eminence. Pharaoh's wife Hadhrat A'asiya has, likewise, been conferred distinction by Islam though the old Testament is silent on this point. We accept their greatness and superiority even though history is silent. But the holy tongue that expressed the revelations, has already made the declaration.

“Among men there were many perfect persons but none among women except two: Mariam, daughter of Imran and A'asiya, wife of Pharaoh. And Ayesha has superiority over other women as Tharid has over other dishes.”

May God shower His blessings on her, the Ahle-Bait, the Companions and the Holy Prophet! ■

(Cont. from page 37)

transcendent realm), the ultimate questions of metaphysics, the domain of God, of His heaven, His angels, His activity, of after-time and beyond-space—are forever beyond our ken. By nature, we can have no knowledge of them other than what God has revealed. Stealing knowledge from heaven like Prometheus is ridiculous; desiring it as did Adam and Eve regardless of consequences is futile. The mature, the responsible, and the wise among humans are those who are satisfied with their human condition; and they move on to undertake the great task of establishing the truth man can establish—namely, knowledge of themselves and of their environment.

Knowledge is infinite because the truth is infinite. There is no shortcut to it; the road leading to it is hard and hazardous, requiring disciplined self-application and dedication. Fortunately man does not start on the quest of knowledge *ex nihilo*. He stands equipped with a number of gifts which make the pursuit easy and bring the object within reach. He is endowed with senses and the faculties of memory and imagination, of theoretical and axiological perception. And above them all stands the critical faculty of reason to guide, to collate and harmonize, to correct and corroborate and relate it to action.

To make the quest still easier, Islam regards Prophecy as an aid to the human quest. Revelation (Scriptures), Islam holds, is not the disclosure of God but making known of His Will and commandments. Its object is knowledge and only knowledge. It is offered as a warning against error and pitfall, as guidance to the truth, the same truth that is the object of the human quest and which the faculties of knowledge seek. It is recorded in a book—the Quran—which contains transcendent truths, principles and purport of all knowledge embodied in all sacred Scriptures of the past.

The Quran stands as a book alongside another “book”, nature or reality, which is equally open, public, and available to the seeker. The contents of the two “books” are identical; the laws of nature are the patterns the Creator has imbedded in His creation. They are hence His Will, whether they apply to nature—to earth and sky, to things and organisms—or to history—to the intentions and deeds of men. Despite the equivalence of the two books, priority belongs to the Quran, because it posits the base of knowledge as such, the very thesis of the place of God, man, nature, and knowledge in the overall scheme of things. In the words of Karen Armstrong:

“The Koran constantly stresses the need for intelligence in deciphering the ‘signs’ or messages of God, Muslims are not to abdicate their reason but to look at the world attentively and with curiosity, It was this attitude that later enabled Muslims to build a fine tradition of natural science,” (A History of God)

The central source of all Islamic knowledge and science is the Quran, to which must be added Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The Quran and the Hadith together are the fountainhead of all that is Islamic in whatever domain it might be. More specifically, these sources have played a double role in the creation and cultivation of the sciences. Secondly, the Quran and the Hadith have created an atmosphere for the cultivation of the sciences by emphasizing the virtue of pursuing all knowledge that is in one way or another confirmation of Divine Unity (*tawhid*). Therefore, a whole metaphysics and cosmology have issued from the bosom of the Quran and the Hadith and have acted as the basis upon which all the Islamic sciences have been constructed. *(To be continued)*

Islamic Awakening And Western Callousness

- S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi*

Islam had to undergo a turbulent period time and again. Disruptive forces and nefarious elements always came in its way with their conspiracies, devilish tricks and frauds.

**“Sateza kar raha hai azal sey ta
amroz**

**Chiraghe Mustafavi sey shararey
bulahbi”**

(From the very beginning till date light of the prophet had been the target of Abu Lahab’s blows.)

But Islam stood the test of time, remained adamant to its principles and played a radiant role from the very outset despite of many hurdles and obstructions.

Now Islam is under attack again from all sides. The menaces emerge sometime in the form of oppressions and atrocities and sometime in the guise of confrontation, war and clashes.

But these trials assume significance. For inspite of their darkneses and glooms, they are like that of a messenger which brought this good tiding that Muslim community is rising from its deep slumber to awakening. A bright future awaits for the restoration of their diminishing power,

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sinking pomp falling dignity and honour.

**“Jahan ne naw ho raha hai paida
wah alamepeer mar raha hai**

**jisey firangi muqamero ne bna diya
hai qumar khana”**

(A new world is coming up and the old one is dying which the gamblers of the west have made a gambling den.)

It is an admitted truth that if Muslims would not have been careless, western nations could not have surpassed them, while they were going astray in the deepest caves of ignorance and superstition. The leadership of the world was in the hands of Muslims. They were distinguished in every field of life. Be it research, discoveries, inventions, arts, science and technology. Their position was that of a caravan leader. They were well equipped with all kinds of tools of strategy. They were respected everywhere.

It should be noted that thirsty for knowledge came to Islamic universities and quenched their academic thirst from these seminaries. They were astonished with Muslims glorious arts, sciences, learning, excellency and trimness from civilization and culture. It is unfortunate that lethargy, slackness, negligence and carelessness

overshadowed them instead of making further in the field of arts and sciences. They remained in the state of stagnation till more than four centuries. This is such a period which was sufficient for any other nation's awakening and development.

Hence young western graduates of Islamic universities came forward and gained power and strength and began to lead the world.

Needless to add that people hailing from various schools of thoughts and communities joined this new group of Europe. Because of their animosity, hatred, malice and hostility against Islam, they came together to malign Islam and its adherents. They started wringing the last drop of blood from the veins of Muslims. They concentrated their energy in obliterating Islamic norms and values. They behaved with Muslims in such a way which cannot be expressed. But it would be sufficient to add that the thinkers of west did not only paralyse their power but they used their wisdom and reason to efface the achievements and contributions made by Muslims.

Besides they shattered the unity of Muslims and infused the feeling of cowardice, weakness, ignominy in them and made them to fall prey to inferiority complex and deflected their attention from their radiant past. Moreover, Muslims future planning and passion for

progress and development were also thwarted by Europe.

It goes without saying that the callousness of Europe is obvious. Here a white man is considered respectable and reverend and non-white particularly black man is regarded no more than an animal. Ancestors of European nations behaved with their slaves in the same way. Even today civilized Europe and America treat Blacks shabbily.

After all, Europe succeeded in extirpating Muslims ideologically and led eastern nations like a flock of slaves and animals and used them in achieving its end sometime under the pretext of tricks, ruse and evasion and sometime with oppressions and atrocities.

Europe was benefitted from resources of eastern countries particularly Islamic countries. With the help of Muslims wealth, Europe made great strides in the field of science and technology.

A part from it Europe left no stone unturned in discovering hidden resources from earth and made use of natural sciences and arts. It regulated them in achieving progress and prosperity and enhancing their civilization and culture. These resources brought grist to the mill. Even they began to throw up sealing ladders on the stars with the help of these discoveries and inventions. Due to their developments

it seemed that Europe would hold the leadership of the world and the position of the remaining nations would be so crushed that they would reduce to non-entity. But according to everlasting law of nature every nation awakens from its slumber. Accordingly Muslims also began to find out the way of future on the track of their past glories. They developed a sense of reaction against oppressions, atrocities, defamation and disgrace. To achieve success, a wave of awakening started penetrating in their veins.

All possible efforts are being made to subdue the wave of Islamic awakening by elements of imperialism. With the result that the tussle is gaining momentum between Islamic awareness and western callousness. As a reaction of this, the entire of Islam is confronted with various trials. But these trials will not go vain, they are creating more impetus and convulsion in Muslims. Due to its impact, signs of defeatism and repulsion began to emerge in the ranks of western power.

In fact, Muslim Ummah will turn into gold by warming themselves from this forge of trials.

***“Islam ki fitrat men qudrat ne
lachak di hai
utna hi woh ubhrega jitna ki
dabawo ge “***

(Almighty has given flexibility and elasticity in the nature of Islam. So you Press it, it will come up.)

The time of development, progress, prosperity, elevation and exaltation of Muslims has come. They will soon obtain their lost glory again. They will occupy the same dignity, honour, power and pomp which were their distinctions and excellence in their past.

Now their efforts will be spent in digging out the stores of knowledge and wisdom. Once again they will foster the distinctive norms of humanity and guidance proving themselves as the best nation. They will lead the oppressed people towards the light of oneness of God by extricating them from darkness, ignorance and seduction. At last opponents of Islam will be defeated and humiliated and the lamp of Islam will continue to spreading light despite storms, cyclones and tsunamis.

***“Hawa Hai go tundotez lekin
Charagh apna jala raha hai
woh mard wo darvesh jisko haq ne
diye hain andaz-e-khusrowana “***

(Even if wind is stormy but the lamp continues to spread light by the man and beggar whom the Divine truth has conferred the style of Khusru.) ■

Protection of Faith-A Big Problem

- S. Bilal Abdul Hai Hasani Nadwi*

Today, the most striking issue in the country is to safeguard the faith. The new generation is rapidly going astray from the straight path. Madrasa going children can be counted on fingers. About 95 percent of Muslim children study in government schools, colleges and universities. Unfortunately, they are left free and no particular attention is paid towards their educational curricula. The need of the hour is that an attempt must be made as what they are taught, how they are brought up and how their minds are moulded. Now, they are openly made rebels against the teachings of Islam. The present scenario is not less than the scourge for Ulama and leaders of the community.

The new syllabus also plays destructive role by sowing the seeds of hatred, abhorrence and animosity in the minds of innocent children. It is not hidden from Islamic scholars and peace loving persons. It has been taken for granted that these school going children belong to a particular section. A few days back someone showed me a lesson from a prescribed book in which appeared that Eid is the festival of Muslims they celebrate it in this or that manner. Holi is the festival of Hindus they enjoy it in this or that way. The above mentioned division clearly steers towards an unfriendly atmosphere. Moreover, it projects phenomena of polytheism in a magnificent way. Besides, Islamic history is presented in a distorted form. It is not less than a deadly poison. For the last one decade incidents of

apostasy and recantation gained momentum to a great extent. The new menace badly affects the new generation. It appears that it will wash them away from the mainstream. If it is not checked only Allah knows what will happen in the future. There are two ways to handle it. One thing is that morning and evening makatibs (schools) for the period of one or two hours should be set up for the school going children and such arrangements should be made in every mosque of the locality. Thus they may easily learn basic tenets of Islam and be able to lead their lives according to Islamic Sharia. The second thing is that standard Islamic schools are to be established where modern education should be imparted along with moral and religious learning in sublime and sophisticated way. In this way an atmosphere of peace and serenity may come up in the society. It also may help put an end to the prevailing spate of apostasy which is engulfing the new generation as a whole.

In a nutshell, these two tasks are very important for all of us. It is time we must take it seriously and gird up our loins to do these life-giving and holistic endeavors. It is such a phenomenon which leads to the promotion of faith and the development of the spirit of brotherhood and fellow-feeling. God willing, situation will definitely change. Indeed, Allah helps those who strive hard and lay their lives for the way of Allah. As the Holy Qur'an says, "And those who strive in Our cause, We will certainly guide them to Our paths: for verily Allah is with those who do right" (S.29, A.69)■ (English Rendering: Obaidur Rahman Nadwi)

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Islam And Science

- Mohammad Aslam Siddiqui*

Islam is a true religion. It is free from all sorts of deviations and interpolations. From the very outset it stressed on the importance of knowledge and learning. The first revelation of the Holy Qur'an "Iqra bismi Rabbi kallazi khalaq" vividly lays immense stress on the acquisition of all kinds of knowledge. "It should be noted that before the advent of Islam Aristotle theory was in vogue. The theory was based on "Deductive Research". 1. Theory 2. Hypothesis 3. Observation and 4. Confirmation

It is Islam which first introduced "Inductive Theory". 1. Observation 2. Pattern 3. Hypothesis and 4. Theory.

The main point is that the observation is the first and the theory is in the last in Islam. That is why the Qur'an repeatedly asks the mankind to look around and ponder over what they observe. The Holy Qur'an says "Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day, there are indeed Signs for men of understanding" (S.3,A.190) It further says, "Say: Travel through the earth and see what was the End of those before you : most of them were Idolaters." (S.30,S,42) "Fourteen centuries ago, the Holy Qur'an mentioned (in a miraculous manner) the creation of the

universe, the motion of the sun and the motion of day and night. Modern science explains the creation of the universe by the "Big Bang theory" which is supported by observational and experimental data gathered over decades. According to "the Big Bang theory" the whole universe was initially one big mass then there was a huge explosion which resulted in the formation of galaxies out of agglomerated clouds of celestial matter in a smoke or gaseous form.

In 1925, American astronomer Edwin Hubble provided observational evidence that stars are moving away from each other which implies that galaxies and the whole universe is expanding. Also, it is an established scientific fact that planets move in elliptical orbits around the sun and rotate around their axes. "One will be surprised at the similarities between the modern scientific discoveries and the following verses in the Holy Qur'an which were recited by Muhammad (PBUH) more than 14 centuries ago and preserved until now. (The Prophet of Islam Muhammad, Biography and Pictorial Guide, page,188-189)" "Haven't the disbelievers known that the heaven and the earth were joined together as one piece and We separated them apart and We made every living thing of water? Will they not then believe?" (S.21, A.30) "He, the

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Almighty God " turned to the heaven when it was smoke and said to it and to the earth: come together willingly or unwillingly, they said: we come together in willing obedience" (S.42,A.11) "And it is He Who created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. And (the celestial bodies) swim along (float), each in its rounded "course (orbit)" (S.21,A.33) "With power and skill We created the heaven and We are continuously expanding it. "(S.51,A.47)

"Historically, the scientific glory of the Arabic nation originated on the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century C.E., where the Prophet Muhammad united the Arab tribes and inaugurated the Muslim religion. The Islamic State was formed in 622 C.E., when the Prophet Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina. Within a century after his death (632)C.E.) a large part of the planet, from Southern Europe throughout North Africa to Central Asia and on to India was controlled by and / or influenced by the Muslim world. The Golden Age was based on several factors. Muslims following the guidelines of the prophet studied and searched for knowledge. The Qur'an is clear. The scholar's ink is more sacred than the blood of martyrs, while the Prophet promoted medical research preaching that "For every disease, Allah has given a cure". "Communication became easier because the Muslim Empire united expensive geographic areas. Furthermore, the Arabic language became a unifying factor.

Translation from Greek, Latin and Chinese into Arabic were innumerable, thus removing language barriers for scholars. During the same period, Arab learned from the Chinese how to produce paper and books became more available. Libraries were established in Cairo, Aleppo, Baghdad and urban centers in Iran, Central Asia and Spain, while bookshops thousands of titles opened in several cities. Finally, the House of Wisdom an academic institution serving as a university, was set up in Baghdad in 1004 C.E". (Source Internet)

It is Islam which instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation. Within a few years of the spread of Islam, great civilizations and universities were flourishing. The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas, and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems, such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and the concept of Zero (vital to advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from the Muslim world. Sophisticated instruments which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery, such as the astrolabe, the quadrant, and good navigation maps, were also developed by Muslims." (A Brief Illustrated Guide To Understanding Islam, p,56-57) ■

(To be continued) .

Beloved Nursery Rhymes With Horrifying Origins

- Karan Thapar*

I imagine many of you have heard of Jack and Jill. If you remember, they climbed up the hill, Jack fell down and Jill came tumbling after. It used to seem like an innocent frolic, a children's jape, but it turns out its real meaning is far darker and more portentous. And that, in fact, seems to be true of many other nursery rhymes I used to love.

According to an article in Vagabomb.com, sent by my cousin, Nonika, "Jack and Jill" are actually France's Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette. In 1793, they were guillotined. Thus Louis "lost his crown" (ie his head) and Jill's soon "came tumbling after".

Another much-loved nursery rhyme "Baa Baa Black Sheep" has even older origins. In the 13th century, King Edward the First imposed an extremely harsh wool tax on farmers — one-third for the King or Master, one-third for the Church or Dame and one-third for the farmers. An older version of the rhyme ends "but none for the little boy, who cries down the lane". In other words, there was very little for the people who actually cultivated the wool.

Do you remember "Old Mother Hubbard", for whom "the cupboard was bare"? Well, it seems she wasn't even a woman, if this article is to be believed. Old Mother Hubbard is supposed to be Cardinal Wolsey, who fell into Henry the

Eighth's bad books because he couldn't get him a divorce. The king is the "poor dog" and the divorce is the "bone". The "cupboard" is the Catholic Church. Hmm...

Now, one of my favourite nursery rhymes is "Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie". There are many naughty versions of this that I will not repeat, but they're not as inaccurate as I had always assumed. Georgie, it transpires, is none other than George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, who was once rumoured to be King James the First's lover. Is that, perhaps, why the girls cried when he kissed them? But why did he run away when the boys came out to play?

A favourite of the teacher who taught me in kindergarten was "Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses" which, this article says, is actually "Ring around the Rosie". Anyway, its origin lies embedded in the Great Plague of 1665. When "we all fall down", we're dead. Thank God the little children, who skipped around the school garden tunelessly singing this rhyme, weren't aware of its actual meaning.

Interestingly, several nursery rhymes have their origin in Tudor times. "Mary Mary Quite Contrary" refers to Queen Mary, who reigned briefly between her short-lived half-brother, Edward the Sixth, and her glorious and successful half-sister, who first made the name Elizabeth famous. The "silver bells" and "cockle

* *Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story.*

shells” are torture devices popular in her day. The “pretty maids all in a row” is a euphemistic reference to hundreds of women burnt at the stake for the crime of being Protestant. Mary attempted to re-impose Catholicism after her father, Henry VIII, had forcibly converted the country to the Church of England.

Another, that comes from the same time, is “Three Blind Mice”. They’re supposed to be three Protestant bishops who Mary burned at the stake for treason and heresy — Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Radley and Thomas Cranmer, then Archbishop of Canterbury. “It was mistakenly believed that she also blinded and dismembered them, as the rhyme goes, as if being burnt alive was not

enough”. Incidentally, I wouldn’t use this precedent to call the next bishop you meet a mouse!

Finally, would you ever believe what “London Bridge is Falling Down” possibly alludes to? Of the many theories afloat, one is the belief “a bridge would collapse unless a human sacrifice was buried in its foundation.” For those who want to know, it’s called immurement.

Unfortunately, this article doesn’t relate the alleged origins of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”. I wonder what that might be? But the ease with which it has lent itself to Punjabi interpretation suggests it could be a lot closer to home. ■

*(Courtesy: The Hindustan Times,
12-12-2021)*

HC Rebukes Guj Civic Body Over Removal of Non-Veg Food Stalls

The Gujarat high court rebuked the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) for removing stalls of street vendors selling non-vegetarian food, and wondered what the civic body had to do with people’s food choices.

“How can you decide what people should eat? Suddenly because someone in power thinks that this is what they want to do? Tomorrow you will decide what I should eat outside my house?,” a single-judge bench of Justice Biren Vaishnav observed. The HC was hearing a petition filed by 20 street vendors, mainly egg and non-vegetarian food stall owners, but also fruit and vegetable sellers, challenging AMC’s action and the non-implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which, among other things, aims to protect legitimate street vendors from harassment by police and civic authorities. The judge added, “Ask your Corporation Commissioner to be present! How do you dare indiscriminately pick up people?”

The judge asked whether AMC was following the wishes of the party in power. “Tomorrow they will tell me that I should not consume sugarcane juice because it might cause diabetes or that coffee is bad for my health.”

Between November 9 and 12, the municipal corporations of Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Rajkot, Junagadh and Bhavnagar issued oral directives to officials to remove stalls and kiosks selling non-vegetarian food, citing religious sentiments, the health hazard posed by the smoke emanating from the stalls, and traffic snarls.

The Vadodara Municipal Corporation said last month that the “public display of meat, fish, eggs hurts religious sentiments” and that it “should not be visible. “Later, all corporations passed off their moves as part of an anti-encroachment drive.

Justice Vaishnav asserted, “You don’t like non-veg food, it is your outlook. How can you decide what people should eat outside?”

Pursuit of Knowledge

- K.K. Usman

God brought you out of the wombs of your mother knowing nothing, but gave you the faculties of hearing, sight and perception. Would you not thank Him?

(16:78)

Is the man devoid of knowledge the equal of the man in the know? Do you not think?

(39:9)

O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge.

(20:114)

The combination of man's intellect and curiosity have provided him with irresistible motivations to know and understand the nature of his environment and the causes of its creation. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the scientific and religious activities started almost simultaneously with the 'Creation of Man'. The evolution of every kind of civilization on the face of this earth, and indeed the entire human progress, has largely been based or centred on religion and science.

The Quran addresses many topics of scientific interests to persuade the believers (and non-believers) to think, reflect, investigate and postulate. Despite the fact that God is the central theme of the Quran, it never provides a figurative description of the creator but speaks of His Signs (ayats) around us. The direct implication of this message is that to understand and comprehend the nature of God one must investigate and analyze all aspects of His creation.

The Quran repeatedly uses the

expression 'why do they not reflect? Why do they not ponder?' In his seminal work, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, the celebrated poet and Philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal argues that by repeatedly reminding mankind to reflect and ponder, the Quran aims to 'awaken in man the consciousness of that of which nature is regarded a symbol. But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Quran which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science. It was a great point to awaken the empirical spirit in an age which renounced the visible as of no value in men's search after God.' Moreover, Iqbal argues further, as scholars like al Ghazzali and ibn Khaldun have argued before him, that total reflection also includes inner reflection; and the pursuit of knowledge should not be divorced from ethical and value criteria. And it is this consideration that makes the Quranic approach to science so much different than the Western approach to science.

The basic Islamic ideals are linked with each other in an impeccably well built system in which reason is given its full due. Islam does not require man to believe blindly. He has to convince himself. It is up to the individual to strive and reach the truth by his own means. Thus knowledge of God is an idea! towards which every Muslim should try to move by seeking the knowledge of His creation:

“Do not the unbelievers perceive that the heavens and the earth were unified together (as one unit of Creation), then We split them apart? And we made from water all living things—will they not have faith? And we set upon the earth immovable mountains, lest it quake with them.” (20:30,31)

God created man for a purpose, which is to worship God, and to do this he has to ‘know’ His will. ‘Knowledge of God’ is not based on blind faith: it is based on knowledge of His laws, the laws of the universe. God has given the earth in trust to mankind. Man should therefore use this trust properly by going good. This leads to the need for better and more efficient means of managing the trust—that is, developing an appropriate science and technology, which is in itself an act of religious significance.

Man is requested to use his knowledge not only to ‘know’ God but to serve man as well. In using science for the development of ways and means to controlling the forces of nature, the guidelines given to a Muslim is to seek the good of the community—and indeed the humanity as a whole—and to use good and lawful means to reach this end.

Contemplation (ibadah) is an obligation, for it leads to an awareness of tawhid (Unity of God) and khilafah (Trusteeship); and it is this very contemplation that serves as an integrating factor for scientific activity and system of Islamic values, Ibadah, or the contemplation of the Unity of God, has many manifestations of which the pursuit of knowledge is the major one. But is the

pursuit of all knowledge ibadah? The concept of knowledge (ilm) which is a value when it is pursued within an Islamic frame-work, is one of the most written-about and discussed concepts of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad for the first time in the history of Arabian peninsula made knowledge an essential tool for understanding realities of life. Under his inspiring guidance, learning acquired respect and reverence which remained the hallmark of Islamic civilization for centuries afterwards. The importance which the Quran attaches to knowledge can further be explained by the frequency with which it has used the word ilm (knowledge). According to one estimate it has been used 750 times in the Quran. In the mind of a Muslim, knowledge should include everything which reason and Revelation can unearth for the betterment of mankind. Franz Rosenthal in his valuable work listed 107 definitions from various source books. Philip K. Hitti defines ilm (concept of knowledge in Islam) in the following words:

“The Arabic word for science (ilm) like its English correspondent etymologically means ‘knowledge’. It may be used in the broad sense to mean knowledge systematized with reference to general truths and laws, or more specifically, to refer to knowledge as it relates to physical world in which case it is known as physical or natural science.”

Almost all Muslim classical authors from al-Kindi (d. 873A.D.), al-Ferabi (d. 950 A.D.) and al-Biruni (d. 1048 A.D.) to ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 A.D.) have produced major classifications of knowledge. In

general, ilm (knowledge) is divided into two categories: revealed knowledge (Scriptures), which provides the ethical and moral framework, and non-revealed, the pursuit of which is an obligation under the dictates of ibadah. Non-revealed knowledge is further subdivided into two categories: fard-ayan, which is essential for the individuals to survive, and fard kifayah which is necessary for the survival of the whole community. The pursuit of knowledge for the benefit of the individual or the community is ibadah—contemplation of God. It will please the Lord to see that one of His humble servants seeking the truth in His Revelation or in his Signs (Ayat) in pageants of nature.

Islam should not really be regarded as a religion for it is a total system. It is a religion, a culture, a civilization—all at once. And as a holistic system it touches every aspect of human endeavour. Islamic morals and values permeate all human activity. It follows then that Islam must have something to say about science and knowledge:

Islam told the Arabs to leave their corrupt practices by recognizing the existence of their Creator, by obeying the God Who built them and their world. It stated that recognizing the proper position of God in relation to man was a great advance in thinking. It claimed that God Himself is the Creator of the mind, and therefore is the ultimate source of all knowledge. Claiming that God is inseparable from man and his world, Islam negated the concept that God is a reserved Being sitting on his unreachable

throne, His being actively and intimately connected with all the proceedings of this world. Thus, the Muslims felt that as God holds the keys to knowledge, man's purpose was to open the doors of ignorance by spreading this knowledge. This led them to view the entire universe as a divine gift for them to study in developing moral and intellectual strength to the utmost. In searching for knowledge, Islam strongly demanded that man study the sciences, since science itself is thought of as a divinely established system. To them, if God is the Creator of the elements on which chemistry must rely, He is also the Constructor of the solar system which the astronomer beholds, as He is the builder of the human biological system whose mind intrigues the philosopher, and to whose physiology the physician responds.

As Islam does not permit priesthood or a religious hierarchy, it commands each and every believer to seek knowledge and be aware of his/her obligations and responsibilities to society as well as God. Thus, in Islam, the pursuit of knowledge is both a personal and a social obligation. There are scores of verses in the Qur'an advising the faithful to seek and acquire knowledge necessary for a better understanding of the Divine Message as well as the universe and everything contained in it. The first revelation to prophet Muhammad was a command from God to read and write and gain knowledge:

“Read, in the name of your Lord, who created: who created human kind from a clot of blood. Read, for your Lord

is most generous, who taught by the pen, taught humankind what it did not know..." (96:1-5)

Prophet Muhammad himself has repeatedly and very eloquently emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge. Here are a few examples of several authentic sayings:

- ◆ Acquire knowledge, it enables its possessor to distinguish right from wrong; it lights the way to heaven. It is our friend in the desert, our company in solitude and companion when friendless. It guides us to happiness, it sustains us in misery, it is an ornament amongst friends and an armour against enemies.
 - ◆ To seek knowledge is a duty of every Muslim (male and female).
 - ◆ The angels offer their wings to the seeker of knowledge.
 - ◆ Seek knowledge even though you may have to go to China.
 - ◆ Economy (frugality) in spending is half of livelihood, love for people is half of wisdom and intelligent questioning is half of learning.
 - ◆ Knowledge (science) is a treasure house whose keys are queries.
- The companions of the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims dedicated their lives to acquiring and spreading knowledge about the religion and other spheres of life. Their solid determination and total commitment for the cause of learning and teaching is reflected in the comparison of knowledge and wealth by Ali Ibn Abu Talib, the fourth Caliph of Islam:
- ◆ Knowledge is the legacy of the Prophets, wealth is the inheritance of the Pharaohs. Therefore knowledge is better than wealth.
 - ◆ You are to guard your wealth but knowledge guards you. So knowledge is better.
 - ◆ A man of wealth has many enemies, while a man of knowledge has many friends, Hence knowledge is better.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because it increases with distribution, While wealth decreases by that act.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because a learned man is apt to be generous while a wealthy person is apt to be miserly.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because it cannot be stolen while wealth can be stolen.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because time cannot harm knowledge. But wealth rusts in the course of time and wears away.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because it is boundless while wealth is limited and you can keep account of it.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because it illuminates the mind while wealth is apt to blacken it.
 - ◆ Knowledge is better because knowledge induced the humanity in our Prophet to say to God, 'We worship Thee as we are Your servants,' while wealth engendered in Pharaoh and Nimrod the vanity which made them claim God.

Based on the above observations by Ali ibn Abu Talib, later theologians,

philosophers, scientists and seekers of knowledge in Islam coined a dictum: 'Food for the body and knowledge for the soul.'

Among the writers of wisdom literature al Ghazzali (d.505 A.H./ 1111 A.D.) has a position of indisputable distinction. He was not a statesman, but he ranks among the greatest theologians of the history of Islam. His *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Revivification of Religious Sciences) is considered one of the most authentic expositions of the Quranic doctrine, and is universally read by students of Muslim theology all over the world. He also wrote *Kitab Nasihat al-Muluk* as source book for the guidance of the rulers of men. In it, he has discussed the moral foundations of a Muslim's belief, and also deliberates on the position which man occupies in the universe. He is convinced that aql (intelligence or reason) is one of the supreme graces of man and counts it among the greatest gifts that have been bestowed upon human beings by God.

The Quran has a complete set of ideas about cosmology and cosmography which were of absorbing interest to mystics and scientists. It is also emphasized in the Quran that human reason (aql) is a reflection of supreme intellect and in its balanced form it strengthens faith in tawheed. It becomes an obstructive force only when it is misguided by passions.

Man is considered vicegerent of God on earth and it is by virtue of this position that he has been given the power to explore this universe. This power however needs to be used with wisdom. A reckless use of it is destructive and against the will

of God. The primary objective of religious and secular thought in Islam seems to be the ultimate happiness of man. It is a search to multiply goodness in his character, so that evil which is also inherent in his nature is curbed and restricted. The Muslim philosophers were convinced that man's happiness is to be ensured both here and Hereafter. Religious wisdom and philosophical insights have no other purpose except to remove hindrances which so often make treading on the Straight Path so difficult. Ibn Maskawayh devoted large portions of his *Reformation of Morals* in explaining this vital function of the Sacred law (Shari'ah).

Islam identified itself with knowledge. It made knowledge its condition as well as its goal. It equated the pursuit of knowledge with ibadah (worship) and poured its most lavish praise on those who committed themselves to its cultivation, raising their ink above the blood of the martyrs in value. Islamic knowledge is the rational—empirical and intuitive—apprehension of every realm of reality. It is the critical knowledge of man and history, of earth and heaven. It is the tested, practical knowledge that produces results and leads to virtue, the object of the Muslim's prayer, "O God grant us a knowledge that is useful and beneficial!" It is at the farthest possible remove from speculation, which Islam condemns as vain and idle. However, Islam's aversion to speculative knowledge is not anti-intellectual. Pursuit of impossible knowledge is certainly futile; use of the wrong methodology annihilates the enterprise before it starts. Ghayb (the

(Cont. to page 24)

Haroon Rasheed Siddiqui (1933-2021)

- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

Dr. Hafiz Haroon Rasheed Siddiqui, editor Sachcha Rahi (a Hindi monthly of Nadwatul Ulama) passed away on December 6, 2021 after a prolonged illness in Lucknow. Born in 1933 at Pura Raza Khan, Faizabad, U.P. and got elementary education in his locality. He memorized the Holy Qur'an under the supervision of Qari Mushtaq Malihabadi. For further studies he went to Saudi Arabia and did his M.A. from Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh and did Ph.D on the topic of "Maulana Fakhruddin Khiali, His Life and His Literary Contributions" from University of Lucknow. "He has had a chequered career as an administrator, Journalist, writer, academician and preacher of Islam.

Dr. Siddiqui was also a good writer. His famous books are Sahifa Madina ka Tahqiqi Mutala, Maulana Fakhruddin Khiali Shakhshiat aur Shaeri, Jinnaat ka Bayan, Muharramul Haram aur Taziadari, Urdu Qawaid and the like. The nicest thing is that he treated all with equal courtesy. He was a paragon of morality. He never showed egotism, pride and haughtiness. He performed his duties with honesty and integrity. He started his career as a teacher. He taught at Madrasa Abu Ahmadiya, Ali Ibad and Markaz Dawat-o- Tableegh, Aminabad, Lucknow. He also held the post of manager "Monthly Rizwan", Lucknow. He had good rapport with Maulana Sani Hasani elder brother of Maulana S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi, Rector, Nadwatul Ulama. In 1959 he came to Nadwatul Ulama and was appointed Nazir of Mahad Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama. In his supervision Mahad made tremendous progress and became a parallel institution. Pass outs of it could

easily enrol in any government schools. In 2002 the administrative of Nadwatul Ulama brought out a Hindi monthly "Sachcha Rahi" and made him its editor. Within a short span of time the magazine gained immense popularity. Dr. Siddiqui had been its editor till his last breath. There are a number of things about Dr. Siddiqui which people have noticed and written about. I personally have been most influenced by his personality. To him nothing was more precious than time. He was very punctual. He spent his time meticulously. He had good command over different languages. He always talked with authenticity and reference.

Truly speaking, he was a man of letters. His passing away is a great loss to Nadwatul Ulama. Dr. Saeedur Rahman Azami Nadwi, Principal Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama described him as one of the influential preachers of Islam. He often visited nearby districts for the cause of Dawah activities. On his demise various condolence meetings were held in and out of India in which glowing tributes paid to the departed soul. He is survived by two sons Maulana Matloob Ahmad Nadwi, Mr. Maroof Ahmad and a daughter. His grandson Hafiz Abdul Karim Nadwi is an employee at "Al-Raid" (Fortnightly) in Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow. Maulana S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi led his funeral prayer. A good number of teaching and non-teaching members of Nadwatul Ulama attended his last rites. He was buried in Daliganj graveyard, Lucknow. May Allah forgive his shortcomings and lapses and grant him an elevated position in Jannat al Firdaws! Aameen! ■

Around the World

West responsible for tensions in Europe, says Russian President

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin blamed the West for escalating tensions in Europe, saying it had incorrectly assessed the outcome of the Cold War.

Speaking to senior military officials, Putin said Russia would respond “adequately” to any Western aggression and would develop its army further.

Russia has amassed tens of thousands of troops on the border with Ukraine, demanding that Nato refuse to accept the former Soviet republic as a member and guarantee that no weapons or troops will be deployed there.

Speaking at the same meeting, Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu said the United States had deployed some 8,000 troops near Russian borders and, alongside Nato allies, frequently performed flights by strategic bomber planes close to Russia.

Attempts by Nato to get the Ukrainian army involved in the alliance’s activities present a security threat, Shoigu said.

“In the event of the continuation of the obviously aggressive stance by our Western colleagues, we will take appropriate retaliatory military-technical measures,” Putin told a defence ministry meeting.

Earlier a senior Russian diplomat said contacts had already begun between Moscow and Washington on the issue of security guarantees that Russia is seeking, and there was a possibility that the sides would reach an understanding.

NZ to Ban Cigarette Sales For Future Gen

New Zealand plans to ban young people from ever buying cigarettes in their lifetime in one of the world’s toughest crackdowns on the tobacco industry, arguing that other efforts to extinguish smoking were taking too long. People aged 14 and under in 2027 will never be allowed to purchase cigarettes in the Pacific country of five million, part of proposals unveiled

that will also curb the number of retailers authorised to sell tobacco and cut nicotine levels across all products in the country. “We want to make sure young people never start smoking so we will make it an offence to sell or supply smoked tobacco products to new cohorts of youth,” New Zealand associate minister of health Ayesha Verrall said in a statement. “If nothing changes, it would be decades till Māori smoking rates fall below 5%, and this government is not prepared to leave people behind.”

Record Number of Journalists Jailed in 2021, at Least 24 Killed Worldwide: CPJ

NEW YORK: The number of journalists jailed around the world hit a new record in 2021, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said, with China and Myanmar having put a quarter of the 293 media workers behind bars.

The association also counted 24 journalists killed around the world this year.

In its annual report, the CPJ listed 50 journalists imprisoned in China, 26 in Burma, 25 in Egypt, 23 in Vietnam and 19 in Belarus.

Adding those jailed in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Russia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the CPJ said a total of 293 journalists were in prison worldwide as of December 1 - up from 280 the year before.

“This is the sixth year in a row that CPJ has documented record numbers of journalists imprisoned around the world,” said Joel Simon, executive director of the group.

“Imprisoning journalists for reporting the news is the hallmark of an authoritarian regime,” he said.

For 40 years, the CPJ has denounced journalists being murdered, imprisoned, censored, physically hurt and threatened.

“It’s distressing to see many countries on the list year after year, but it is especially horrifying that Myanmar and Ethiopia have so brutally slammed the door on press freedom.” ■

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