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# The Fragrance of East

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The Qur'an lays stress on following the way of the prophets and asks the believers, time and again, to pattern their lives and conduct after the example set by the messengers of God.

“Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much.”

It directs the Muslims to beseech God always to show them the right path.

“Show us the right path, The path of those whom Thou hast favoured;

Not (the Path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.”

This prayer which forms part of the service repeated several times a day, teaches man to seek the companionship of the prophets, their leaders and guides and God-loved souls. Whoever shall live up to this supplication by coming close to the appearance and behaviour of these pious souls shall undoubtedly be sanctified and redeemed by divine grace. ■

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### **Wisdom of Qur'an**

It has been called ummul-amradh, or the root of all sicknesses of the heart. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), warned that a person having even an iota of it in his heart will never enter paradise. This deadliest of all sins is kibr, or arrogance.

"... Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful; Those who are miserly and enjoin miserliness on other men and hide what Allah has bestowed upon them of His Bounties." (Qur'an, 4:36-37)

"And walk not on the earth with conceit and arrogance. Verily, you can neither rend nor penetrate the earth nor can you attain a stature like the mountains in height." (Qur'an, 17:37)

"And do not turn your face away from men with arrogance, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allah does not like each arrogant boaster. And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking, and lower your voice. Verily, the harshest of all voices is the voice (braying) of the ass." (Quran, 31:16-19)

"Of what benefit to you were your great numbers (and hoards of wealth) , and your arrogance against Faith?" (Quran, 7:48)

"Enter the gates of Hell to abide therein and (indeed) what an evil abode of the arrogant!" (Qur'an, Ghafar, 76)

"I shall turn away from my ayat (verses of the Qur'an] those who behave arrogantly on the earth, in a wrongful manner." (Qur'an, Al-A'raaf:146)

"Verily! Those who disdain My worship (because of arrogance), they will surely enter Hell in humiliation!" (Qur'an, Ghafer: 60) ■

### **Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)**

Once a man asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of Allah, advise me. The Prophet said, 'Avoid lengthening the dress (below the ankles), for this practice is from arrogance. Verily, Allah does not like arrogance' ."

The Prophet said, "Paradise and Hell quarreled in the presence of their Lord. Paradise said, 'O Lord! What is wrong with me that only the poor and humble people enter me?' Hell said, 'I have been favored with the arrogant people.' So Allah said to Paradise, 'You are My Mercy,' and said to Hell, 'You are My Punishment which I inflict upon whom I wish, and I shall fill both of you.'" (Bukhari)

"Arrogance is to knowingly reject Truth and to belittle other people." (Hadith)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "One will not enter Paradise, if one has an atom's weight of arrogance in his/her heart." (Muslim, At- Tirmithi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) defined it for us in an authentic hadith reported by "One will not enter Paradise, if one has an atom's weight of arrogance in his/ her heart." a man then asked, "One may love his clothes to look good and his shoes to look good?!" The prophet replied, "Allah is beautiful and loves beauty, arrogance is: rejecting the truth and looking down on people." (Muslim, At- Tirmithi)

"Dignity is my lower garment, and arrogance is my covering. If anyone competes with Me in either of these two, surely I torture him." Qudsi Hadith, reported by Imam Muslim.

"While a man was showing off in his garment, he looked proudly to himself, all of a sudden, Allah immediately crumbled the earth underneath him, and he is still dropping with struggle through it till the Day of Judgment." (Bukhari, Muslim)

"Whosoever drags his clothes out of arrogance, Allah will not look at him on the Day of Judgment." (Bukhari, Muslim) ■

*Editor's Note* 

## Congregational Service of Friday

There are four fundamental duties prescribed for Muslims. Salat (Regular worship), Zakat (Poor-due), Saum (Fasting) and Haj (Pilgrimage to Mecca). According to Syed Abu! Hasan Ali Nadwi the correct place in the Islamic Shariat, their proper legal position, their precise worth and importance in the religious structure and the individual and collective spheres of existence have been explained at length and such of their secrets and purposes set forth as are proved from the Holy Quran and the Traditions have been explained.

In this issue we will discuss the importance of the congregational service of Friday. It is distinguished by certain incentives and other features that have enhanced its solemnity and Splendour and are conducive to the generation of enthusiasm for the prayer and the promotion of the spirit of unity and cooperation among Muslims for piety and righteousness.

O ye who believe! When the call is heard for the prayer of the day of congregation (Friday), hasten unto remembrance of Allah and leave your trading. That is better for you if ye did but know. (—1xii: 9)

Some of the Traditions of the holy prophet regarding the congregation of Friday are as follows:

He who misses three Friday service (in succession) owing to heedlessness or indolence, God sets the seal on his heart.

Let people give up neglect of the Friday prayer otherwise God will set the seal on their hearts, and then they will become of those that are negligent.

Sometimes I feel like telling someone else to lead the prayers so that I could go and set fire to the dwellings of those who stay away from the congregation.

For the Friday service a Muslim is required to take a bath, brush his teeth

and use perfume and take the greatest care for cleanliness. A sermon is also delivered before the commencement of the service. The sermon the holy prophet used to deliver was not of a routine nature but he dwelt on the current problems and realities of life and made it an effective medium of guidance and instruction. We learn from Hazrat Jabir that “when the holy Prophet delivered the Sermon his voice got raised and his eyes became red. It appeared that he was warning against the enemy, an attack from whom was imminent (and could take place at any time of the morning or evening).”

Writes Allama Ibn-i-Qaiyim in ‘Zad-ul-Maad:

“In his sermon the holy Prophet used to instruct and inform the Companions about the laws, principles and practices of Islam and if there was a matter of sanctioning or prohibiting he would sanction or prohibit (as the case might be).”

Commenting on the conduct of the Imams and preachers of his day, the Allama remarks:

“Then a long time elapsed, the light of Apostleship faded from the eyes and rituals took the place of Commands and practices became common which were carried out mechanically and without regard to their purpose and significance. People became obsessed with outward forms and ceremonials and thought only of observing them in an impressive manner. The rituals were elevated to the status of the Sunnah and lofty ideals and objectives, in respect of which the least amount of negligence or variation was forbidden, fell into neglect. They embellished their sermons with glittering phrases and far-fetched ideas, but the thought-content declined till the very object of the sermon, was lost.” ■

**S.A.**

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## Sufi Saints of India And Their Impact on Society

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

### Sufistic Orders

Although the chief Sufistic Orders had their origin outside India, they attained the greatest success in this country. This was due partly to the circumstances of history and partly to the inherent Indian character and temperament. There branched forth from these Orders such fraternities in India which themselves grew into permanent orders and recognised schools of Islamic mysticism. Apart from the well-known Sufistic Orders—the Qadiriya, the Chishtiya, the Naqshbandiya and the Suhrawardiya—there are other Orders and fraternities that are essentially Indian and are attributed solely to men who were born in India and returned to its dust, as for instance, the Madariya Order, the Qalandriya Order, the Shattariya Order and the Mujaddidiya Order, India has been the standard-bearer of Tasawwuf (Islamic mysticism) and spiritual evolution and self-reform since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It was at that period of time that an infinite number of persons profited spiritually from Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi and his illustrious son and successor, Khwaja Mohammad Masoom. The deputies of the latter were found in several foreign countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Turkestan. Similarly, votaries from Turkey, Baghdad, Syria, Samarkand, Bokhara, Egypt, China

and Ethiopia were drawn to the Khanqah of the 19th Century saint of the Mujaddidiya line, Shah Ghulam Ali Dehlavi. The Mujaddidiya Order was popularised in Iraq Syria, Kurdistan and Turkey by Sheikh Ghulam Ali's deputy, Maulana Khalid Rumi, where it still endures. Then, at the beginning of the current century, it was the turn of Haji Imadullah Mahqir to rise to dizzy height of fame. Known popularly in the Islamic World as the 'Spiritual Guide of the Arabs and the Non-Arabs', innumerable Arabs, as well as non-Arab Haj pilgrims coming to Arabia, availed themselves of this priceless spiritual guidance during his stay in that country. In the contemporary Muslim World, also, it is India which is keeping the spirit of God-seeking alive. An uninterrupted chain of earnest and exalted men of God has enabled it to maintain, its distinction as the universal centre of spiritual and Sufistic endeavour. It is now the sole refuge in the world of the votaries of Sufism.

### Popular Enthusiasm

The Muslim epoch in Indian History was, in fact, heralded by the Sufi divines, particularly by Khwaja Moinuddin Ajmeri who also laid the foundations here of the Chistiya Order of Islamic mysticism. From the earliest days the rich vied with die poor and the high with the low to do homage to these

elevated self-denying men of God till the whole sub-continent was lit with a thick cluster of spiritual luminaries and their religious establishments. Apart from the more important towns, was hardly a Muslim hamlet which was left without a teacher or a spiritual guide.

The enthusiastic devotion of the people to the Sufi saints and their overwhelming responsiveness to religious emotion can well be imagined by the facts we are now going to narrate.

The daily average of votaries staying at the Khanqah of Syed Adam Bannuri (d. 1643) was one thousand. They took their meals at the Khanqah. A great throng of men, including hundreds of theological doctors, followed the saint wherever he went. It is stated in Tazkira-i-Adamiya that 10,000 persons formed his entourage during the visit to Lahore in 1642. Seeing the phenomenal popularity of Syed Bannuri, Emperor Shahjehan became so apprehensive that the thought of a plan to send him out of India. He sent to him a large sum of money and then suggested that as possession of money made the Haj pilgrimage obligatory for a Muslim he should waste no time in proceeding to the Hejaz to discharge the duty. The saint, thereupon, migrated from India.

Hazrat Mujaddid's celebrated son and spiritual deputy, Khwaja Mohammad Masoom (d. 1668) had as many as 9, 00, 000 disciples who did

the Bai'at and repentance at his hand. Of them, 7,000 rose to be his Khalifas.

It is recorded about Shah Ghulam Ali in Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Aasar-us-Sanadeed that "not less than 500 destitute persons used to live in his Khanqah all of whom were fed and clothed by him."

Unprecedented scenes of popular enthusiasm were witnessed during the missionary tours of the famous divine and spiritual leader of the 19th century, Syed Ahmad Shaheed, as also during his journey to Calcutta while on the way to Arabia for the Haj. In many of the towns that fell on Syed Saheb's route few persons were left who did not offer bai'at the repentance at his hand. At Allahabad, Mirzapur, Varanasi, Ghazipur, Azimabad, (Patna) and Calcutta, specially his disciples must have run into lakhs. The limit was that at Varanasi the indoor patients of the Sadar Hospital sent to him a petition begging that since they were unable to move out he might condescend to visit them in the hospital so that they could take the bai 'at. About a thousand persons became his disciples every day during his two month's stay at Calcutta. From morning till late at night a stream of men and women would pour in where he was staying. There was hardly any time left for Syed Saheb to attend to his personal needs. When it became impossible to administer the vow to everyone individually, it was arranged for the aspirants to collect in a large



house where Syed Saheb went and initiated them into the fold. Seven of eight turbans were unrolled on the ground when he went there and the aspirants were told to hold them at different places, while one end of them was held by Syed Saheb himself. He then taught them the fundamentals of the Faith and read out the oath in a loud voice like Azan which they repeated, and, thus, the ritual was completed. This was done seventeen or eighteen times each day.

### **Social Significance**

The virtuous Sufis would call upon those taking bai'at at their hand to offer earnest repentance for their sins and make a solemn affirmation of loyalty and obedience to God and the Prophet. They would warn them against licentiousness and self-indulgence, injustice, oppression and violation of the rights of others. These pious teachers addressed themselves to the moral elevation of their disciples by prescribing measures for the eradication of vices like vanity, malice, jealousy and lust for wealth and power. They urged them to remember God and to do well to His creatures and practice self-abnegation and contentment. Besides the bai'at which symbolised forging of a special link between the guide and the disciple, the revered teachers also exhorted and gave good counsel to whoever came to them and strove to awaken in his breast the love for the Divine and the ambition to seek

His countenance and to strive with all his might for self-correction and inner reform.

Illustrative of the powerful, inspiring and morally regenerating influence exercised on the society by the Sufi leaders through their tremendous sincerity, moral excellence and preaching and instruction is the following extract from the renowned historian, Ziauddin Barni, depicting the social conditions prevailing in India during the reign of Alauddin Khilji.

“The leading Sufi saints at the time of Alauddin Khilji were Sheikh-ul-Islam Nizamuddin, Sheikh-ul-Islam Alauddin and Sheikh-ul-Islam Ruknuddin. A world received enlightenment from them and took the bai'at at their hands. Sinners were inspired by them to repent for their sins and thousands of evil-doers and habitual defaulters of Namaz abandoned their evil ways and became devout worshippers; a strong fervour was created among them for religious deeds and their repentance attained perfection. The obligatory duties of worship and Divine ordinances in the other spheres of life began to be observed as a matter of course. Excessive attachment to worldly desires and aspirations, which lies at the root of most of the evils, got reduced under the force of the high morality, asceticism and profound self-denial of these spiritual masters.... People grew truthful as a result of their

blessings; they became honest in the management of worldly affairs and were fired by the ambition to improve and evolve their inner selves due to the inspirational influence exercised by the laudable moral conduct, abstinence and spirituality of the Sufi leaders..... .”

The historian goes on to say:

“In the last years of Sultan Alauddin’s rule the general moral level had improved so much that a majority of the people abstained from drink, adultery, gambling and other social and moral perversions. The major sins were shunned as equivalents of infidelity. Muslims refrained from open usury and hoarding and fear of each other’s censure. Adulteration, deceit and under weighing were eliminated from the market.”

It is manifestly impossible, in these few pages, to give a coherent, historical picture of the reformation brought about in public morals by the Sufi divines. It is enough to know here that the Sufi saints have made an enormous contribution towards the evolution of a healthy, conscientious environment in India which is the nation’s greatest asset and which has provided it with worthy leaders and redeemers at every critical turn of history. Leaving aside the intervening centuries, the material on which is widely distributed in the memoirs and biographies of the spiritual leaders, we will take an instance from the life of Syed

Ahmad Shaheed, a religious reformer and Sufi saint of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to show the extent of the moral impact of his Personality on society. It is recorded in connection with his brief stay in Calcutta that “the liquor business in that great city was suddenly brought to a standstill. The liquor merchants complained to the authorities that through they were paying the taxes regularly, they had been forced to close down their business since the arrival in the city of a saint under whose influence more and more Muslims were getting reformed daily and taking the vow not to indulge in intoxicants any more. They did not even look at the liquor shops now.”

The venerable divines enjoined on the new entrants into their Orders fairness in monetary dealings, paying back of debts and scrupulous satisfaction of the claims of others. To cite an example, Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia was bidden emphatically by his spiritual mentor, Khwaja Fariduddin Ganj Shakar, “to do his level best always to placate the opponent and render to everyone what was his due.” Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia owed a person some money, and a book he had borrowed from someone had got lost. When, on arriving in Delhi, he went to settle these accounts, the person to whom he owed the money remarked, “It seems you are coming from the society of Muslims,” while the owner of the book said, “It is always like that at the place from where you are coming.”?

People, likewise, were imbued with the desire to oblige and be of help to others under the guidance and instruction of the Sufi saints. During the entire course of the long Haj journey, Sayed Ahmad Shaheed and the large band of his companions missed no opportunity to do an act of public service. While they were sailing down the Ganges they came across, at the landing -ghats of Mirzapur, a boat which was laden with cotton. The owner of the cotton was in need of labourers to remove it to the godown. Seeing his plight, Syed Saheb, at once, told his companions to unload the boat and so energetically did they apply themselves to unload the boat and so energetically did they apply themselves to the task that in a couple of hours the whole of cotton was taken off and deposited in the godown. People who witnessed the deed were left thoroughly amazed. "What sort of men they are?" they commented among themselves. "They did not even know the cotton merchant and yet they have toiled so hard for him without charging a pie. Surely, they are the devout men of God."

What was achieved by the Sufi divines in India in the sphere of general uplift was solely the result of their evolved spiritually and loftiness of character. No government, no law, no other institution could bring about so much improvement in so many people or keep them so steadily within the bounds of moral propriety and rectitude.

### **Fearlessness**

A most valuable service rendered by the holy Sufi saints was that they stood fearlessly against the unjust and degenerate ways of powerful despots and tyrannical rulers, and saved the kingdom and the society, in general, from the consequences of their follies by boldly telling the truth at their face. Inspired by their example, people also shed fear and become courageous and straightforward. The history of Muslim rule in India offers any number of instances when Muslim saints threw the consideration of personal safety to the winds and fulfilled, at the gravest peril of their lives, the Islamic duty contained in the Prophet's Tradition that a most superior form the Jihad is to speak the truth in front of a tyrannical ruler.

Sheikh Qutbuddin Munawwar was a Chisti saint who lived in solitude at the time of Mohammad bin Tughlaq. Once the King chanced, on one of his tours, to pass through the area in which the saint lived, but the saint did not come to meet him. The King, then, summoned him to Delhi. When the Sheikh entered the royal palace, the court nobles, ministers, heralds and attendants were standing in a double row in front of the throne. On seeing the imposing spectacle, his young son, Nuruddin, who was with him, and had never been in a king's durbar before was seized with fright. The Sheikh admonished him sternly. "Glory is God, Baba Nuruddin," he said to him in a loud voice. The son

related later that as soon as he had heard these words, he felt a new strength surging within him, all the fear disappeared and the Court grandees began to look to him as meek as goats. The Ring complained to the saint, "When I was in your neighborhood you neither counseled me nor honored me with a visit." The Sheikh replied, "The dervish does not consider himself worthy of royal society. In his solitary corner he prays for the King as for the general body of Muslims. He will now beg to be excused." After the interview, the King confided to a nobleman that he had noticed with all the spiritual leaders with whom he had the occasion to shake hands, that their hands trembled at the time, but Sheikh Munawwar's grip was so firm that he seemed to be completely unaffected by the event" The King, then, presented to him a purse of one lakh gold coins, whereupon the Sheikh exclaimed, "Glory, be! Two seers of pulses and rice and a piece worth of ghee are enough for the dervish. What will he do with all this money? "After great persuasion and on being advised that the King would be antagonised by a blank refusal, he agreed to accept 2,000 pieces which, too, he distributed among his brother-saints and other poor and indigent people before returning from Delhi.

To take another instance, again from the reign of Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq, Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi had a strong aversion to meeting him.

He used often to say that he saw his rolling in his durbar (meaning that he will not hesitate to speak the truth in his presence and the King will not forgive.) At last, he was once called by the Sultan to his court. "Give me some good advice," the Sultan asked, " Suppress anger," the Maulana said. "What anger?" asked the Sultan. "The anger of the wild beasts," the Maulana replied. The King grew red in the face at the reply, but he kept quiet. After this, the royal meal was ordered. The King shared his vessel with the Maulana, and sometimes, even fed him with his own hand. The Maulana are with apparent dislike. When the meal was over, the Maulana came away.

The Sufi saints upheld steadfastly the traditions of detachment, fearlessness and undaunted championship of truth though those were the days of absolute monarchy and despotic rule. The Kings, too, under the force of their spirituality, felt compelled to allow them the freedom to perform their duty even when they showed no consideration to the forthright and honest Ulema. The spiritual leaders guarded zealously their self- respect and dignity before mighty rulers, chieftains and noblemen right till the last days of the Mughal Empire. It is reported that "Emperor Shah Alam, once, was present in the Mahfil Sima'a of Khwaja Mir Dard when, troubled by a painful leg he could not help stretching it a little. The Khwaja protested, "It is

against the decorum of the society of the fakir to sit like this,” he said. The Emperor apologised and indicated his discomfort upon which Khwaja mir Dard remarked, “If you were not feeling well, what was the need to come?”

### **Propagation of Knowledge and Learning**

The Sufis of India were great patrons of learning. Some of them were outstanding men of letters themselves. Their belief was that it was impossible to know God without knowledge, and also that ‘as ignorant Sufi is the Devil’s plaything.’ There are instances when they refused to admit in their folds votaries of striking promise and aptitude until they had completed their education. As we will see in proper detail in another chapter, the remarkable educational and literary progress of India under the Muslims was due, directly or indirectly, to the encouragement given by the Sufi divines. The two of the greatest scholars and teachers of the 14th century, Qazi Abdul Muqtadir Kindi and Sheikh Ahmad Thanasari were the spiritual protégés of Khwaja Naseeruddin Chiragh-i-Dehli. The renowned century educationist and teacher, Maulana Lutfullah of Kora Jahanabad, through whose pupils, and pupils of whose pupils, educational activity was kept going till the 19th century, was a Sufi saint of the Chishtiya Order. More often than not, the Khanqah and the Mamassa formed the natural complements to each

other. The Khanqah-i-Rasheediya of Jaunpur, the Madrassa of Shah Pir Mohammad at Lucknow, the seminary of Shah Waliullah at Delhi and the Khanqah of Maulana Rasheed Ahmad at Gangoh were the best examples of it.

### **Benevolence**

The needs of thousands of men used to be satisfied through the saints; in countless homes the hearths were lighted because of their benevolence; a vast number of people lived in Khanqahs as permanent guests enjoying all the reasonable comforts of life. At the dinner-spreads of the Sufi ascetics no distinction was observed between the rich and the poor, the friend and the foe, and the kindred and the stranger. The dinner-spread of Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia was proverbial both for its extensiveness and sumptuousness of the meals served on it. At the Khanqah of Sheikh Saifuddin Sirhindi, a Mujaddidiya divine of the Seventeenth Century, 1,400 persons used to dine every day and every one of them was served with food of his own choice. Of Chishti saint of the late Seventeenth and early centuries, Syed Mohammad Saeed alias Shah Bheek, it is reported by his biographer that, apart from the 5,000 votaries who lived permanently in his Khanqah, an equal number from among the daily visitors also joined in at the meals with the result that about 1,000 persons dined with him regularly. Once Roshanuddaula, who

was a Seh-Hazari feudal lord of the Court of Emperor Farrukh Siyar of Delhi, presented to him Rs. 70,000/- for the construction of the Khanqah. The Shah advised him to leave the money and go and have a little rest: the work would commence in the afternoon. After Roshanuddaula had retired Shah.

Bheek sent the entire money to widows and other needy and indigent people of Ambala, Thanesar, Sirhind and Panipat through the ascetics of the Khanqah. When Roshanuddaula returned in the afternoon, Shah Saheb said to him, "You could never have earned so much Divine reward by the construction of the Khanqah as you have by serving so many poor, helpless persons and hermits. What would an humble ascetic like me do with a palatial building?" On another occasion, Emperor Farrukh Siyar, Roshanuddaula and Nawab Abdullah Khan sent him promissory notes worth Rs. 3,00,000 along with their petitions. The divine had all the money distributed in the neighbouring towns and among indigent families of good birth. As Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani had very appropriately observed

"The Khanqahs of the Sufi saints served as the connecting link between the rich and the poor. Even reigning monarchs paid tribute to the courts of these august men. Take the case of Sultan-ul-Mashaikh. It has been shown how Khizir Khan, the heir-apparent to the throne of Delhi, was his bondman.

Sultan Alauddin Khilji used to collect the tribute from all parts of the county, but there was one treasury in which he also had to deposit the submission money..... The Khanqahs were the channels through which the share of the poor and the needy used to reach them throughout the land. This is what was implied by the well-known saying that 'the property of the Sufi is at everybody's disposal.'

"This confluence of poverty and riches, i.e. the holy Order of the Sufis to which the rich and the poor alike paid homage was the agency by means of which the needs of innumerable destitute Muslims families were satisfied. Indeed, there was no phase in the whole era of Muslim supremacy in India, and no province, in the entire sub-continent, in which the Prophet's command that 'it should be taken from those among them that are rich and given to those among them that are poor' was not dutifully carried into practice by the Sufi saints, specially by those among them who, by some extraordinary circumstance, had come to acquire influence over the rich and privileged sections of the community: the fortunes of the distressed sections would, then, literally wake up."

#### **Resignation and Contentment-**

The holy Sufis, generally, abstained from accepting offices of the State or gifts of grants from the wealthy lords, princes and other well-to-do

people. By their conduct they set a tradition of sublime asceticism, contentment, reliance upon God and self-respect which encouraged and sustained in the general Indian society the ideals of magnanimity, large-mindedness and integrity, and held aloft the honour and dignity of humanity in the market-place of gain and loss which is the world, and where human beings also are bought and sold. Their life-principle and open declaration in this behalf was:

I shall not exchange my tattered pallet for royal standard.

Nor my poverty for Solomon's dominions;

The treasure I have discovered in my heart because of poverty's pang.

I shall not exchange it for the comforts of Kings.

There is practically no Sufistic Order which does not abound in glorious episodes of the triumph of the abstract and spiritual values of life over worldly and materialistic urges and temptations. Here, however, we will quote instances only from the last two centuries to show on what a lofty plane did the Sufis continue to operate even when materialism had made its headway in the Indian society and transcendental values had begun to be at a disadvantage everywhere.

Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan was a Sufi leader of the Naqsh-bandiya Mujaddidiya Order. The Emperor of Delhi approached him with the request

to accept something from the vast Empire God had' blessed him with. Came the reply, "God has said about the kingdom of the seven climes (i.e., the habitable world) that 'the stock of the world is meager.' Of it only a country of one clime has come to your lot. How much can it be that I extended a covetous hand towards it?" Once, Nawab Asaf Jah presented him with 20,000 rupees which he refused. The Nawab urged, "Take them and give them away to the poor." Mirza Jan-i-Janan replied, "Start distributing them as you proceed from here and they will be used up by the time you are back home. If any of them will be left they will be finished there."

Nawab Mir Khan, the ruler of Tonk (in Rajasthan), wanted to make a grant for the maintenance of the Khanqah of Shah Ghulam Ali of Delhi. The divine, when he came to know of the ruler's intention, had this verse written to him:

We do not disgrace resignation and contentment,

Tell Mir Khan, one's portion in pre-ordained.

Once a high-ranking Government officer who had come to meet Maulana Shah Fazlur Rahman of Ganj Moradabad (d. 1895) was so much impressed by the high moral level of his conversation that he said, "If you are willing, I can move the Government to bestow a grant on your Khanqah." The Maulana observed, "What will I do with the grant of your Government? By the

grace of God, I have a stringed cot, two earthen lotas and two pitchers clay. Some disciples bring me a little millet from which bread is made, and my wife cooks some pulses or cheap vegetables with which I eat the bread.”

Again, it is related by Molvi Mohibullah that Nawab Kalb-i-Ali Khan of Rampur once expressed the desire that the Maulana honoured him with a visit. Molvi Mohibullah asked what would he offer to the Maulana if he came, to which he replied, “One lakh rupees.” Molvi Mohibullah then went to Ganj Moradabad to persuade the Maulana to undertake the journey. “Come to Rampur,” he pleaded with him, “Nawab Kalb-i-Ali Khan is very eager to have you as his guest. He will make a present of one lakh of rupees if you went there.” The Maulana heard as if it mattered absolutely nothing to him. Then he said, “Forget the one lakh (of rupees), and listen to this:

When I behold His favours on my heart,  
To me it appears far more precious  
than the cup of Jamshed. “

### **Refuge of Humanity**

People got imbued with excellent humanitarian ideals in the society of the Sufis. They were guided by an earnest solicitude for humanity to render whatever service they could to fellowmen without regard to their race or creed. They believed in and fashioned their conduct on the Prophet’s advice that “God’s creatures are His family: among His slaves. He loves him

most who serves His family with the greatest devotion.”

Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia is reported to have said about himself that “when a person comes to me and relates his troubles I feel twice as much distressed as him.” Another of his favourite dictums was: “On the Day of Judgement, nothing will carry greater weight than the desire to serve and to please.”

Many a soul- weary and broken-hearted person would find refuge in the Khanqahs of the saints. The arms of the revered Sufis were ever open to welcome those whom fate had jilted or who had been forsaken by their kinsmen or the society. The dejected, the anguished and the outcaste would come to them and find shelter, food, love and recognition. They would find the balm for their broken hearts and wounded spirits. When the spiritual guide and mentor Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia was sending him off finally to settle in Delhi, he had bestowed this blessing upon him: You will be like a huge, shady tree under which God’s creatures will find comfort.” History bears witness to the fact that for full seventy years people came from far and near to find shelter and protection under his benevolent shadow. Thanks to the Sufi ascetics, there existed at hundreds of places in India such ‘huge, shady trees’ under whose merciful shade broken-down travellers used to find new life and freedom. ■



## Unity And Concordance – A Great Need of Islamic World

- S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi

Muslims should be grateful that they possess distinctive privilege as compared to others because of their mutual love, affection and cooperation. They should try their level best to improve these qualities in themselves.

Needless to add that brotherhood and fraternity as ordained by Almighty Allah help them to stand for unity as a rock in collective affairs irrespective of their geographical distances. That is why Muslims because of these sublime qualities emerge out as one unit. If any event takes place in any part of the west or the east, its echoes are heard throughout the Islamic world. Besides its effects can be seen on lives of Muslims across the globe. Besides expressing their concern over it they come forward to help and cooperate as much as possible.

In this context, we may recall the words of Prophet Muhammad (S): "Muslims are like a building among themselves. One brick of it reinforces other one to form a unit. If any part of it experiences shock, whole body will share it." It is unfortunate that now Muslims have become lethargic in demonstrating this spirit.

In the past too they did so and borne its consequences. It is obvious that it was their slackness that Spain slipped away from their hands, though

Muslims at that time were in power in several countries of the world and their grandeur, magnificence, pomp and show were manifest there. The condition of Muslims in different Islamic countries at present is not better than what it was during the days of their slavery. Even today opponents of Islam are targeting Muslims with their ideological and cultural incursion. They are determined to obliterate Islam's national identity and recognition. Their main plank is that Muslims should keep away from Islamic culture and civilization and leave their own territory on the discretion of others. If they are not ready to do so, they would have to face hard time and tyrant behaviour.

Right from the time of imperialist power efforts of enemies are there to browbeat Muslims. But it is only a miracle of Islam, that as a universal and everlasting religion, it stood like rock before all odds and storms. Muslims demonstrated patience whenever any disaster, misfortunate and calamity afflicted them and sought Allah's blessings all the time.

No sooner did the cloud of oppressions disappeared, Islamic spirit resurfaced with more vigour. Despite a series of oppression and cruelty, Islamic spirit became radiant in Islamic states of erstwhile Soviet Union. To great

extent Muslims remained sincere and loyal to their religion and obeyed injunctions of Allah and His messenger.

They never became pessimistic and lost their courage and vision and remained adamant to their religion even in critical situations. The living example of it can be seen in Bosnia, Chechnia and Kosovo. They proved their spiritual strength dignity and status before their enemies.

Muslims all around shared their sufferings and woes and provided financial aids too. Their spirit of brotherhood and fraternity brought them closer and encouraged in various ways infused confidence in them. In this way they acted as a shield with their selfless services and contributing. It is an open secret that Almighty Allah bestowed upon those having material resources to come forward in charitable activities. It is all because of spirit of "Dawah".

They combat fascist forces in European countries and try to remove poverty and ignorance of their poor and downtrodden Muslim brothers. Besides, they try to put an end to Imperialist despotism and tyranny. In fact, they play a constructive role in fostering Islamic awareness and awakening. Muslims perform their responsibilities with integrity and honestly. No doubt, Unity of Muslims helps in solving complex issues and difficulties of entire community living in various parts of the world.

Pan-Islamism and its spirit of brotherhood and fraternity can be seen in Palestine, Afghanistan, Arteria, Somalia, Fhalbain and so on. On the basis of this passion of Islamic brotherhood and fraternity, Muslims in Arab particularly in Gulf countries have played a leading role in the building up of their Muslim brothers living in other parts of the universe. They have undertaken their responsibilities in a quite sublime way. With the help of their contributions, scores of oppressed Muslims got provision of their security and recovery of their rights particularly at a time when disruptive forces were bent upon in committing atrocities on them.

The impact of Islamic urgencies are often felt in Muslims particularly in young Muslims civilized generation who seek Allah's help in all affairs of theirs and seek His guidelines as beacon. They gain light from His luminosity too.

On the other hand fascist forces of west want to deflect the attention of learned Muslims from Islam and try to destabilize the faith of weak and poor Muslims. Their real purpose is to the image of Islam and its ideology. The reaction of such impacts can be seen in the hearts of educated Muslim youths who pave the way of Islamic awareness in the entire world. If the mutual unity and coincidence of Muslims foster, it would bring about an overwhelming change and may prove prelude to goodness and

welfare in Islamic world. Today Muslims are victim of unbearable perplexities and perturbation due to imperialist and oppressive powers. Enemies are not only targeting their lives but religious sentiments too. They want to efface Islamic identity from these countries. No doubt, it is a big challenge. It is imperative for us to come forward and combat such evil designs. It should be noted that two fronts are before Muslims to deal with these disruptive forces and fascist powers. One is to combat religious deviation and ideological refraction by literary and scholarly ventures. Other is to strengthen norms of religious and Islamic thoughts in the minds of Muslims. Similarly, it is time to infuse in Muslims Islamic thoughts and heritage of Islamic civilization and its history so that Muslim young generation may comprehend phenomenon of Islam

and face literary and ideological incursion of their foes with determination. Keeping in view the present scenario, it is felt that Islamic defence forces are quite weak than that of the opponents. Hence, unless Muslims unite they will not be able to bear the attack of disruptive forces. The need of hour therefore is that Muslims should unite and set a good example by creating mutual love, affection and cooperation among themselves.

*“Ek hojain to bun sakte hein  
Khurshide Mubin,*

*warna in bikhre hoe taron se kya  
bat bane “*

(If they come together they can become a shining Sun, otherwise scattered stars are of no use) ■

*(English rendering by Obaidur  
Rahmam Nadwi)*

### **Will build madrasas in Assam after LS polls: Ajmal**

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) supremo Maulana Badruddin Ajmal said on Wednesday that the elected leaders of his party would build 700 madrasas to compensate for some 750 closed down in Assam.

The BJP-led Assam government closed down all State-run madarsas in 2023 and converted them into regular schools.

Mr. Ajmal said all AIUDF candidates would get down to opening 700 madarsas after winning the Lok Sabha seats they are contesting - Karimganj, Nagaon and Dhubri.

He said the party would move the Supreme Court, if need be, over the closure of madrsas, and said education was a right. ■

*(The Hindu 25-04-2024)*

## Israel, A Two-State Solution, Some Recent Perceptions

- Hamid Ansari\*

How, and where, did the idea of a Jewish national home arise and take shape since recorded history on the matter is somewhat hazy?

Rarely has social media summed up a situation so succinctly. According to the Urban Dictionary, the noun Israel 'got israeled' as a verb to mean when someone is asked to share something of yours, then claims it as their own, and takes it for themselves.

### Origin and questions

The 40th anniversary (in 1988) of the establishment of the Israeli state, however, and the release of official documents, coincided with the effort by Israeli scholars to challenge it. The historian Ilan Pappé contested 'the Ten Myths' about the origin and identity of the contemporary state of Israel. Five of these related to the origins: that Palestine was an empty land; that the Jews were a people without land; that Zionism is Judaism; that Zionism is not Colonialism; and that the Palestinians left their land in 1948.

Bilateral and multilateral efforts to seek a solution to the resulting problems brought forth no compromise. On the contrary, and early in 2018, Israel's ruling Likud Party unanimously endorsed a resolution calling for the annexation of West Bank settlements. The Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan declared, "We are telling the world that it doesn't matter what the nations of the world say. The time has come to express our biblical right to the land."

Subsequent writings, and official Israeli assertions, have confirmed the validity of these questions. The war of June 1967 changed the landscape to Israel's benefit. It was followed by United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). In 1974, the Palestine Liberation Organization was officially

\* *He was the Vice-President of India (2007-2017)*

recognised by the Arab League and the United Nations General Assembly as being the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people", and was invited to participate in all UN activities under observer status. The Arab states, after much meandering, developed a common position in the Arab League Declaration/Initiative of March 2002. This was followed a few months later by the Palestinian Non-Paper (June 12, 2002) outlining a vision for Permanent Status. Negotiations based on it and stating that 'the border between the state of Palestine and the state of Israel will be the June 4, 1967 Armistice Line.'

Light on this was shed by Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi of Haifa University in *Original Sins: Reflections on the History of Zionism and Israel: 'out of the original sins of the world against the Jews grew the original sins of Zionism against the Palestinian'*. Looking at the future he argued that 'the main obstacles to a solution have to do with exorcising the past, admitting past and present injustice for one side; forgiving the past, and the present for the other. The Israelis' problem is asking for forgiveness; the Palestinians' the readiness to forgive... Israelis seem to be trapped in a peculiar and impossible situation. Any concession to the Palestinians may lead to the unravelling of the whole Zionist enterprise'.

### Balance of forces

A realistic assessment of the balance of forces was made by former negotiator and Ambassador to Washington, Prof. Itamar Rabinovich of Hebrew University, in *Waging Peace: Israel and the Arabs 1948-2003*: 'The military might that Israel displayed in June 1967 convinced the Arabs that they could not reasonably hope to end the conflict through a military victory... The effect of the 1967 defeat was qualitatively different from that of the

(Cont. on page 28)

## In Search of A Dignified Economic Life

- Hilal Ahmed\*

Price rise and unemployment have emerged as serious concerns for a significant majority of Indians. There is a consensus that employment opportunities at all levels have gone down in the last five years. At the same time, the prices of essential commodities continue to increase. The interlinkages between these two issues have affected the ability of a household to maintain its standard of living in the ever-changing economic life of the country. The Pre-poll survey findings, broadly speaking, underlines four crucial factors in this regard. These factors will have an important role to play in this election, and they will have an impact on the future trajectories of Indian democracy.

Over 60 percent of our respondents assert that getting a job has become much more difficult now. The magnitude of unemployment is so alarming that the conventional rural-urban divide has become almost irrelevant. People find it hard to get economically sustainable occupations in big cities, small towns, and even in rural areas. It is trend has also affected the gender dimension of employment. It is found that work opportunities have reduced considerably for women. It

simply means that the question of economic sustainability is going to emerge as a key political question in future electoral discourse.

Second, price rise has disturbed the everyday economic equilibrium of individual households. The survey findings show that 71 percent of respondents claim that prices have increased in the past five years. The poor, low-income groups, and marginalised rural communities are the worst sufferers in this regard. This economic marginalisation underlines the fact that economic disparity is increasing.

Third, the growing economic crisis has an interesting social dimension. It shows that all social groups claim that unemployment and price rise are affecting their economic life. The marginalised social groups (dalits, adivasis and muslims) however, are more vocal than others. 67% of Muslims assert that finding a job has become very difficult for them. Similarly, Muslims are also comparatively more concerned about the price rise (76%). It shows that the economic questions are interpreted through the prism of social identity.

The survey found that a majority of respondents believe that both the Central government and State governments are responsible for

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shrinking employment opportunities and price rises. There is a clear expectation from the State to intervene in the economic life of the country. In this sense, the dominant political consensus that the market-driven liberal economy can regulate itself and there is no need for State intervention becomes contested. This finding also underscores the limits of what I call a “charitable State”— a State that provides welfare as charity not as a right. Our previous studies have shown that there has been

acceptability for welfare schemes introduced by the different governments in favour of poor and marginalised communities. However, this State charity is not seen as a permanent solution. Instead, there is an assertion that the State should ensure the possibilities of dignified employment. It will be interesting to see how this politics of economic dignity is translated into actual electoral outcomes.

*(The Hindu 11-04-2024)*

### **SC Stays Allahabad HC Order on Madrasas**

“The remedy would not be to strike down the Madrasa Board Act, but to issue suitable directions to enable students pursuing their education in madrasas to access the quality of education made available by the State in other institutions,” Chief Justice Chandrachud dictated in the order for the Bench.

The court said if the State had a “legitimate public interest” in all students, including those in madrasas, it ought to ensure that “they receive education of a requisite quality and standard which make them qualified to pursue a dignified existence”. Issuing notice to Uttar Pradesh, the court said it would hear detailed arguments in the second week of July. The court said it was left to the choice of students and their parents to stay back or leave madrasas to join schools. However, it was unwarranted on the part of the High Court to direct their transfer to “regular” schools.

Mr. Nataraj, for Uttar Pradesh, tried to reason that the madrasas had not been shut down after all. He argued that Article 28(1) of the Constitution prohibited religious instruction in educational institutions wholly maintained out of State funds.

The petitioners argued that imparting instruction in secular institutions was not proscribed in the Constitution. Besides, subject other than Islamic theology are taught in madrasas, the petitioners submitted.

They said without the Board, madrasa education would continue unregulated. In his order, the Chief Justice said the High Court seemed to have “conflated the concept of madrasa education with the regulatory powers attached to the Board”. The reasoning was prima facie misconceived. ■

## Migration To Medina (Known as Prophet's Hijrat)

- M. S. Aftab

The conspiracy was under implementation, the young men had agreed to assemble outside his gate after nightfall, Allah (SAW) sent revelation to the Prophet (PBUH) what he should do. The Prophet (PBUH) went straight to the house of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and told him that Allah (SAW) had allowed him to leave Makka and to migrate to Medina together with Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) and that plans should be made accordingly. The Prophet (PBUH) returned to his house and informed Hazrat Ali (RA), bidding him to stay behind in Makka until he had returned to their owners all the goods which had been deposited for safe custody. It may be noted that Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was always known as Al-Amin (the trustworthy) and many disbelievers would trust him with their property as they would trust him the most. He also informed him about the plot, which was revealed to him by angel Jibril (AS) (Gabriel).

At night the would-be assassins assembled outside his house. The Prophet (PBUH) told Hazrat Ali (RA) "Sleep thou in my bed and cover yourself in this green cloak of mine and no harm shall come to thee from them, Insha Allah (SAW)." Then he began to recite the 36th Sura Ya-Sin of the Quran and when he came to the ayat no. 09 "And we have put a bar in front of them and a bar behind them, We have covered them up; so that

they cannot see" he went out of the house: and Allah (SAW) made the men blind for that moment so that they could not see him and he went on his way. This event is of Safar 27, Nabawi 13, Thursday.

A man coming from the opposite direction saw the Prophet (PBUH) and recognized him. A little later his path took him near the Prophet (PBUH)'s house, and seeing men at the gate, he told them that if they wanted Mohammad (PBUH) he was not there inside the house but had gone out not long since. The men thought that could not be. But now they began to be uneasy. One of them who knew where the Prophet (PBUH) slept went to a window from which he could see inside, just enough to make sure that someone was sleeping in the prophet (PBUH)'s bed, wrapped in a cloak, so he reassured his fellows that Mohammad (PBUH) was still inside. But after a while Hazrat Ali (RA) rose and went to the door of the house, still wrapped in the cloak; they saw Hazrat Ali (RA) and realized that somehow they had been outwitted. They waited, found no sign of the Prophet (PBUH) and with a sudden impulse they decided to leave and give alarms to their respective chiefs.

The Prophet (PBUH) reached Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA)'s house where two camels, already saddled, were waiting. The Prophet (PBUH) mounted one of them and Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) the other with his

son Abdullah behind him. As per plan, they went toward a cave in the Mount of Thawr on south side toward Yemen, for it was certain that search parties would be sent out to scour all the northern outskirts of the city, Medina being on the northern side of Makka. Having gone beyond the precincts of Makka, the Prophet (PBUH) looked back and said "Of all Allah (SAW)'s earth, thou art the dearest place unto me and the dearest unto Allah (SAW), and had not my people driven me out of thee I would not have left thee." They stayed in the cave for three days, fourth day they moved on.

During these days, Amir bin Fuheyrah, the Shepherd devoted to Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) pastured his flock of sheep to cover up their tracks, Abu Bakr (RA)'s daughter Hazrat Asmaa (RA) arranged for food and son Abdullah was to listen to what was said in Makka and to bring word of it the following night.

The next night Abdullah and his sister returned, came to the cave with food and also news that the Makkans had announced a reward of one hundred camels to anyone who could find Mohammad (PBUH) and bring him back to Makka. Horsemen were on the look out for both; it was assumed that Abu Bakr (RA) was with the Prophet (PBUH) since he also had disappeared. After two days of the search, the searchers came close to the cave, their voices were heard by the Prophet (PBUH) and his companion Abu Bakr (RA). Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) was frightened, not for himself but for the safety

of the Prophet (PBUH) whom he loved and respected without measure. The Prophet (PBUH) looked at Abu Bakr (RA) and said "Grieve not, for verily Allah (SAW) is with us." And the Prophet (PBUH) also said: "What thinkest thou of two when Allah (SAW) is their third?" They could hear the sound of steps growing louder and then stopped: the men were standing outside the cave. They saw an enormous spider's web covering the entrance, in front of it an acacia shrub had sprung up and exactly in the place where a man would have to step on in order to climb into the cave there was a dove obviously sitting on her eggs. They spoke decisively, all in agreement that the cave was inaccessible and nobody could be inside. Then they went back the way they had come:

"Allah has him (Prophet Mohammad) already, when the unbelievers drove him out, the second of the two, when the two were in the Cave, when he said to his companion "Sorrow not; surely Allah is with us." Then Allah sent down on him His \*sakina, and strengthened him with legions you saw not."

Surah 09, At-Taubah: ayat 40)

\*Sakina means calmness,  
tranquility, peace.

When it seemed safe, the Prophet (PBUH) and Abu Bakr (RA) went to the entrance of the cave. There, almost covering the cave's entrance was a thorny acacia shrub, which was not there that morning; and a spider had woven a web on the gap between the shrub and the wall



of the cave. They looked through the web and found a nest, a dove sitting in it as if she had eggs; her mate perched on a cliff nearby. THIS WAS ALLAH (SAW) SIGN/ MIRACLE TO PROTECT HIS TWO MOST PIOUS SLAVES.

When they heard Abdullah and his sister approaching at the expected hour, they gently drew aside the web and went to meet them. Amir had also come. He had brought the Bedouin who was to guide them to their destination by such out-of-the-way paths as only a true son of the desert would know. Asmaa (RA) had brought some provisions (parched grams). They started for Medina, with the Bedouin as guide, through zig zag routes, so as to avoid detection. Having left the risky territory, they at last made directly for Medina. At one point of their journey, the Prophet (PBUH) received a revelation which told him "Verily He Who ordained the Quran for thee, will bring thee back to the Place of Return. Say "My Lord knows best who it is that brings true guidance and who is in manifest error."

(Surah 28. Al-Qasas: ayat 85)

The journey continued till they reached Quba which is about three kms. south of the city of Medina. Several days previously news from Makka of the Prophet (PBUH)'s disappearance had reached Medina. Most of the migrants were living in Quba; they were expecting him eagerly. The Prophet (PBUH)'s arrival was overdue. So every morning after dawn prayer, many people would go out to look

for him. They would go out some distance and wait until the heat of the sun became scorching; they would return. One day the eagerly waiting people had already returned to their homes, when a Jew who happened to be on the roof of his house sighted the Prophet (PBUH), Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), the guide and others. He was sure who the travellers were because the Jews of Quba knew why so many people trooped out daily into the wilderness, with eagerness written large on their faces. So, he called out at the top of his voice. So men, women and kids hurried out of their houses and sped out once more onto the strip of greenery which led to the path they daily stared at. The eagerly awaited travellers had by now reached near. It was a noon of great delightfulness and relief on all sides. The Prophet (PBUH) addressed them saying: "O people, give unto one another greetings of Peace; feed the hungry; honour the ties of kinship; pray in the hours when men sleep. Even so shall ye enter Paradise in Peace." After 2/ 3 days, Hazrat Ali (RA) also came and stayed in the same house as the Prophet (PBUH). It had taken him three days to return all the property deposited in trust to their owners. Thus Allah (SAW) Almighty thwarted all the designs of the Makkans and provided a sanctuary to the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. The event marked a watershed in the journey of Islam, a very noteworthy one, indeed. The event also marked the start of the Islamic calendar called Hijri calendar.

**SUMMARY**

1. With persecution at its peak, the Prophet Mohammad asked his followers to leave Makka. Muslims migrated to nearby Habasha (Abyssinia) in twos and threes, on the sly. Total 83 Muslims reached Habasha.
2. Boycott and confinement in the narrow defile of Abu Talib lasted three years.
3. The Year of Sorrow 619 C.E. The most respected Mother of the Ummah Hazrat Khadija (RA) and the most loving and protective Uncle Abu Talib passed away. Abu Talib provided 'shelter' to the Prophet (PBUH). Hazrat Khadija (RA) was not only the Prophet (PBUH)'s wife, but also his intimate friend and wise counsellor. She was the first person to become Muslim.
4. The Prophet (PBUH) travelled to Taif to seek support, but Taif rejected his mission and, in flagrant violation of the Arab tradition of hospitality to the visitor, meted out highly improper treatment.
5. The Prophet (PBUH) must have felt severe sadness on the Taif's rejection, specially after the death of his most beloved wife and most protective uncle. May be, Allah (SAW) Almighty decided to apply a soothing touch (Allah (SAW) knows the best). So, the Miracle of Meraaj (ascension to the Seven Heavens, the Sidratul Munthaha) happened. If one travels at the speed of light, the concepts of Time and Space cease to apply; this exactly happened on the Meraaj Journey. The Miracle of Meraaj reinforced the belief of the believers and the disbelief of the disbelievers.
6. With almost a dead end in Makka and rejection in Taif, Allah (SAW) Almighty opened another vista of opportunity in Medina. Jews lived in Medina in large numbers, their scriptures contained references to the coming of another Prophet, their scholars disseminated this forecast and strongly anticipated fruition of the forecast. The Arabs in Medina knew of this forecast. During Hajj season in Makka some Arabs met the Prophet (PBUH), listened to him, believed he answered to the descriptions in the forecast; besides they wanted some peace-maker in Medina. They entered Islam. They pledged to extend support and protection to the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions.
7. To begin with, the Prophet (PBUH) sent his companions to Medina. Then, after permission from Allah Almighty, he himself, along with Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), migrated to Medina in very difficult circumstances, amidst conspiracy to kill him.
8. Thus Medina became the first Centre of Islam. A community called UMMAH shaped up; a truly Islamic state with Prophet (PBUH) as head shaped up. Allah (SAW) Almighty permitted Muslims to meet force with force, in defense and with justice. ■

### Pandora's Box

In the last month or so, ever since the State Bank of India was compelled by the Supreme Court of India to release information on donations via electoral bonds to political parties, emerging details have only confirmed the worst fears of naysayers in regulatory and policy-making institutions about the scheme before it was introduced by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in 2018. A joint investigation that included The Hindu found that at least 33 companies that had aggregate losses of over 1 lakh crore from 2016-17 to 2022-23 had donated close to Rs. 582 crore, of which 75% went to the ruling BJP. Loss-making companies were donating substantial sums; profit-making firms were making donations exceeding their aggregate profits; some donor firms were not reporting data on net profits or direct taxes; some newly incorporated firms were making donations before the stipulated three-year period (after being formed) - the list of the rule-breaking and suspect sources of funding is significantly large. The nature of these donations raises several questions. Were these loss-making firms fronts to launder money? Were the firms that did not report profit/losses shell companies? Were donor firms that made significant profits — but did not pay net direct taxes in aggregate for a significantly long period engaged in tax evasion? These supplement other questions raised earlier — was the fact that a number of firms, under investigation by agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and the I-T Department, were significant donors for the ruling party, an indication that these agencies were being used as a means to ensure quid pro quo?

RBI and Election Commission of India officials were emphatic in their apprehensions that the bonds scheme could be utilised in money laundering and tax evasion. Yet, the Union Finance Ministry went ahead with the scheme. In the five and a half years of its operation, thousands of crores were encashed by political parties via electoral bonds, with the BJP receiving the lion's share. While the Court must be lauded for ending an opaque scheme with serious issues, the fact that large amounts were donated from dubious sources before every election is an indictment of the nature of campaign financing in place during this period. With the polity in India busy campaigning for the general election, it is up to the electorate to assess the effects of the electoral bonds scheme. But, more importantly, Once the election is over and governance takes over, Parliament and the regulatory institutions must conduct a thorough investigation into the nature of donations and whether the donors and recipients broke laws. The judiciary must prod these institutions. A clean-up of campaign and electoral financing is a must for a healthy democracy. ■

*(Cont. from page 20)*

defeats of 1948 and 1956...In the Arab's ensuring soul-searching, several alternatives were fiercely debated...but a recommendation to seek a political settlement based on a historic compromise was not made.'

Further turmoil, regional and global, including the arrival in Israel of nearly a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and the long and profound effect on the Israeli public of the Intifada, eventually led to the Madrid Conference of 1991. The letter of invitation to invitees did not include the phrase "territories for peace" but was mentioned in the letters of assurance addressed to the Arab invitees.

Writing in 2004, Rabinovich concluded that 'Israel is far more powerful than its Palestinian adversary, but it cannot translate its military superiority into a total, definitive victory....The military might that Israel displayed in June 1967 convinced the Arabs that they could not reasonably hope to end the conflict through a military victory...The effect of the 1967 defeat was qualitatively different from that of the defeats of 1948 and 1956...In the Arab's ensuring soul-searching, several alternatives were fiercely debated...but a recommendation to seek a political settlement based on a historic compromise was not made.'

In a study published recently by a the Tel Aviv University think-tank, two experts assessed that the American support for Israel in the present war 'has been unprecedented' in terms of diplomatic support, on-going military assistance and strategic support but also in growing criticism of Israel's conduct and increasing efforts to shape the post-war situation. It adds that the predominantly Jewish community (in the U.S.) and particularly its younger members 'are distancing themselves from Israel' and the same can be said of in assessing domestic attitudes in Israel.

The Israeli argument, and the substance of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's reasoning, is guarantee of a continued Israeli

control over the majority of West Bank land, water; internal and external movement and transportation, and over-riding security. This, in effect, is a recipe for preventing the creation of a normal Palestinian state. The American way out of it is a two-state solution whose small print shall be a de-militarised Palestine guaranteed by a de-facto U.S.-Israeli alliance.

### **The players**

The respective requirements of the affected or interested parties to this long-standing dispute, in the light of the experience of October 7, can thus be summed up:

**Palestinians:** recognition of their existence as a state along with rights as a state under international law and in terms of the Palestinian Non-Paper of June 12, 2002;

**Israel:** retention of the acquired territory. 'The Palestinians would be given all the powers to govern themselves but none of the powers that could threaten Israel. Put simply, the solution is self-government for the Palestinians with vital retained by Israel.'

**The United States:** A two-state solution with a de-militarised Gaza, a Saudi normalisation with Israel, a role for the moderate Arab countries in rebuilding Gaza, and in keeping Iran isolated.

In the last week of February, Thomas Friedman wrote about 'the increasingly rapid erosion of Israel's standing among friendly nations' and if [U.S. President Joe] Biden is not careful, America's global standing will plummet right along with Israel's.'

**Arab states:** A revitalised Palestinian state, devoid of radical elements after the experience of the Arab Spring, and a benefiting from the experience of Egypt and Jordan and of the governments party to the Abraham Accords. Some of may not be averse to American suggestions of an Arab Mandate.

One needs to be an optimist, even a 'panglossian', to consider these to be realisable. ■

*(The Hindu 20-04-2024)*

## Data For Beter Education, A Brighter Futre For Students

- Neeraj Trivedi & Shweta Bhutada

As it has almost been a tradition since 2005, except during the COVID-19 years, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 was released in mid-January this year. And, as it has also become customary, the report has got much attention. Amidst a surfeit of insights that the report has offered, what has grabbed the headlines is the foundational skills of 14-18 year olds. As much as the learning outcomes data is concerning, practitioners and policymakers must dig deeper into the data to glean actionable insights for improving education and overall outcomes for India's adolescents and youth.

### **On foundational learning trajectories**

First, the ASER 2023 Beyond Basics survey was carried out in 28 rural districts across 26 States of the country. While the sample is not nationally representative, it is still representative of the district level and indicative of broader trends of the activities, abilities (including digital abilities), and aspirations of 14-18 year olds. The report shows that, overall, 26% of 14-18 year olds cannot read a standard two level text in their regional language.

This is concerning but the die was cast years ago. An 18-year-old in 2023

would have been a 13-year-old in 2018, and most probably a standard seven or eight student. In 2018, around 32% of standard seven and 27% of standard eight children could not read a standard two level text. Foundational learning trajectories are typically flat and become flatter in the upper grades, which means that unless children acquire foundational skills in the primary grades, they are extremely unlikely to acquire them in later grades, in the absence of focused interventions. Should we really be surprised then that one in four 14-18-year olds cannot read fluently?

But how do we correct the collective failures of the past when it comes to these millions of children? ASER provides data on the distribution of 14-18 year olds as well as the percentage of children with basic reading skills, by where they are enrolled. Basic calculations using these numbers suggest that 57% of the 14-18 year olds surveyed who do not possess basic reading skills are enrolled in standard 10 or below, while another 28% of these children are not enrolled in school, college or a vocational institution.

Though ASER does not capture school attendance in secondary grades,

the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) 75th round did so in 2017-18, recording that in the secondary grades (standards nine and 10) attendance in rural India was as low as 60%. Thus, among the 14-18 year olds who are unable to read fluently, even those who are enrolled in school may not be attending school. Focusing on school-based reading improvement programmes without investing in encouraging and empowering these children to return to school and to reading may not yield transformative results.

ASER 2022 provides further insights into where these children are on the ladder in terms of acquiring abilities to read with fluency and comprehension. Of the children in standard eight who could not read standard two level text fluently in 2022, almost half could read a standard one level text (i.e., a simple paragraph). Recognising letters or decoding simple words is not the major challenge most face. They need guidance, practice, and lots of encouragement and motivation to read. Unfortunately, exposed to ridicule and embarrassment, many of these children may have given up and begun to hate reading now.

The availability of reading materials and books is a crucial factor in developing reading habits and abilities. ASER 2022, and later the State

of Elementary Education in Rural India Report, brought out by Sambodhi and the Development Intelligence Unit, clearly indicate that only a small fraction of rural households has reading materials, other than school textbooks. Community libraries can create rich, vibrant spaces that foster reading, creativity and critical thinking. But just setting up libraries is not the solution. They need to be managed right, led by committed and enterprising individuals who can rekindle an interest in reading, drawing children, youth and adults to these libraries and nurturing an environment in homes and neighbourhoods that guides, supports and motivates readers of all ages, genders and abilities.

### **Children and careers**

ASER 2023 provides a peek into the aspirations and thought processes of the 14-18 year olds regarding their future. In addition to quantitative questions around educational and work aspirations and role models, the ASER team conducted focus group discussions with children of the target age group in three districts. More than 60% of the surveyed children want to obtain at least a college education, with a higher percentage of girls aspiring for a college education (65%) when compared to boys (59%). When asked about their work aspirations, one in five said they had really not thought about it.

Among those who had, joining the police or the defence forces was the most prominent among career options for boys, while becoming a teacher or doctor emerged as the most prominent career option for girls. Developing aspirations is important but youth need the support, mentorship and inspiration to evaluate these aspirations, identifying alternative better-suited prospects if available, and to fulfil the aspirations. ASER points out that almost half of the surveyed 14-18 year olds who have work aspirations do not know anyone else working in that profession, whether at home, community, school or even a public figure.

Further, focus group discussions conducted in three districts, as part of the ASER 2023 survey, undertaking preparations and measures needed discussed perceptions of 14-18 year olds around vocational education. In Sitapur and Dhamtari (in Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, respectively) vocational education was marred by negative perceptions of being the route that people choose when they are unable to bag white collar jobs. However, discussions in Solan (Himachal Pradesh) offered a refreshing perspective. Here, context-driven vocational courses such as tourism and hotel management were introduced in schools as early as standard nine and

the result was seen in the perspectives of students towards these trades, which gained aspirational value. On-the-job training, certification at the end of the course and readily available information on career prospects encouraged students to aspire for related professions.

### **Technology use**

In this backdrop, the increasing ubiquity and access of youth to smartphones, as highlighted by ASER 2023, and, earlier, the State of Elementary Education in Rural India Report, must be leveraged. Both surveys also confirm what we all know from our personal experiences - that teens use smartphones primarily for entertainment and social media and less for educational purposes. Youth will use smartphones for what they find interesting and what aligns with their motivations. Tapping into the incentives that youth may have to prepare and learn more about what they want to become, digital technology can equip youth with the foundations of their aspired professions and also bridge connections with relevant professionals. For example, while in school or college, youth who wish to become nurses can undertake online foundational courses on nursing and related subjects, or even relevant short modules such as administering first aid. All this requires committed collaborations among ed-

tech agencies, industries and professional groups. But schools and colleges must take the lead and do more to understand and cultivate youth's aspirations and guide them right platforms and avenues.

Data, and not just ASER data, when designed and collected with

rigour and the right intent, highlight problems but also have crucial pointers for action. What is needed is to move beyond the immediate instinct to lament over the problem and dig deeper to discern where to act, how to act and who must act. ■

( The Hindu, 13-04-24)

### ***Israel's Hit on Gaza Aid Workers is A New Low***

The killing of seven international aid workers delivering food to the starving people of Gaza marks yet another low point in Israel's bombardment of the enclave. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has offered a tentative apology of sorts, speaking of troops "unintentionally hitting" the aid workers, but evidence that has emerged suggests the convoy of the World Central Kitchen was systematically targeted multiple times, with Israeli forces striking as the aid workers sought to move between three vehicles that were hit one after the other. While there can be no justification whatsoever for Hamas' terror attacks that triggered this conflict, Israel's heavy-handed response is only whittling away support for it across the world. It is also difficult to fathom the goals of the war being fought by the Benjamin Netanyahu government unless it is meant to strengthen Israel's grip on all the territories it currently holds and to remove the possibility of a two-State solution.

The governments of the US and the UK, which have lost citizens in this incident, are facing increased pressure from the public to press Israel for a course correction. There is also a growing clamour for them to stop arming Israel in view of the human rights excesses that have been recorded in the Gaza Strip. The daily toll of deaths will only serve to strengthen extremist elements in the Arab States, which have walked the extra mile in efforts to normalise relations with Israel. Irrespective of all this, Israel has prolonged this war for far too long, and its actions — the strike on the Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria, for instance — carry the frightening prospect of dragging the entire neighbourhood into the conflict. The time has come for Israel to heed global calls to stop the bombardment of Gaza and allow humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people. ■



## The Message of Idul Fitr

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

*Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. [He wants that] you must complete the same number of days and that you must magnify Allah for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him. And when My slaves ask you [O Prophet] concerning Me, then [tell them] I am indeed near. I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me. So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led alright.*

(al-Baqarah 2:185-186)

This passage relates to the blessed month of Ramadan. The Qur'anic account of fasting marks the opening of this passage which states that fasting is prescribed as a religious duty for Muslims, as it was for the believers of an earlier date. It is prescribed so that they may become pious. It is further clarified that the Qur'an was sent down during this month and that the Qur'an is guidance for all mankind. Contained in it are signs as guidance and criterion.

In this passage Allah tells Muslims that He intends ease for them. He does not want to put them to any difficulty. Fasting for twenty-nine or thirty days during Ramadan is not an impossible task. Muslims are asked to fast for a limited number of days. This is followed by the directive that they

should celebrate Allah's praise in that He has guided them. They are obliged to praise Him for having blessed them with His guidance. They are also exhorted to thank Allah and express gratitude to Him.

Allah mentions implicitly 'Id in the above passage. Although the festival of 'Id is not specified, the passage states the objective, spirit and function of 'Id. As Allah enables a Muslim to fast during Ramadan and pray at night, he should celebrate Allah's glory. This should be by way of thanks for the bestowal of His guidance. A Muslim stands indebted to Him for blessing him with faith and Islam. Without His leave he could neither fast nor pray. For there are numerous communities besides Muslims in the world. They know well that Muslims celebrate Ramadan in a particular way. Yet it makes no difference to them. Ramadan does not carry any meaning and message for them.

We should be grateful to Allah for having guided us. We should be equally grateful for being blessed with Islam. Moreover, we should be thankful to Him for granting us health which enables us to fast. Above all, Allah grants us the ability and strength to fast. For one may possess everything yet not receive divine guidance to fast. One may be an adult, with sound physique and other

resources yet still not fast. It amounts to disobedience on his part.

That Allah alone grants the ability is the real thing. It is He Who inspires man to fast during Ramadan and to pray to Him. In sum, He guides us to fast. Yet there are those who possess the facilities and resources to fast but who do not do so. This is because Allah does not inspire such a person to fast. A believer is obliged to celebrate Allah's praise for having provided him with the requisite resources and ability to fast. Since there is nothing to prohibit one from fasting, it is imperative for one to fast. The directive to celebrate Allah's praise is on account of the same - the ability granted by Him to fast.

It is part of the *Sunnah* that on the day of *'Id al-Fitr* one should celebrate Allah's praise on one's way to the mosque. On *'Id al-Adha* one should chant such praise aloud: "Allah is great. Allah is great. There is no god besides Allah. Allah is great. All praise is for Allah." It is also part of the *Sunnah* that one should use two different routes for going to the mosque to offer prayer. This results in circulating Allah's praise throughout the whole town. The inhabitants of the town will hence receive this message. While waiting for the *'Id* Prayer to commence, one should keep on praising Him for His guidance and this out of gratitude. For Allah has granted one the ability to fast. One will be pardoned for missing a fast on

account of ill health.

It is common knowledge that festivals are an occasion for expressing joy. One is relieved of one's duties, enabling one to enjoy the festival. Islam is, however, the only faith that *obliges* its followers to perform extra duty on the day of festival. Nonetheless, this duty is not very burdensome. Rather, it accrues more blessings. It instructs the believers in 'Self-restraint and decency. On *'Id* day Muslims are obliged to offer two additional rak'ah of prayer. They are not exempted from discharging their religious duty on this day, as they have to offer extra prayer in between the compulsory *Fajr* and *Zuhr* Prayers. This is the Islamic way of expressing gratitude to Allah.

The Muslim community is thus consistently instructed in thanking Allah. No other religious community is particular about this. The Muslims alone try to perform this. They discharge their duty and thank Allah for enabling them to do so.

Other religious communities do not offer extra prayers or charity on their festival days. Rather, they enjoy life, engrossed in eating and drinking. In Islam, however, the focus is on giving - charity to the poor, gratitude to Allah and celebrating of Allah's praise. This is done in order to thank Allah for His guidance. It expresses Muslims' gratefulness to Him. ■

## Embracing Ramadan in Stockholm: A Cultural Mosaic of Fasting, Faith And Community

In the heart of Scandinavia, where the crisp air carries the whispers of history and diversity, lies Stockholm the vibrant city of Sweden. As the seasons transition and the days lengthen, a significant portion of Stockholm's population prepares to observe Ramadan, the holiest month in Islam. Ramadan holds a special place in the hearts of Muslims worldwide marking a period of fasting, reflection and spiritual rejuvenation. In Stockholm this sacred month intertwines with the city's multicultural tapestry, creating a unique and enriching experience for its inhabitants.

Ramadan is a time for devotion and self-discipline for Muslims worldwide. It is a month of heightened spirituality, communal worship, and strengthening bonds with the family and the community. With a growing population of Muslims from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds calling Stockholm home, the city comes alive with the vibrant energy of Ramadan.

In Sweden where diversity thrives, Ramadan provides an invaluable opportunity for individuals of all faiths and backgrounds to come together in understanding and solidarity, with various groups coming together to

**- Mohammad Shariq Zafar**  
partake in the traditions and rituals associated with the holy month.

Throughout the month, mosques and city centres across the city become focal point of activity with congregational prayers, Quranic recitations, Dars, Taraaweeh and Islamic quizzes for the kids. The melodious recitation of the Quran fills the air, creating an ambience of tranquillity and devotion.

Volunteerism and acts of charity are integral aspects of Ramadan, reflecting the values of compassion and empathy. In Stockholm, numerous charitable organisations and grassroots initiative mobilize during Ramadan to support those in need. From distributing food packages to organising clothing drives and fundraising for the homeless, we strive to embody the value of compassion and generosity that Ramadan teaches us.

One of the most beautiful aspects of Ramadan in Stockholm is the sense of community that flourishes during this time. Families and Friends gather for iftar, the evening meal to break their fast, with laughter and camaraderie abound.

In the midst of the Nordic Landscape, Stockholm emerges as a beacon of diversity, where traditions of

Ramadan enrich the tapestry of urban life, fostering harmony and understanding among its inhabitants. The city's multiculturalism shines through various events and initiatives aimed at promoting understanding and building solidarity among different communities. Interfaith Iftar dinners, organised by mosques and community centres provide opportunities for people diverse cultures to come together, share a meal and learn about each other's traditions.

As the month draws to a close and the Muslim community prepares for Eid al -Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan with Prayers, Feast and Festives. Its a time of joy and gratitude, as families

come together to share meals, exchange gifs and express thanks for the blessings received during the holy month, the spirit of Ramadan continues to illuminate the city with its message of peace, compassion and unity. In the bustling streets and the quite corners alike, the people of Stockholm come together to embrace the values of this sacred month reaffirming their commitment to faith, community and solidarity.■

*(This article was contributed by Mohammad Shariq Zafar and reflects the observations and sentiments of the Muslim community in Stockholm during the holy month of Ramadan.)*

#### **HC Axes Appointment of 25,753 Teachers**

The Bench also directed the return of the salaries from all those who obtained jobs through unfair means along with interest calculated at 12% per annum and ordered district magistrates under whose jurisdictions the candidates reside, to take expeditious steps to realise such amount.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee termed the court order "illegal" and said her government would challenge the verdict in the Supreme Court.

The High Court made scathing remarks on the State Cabinet decision to protect employment obtained fraudulently.

"It is shocking that, at the level of the Cabinet of the State government, a decision is taken to protect employment obtained fraudulently in a selection process conducted by SSC for State-funded schools, knowing fully well that such appointments were obtained beyond the panel and after the expiry of the panel, at the bare minimum," the court said.

The development assumes significance as the issue of corruption in the teacher's recruitment process has dominated politics in the State for the past several years. The decision also comes amid heightened political activity during the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.■

## Post Ramazan Duties

- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

The holy month of Ramazan has just concluded. It bestowed upon Muslims to mould themselves according to Islamic Shariah and spend rest eleven months of the year as such. The fasting in Ramzan has its own significance for the Muslim community. Islam has set a variety of strategies to steer its adherents to the path of peace, progress and prosperity. Besides it presents a well-defined system of "awamir" and "nawahi" (do's and do not's) which encompass the whole gamut of human life.

The main purpose of the fasting is to attain taqwa (piety). As the holy Qur'an said: "O believers! fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you. That you may become pious" (2:183). The real meaning of taqwa (piety) is fear of Allah and practice modesty and shun all kinds of obnoxious and forbidden objects. Noted Islamic scholar late Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi says: "The important truth home though is that fasting helps man attain piety. The Qur'an employs the term taqwa in this context. Generally speaking, words are invested with different meanings with the passage of time. A pious person is taken to be one who is constantly engaged in worship, and who sleeps little. One who does not fall asleep at all is recognised as a perfectly pious person. He is expected

to offer prayers all the time and is very cautious about each and every issue, be it religious or mundane. In the original Arabic, however, taqwa does not carry these shades of meaning. It does not imply that one blessed with taqwa is given wholly to worship, stays awake throughout the night and fasts round the year. Instead taqwa signifies in the original Arabic a state of mind and consciousness. It encompasses one's temperament and way of thinking, Ramadan helps man attain piety. Yet it does not mean that with the passage of Ramadan, piety comes to an end. Piety is not some temporary condition". He further says: "Piety represents a constant state of self-control and restraint. Is a child is brought up well, he imbibes the value of respecting his elders. He does not indulge in any act in the presence of his elders which may be offensive to them. By the same token, he refrains from mocking or insulting them. Piety signifies such a training of the mind which guides one to practice moral values all the time. A pious person thinks carefully before taking any action whether his act is permitted by the Shari'ah or not. This reference to the Shari'ah at every step is a pointer to one's piety. Take the illustrious examples of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, holding exalted rank among the Prophet's Companions. They were witness to the revelation of

the Qur'an. Furthermore, they possessed mastery over the Arabic language and idiom. They were born and brought up in Makkah and used the local language fluently. As true Companions they never felt shy of seeking clarification from the Prophet (PBUH). Once they asked 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud to define taqwa. To this he replied: "O Commander of the Faithful! Have you ever walked on a path with thorns on either side?" When 'Umar replied in the affirmative, he asked as to how he walked on that path. 'Umar replied: "I walk cautiously, ensuring that body and clothes are safe against thorns." 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud exclaimed: "This is the definitions of taqwa - to lead life in a way with our doing anything which may displease Allah. One's deeds should not be discordant with the Shari'ah."

It is noted that Mosques are normally packed with worshipers and devotees during the month of Ramazan. But as soon the crescent of Shawwal is sighted, number of devotees dwindles down and finally rows are shrunk.

It is imperative for us to pass the rest eleven months of the year like Ramazan, keeping ourselves away from all sorts of unholy activities and anti-social acts. If we did not do so, it meant that we did not attain taqwa (piety) in true sense. May Allah give us strength to make Ramazan like environment so that we may lead our life in peaceful way. ■

## Value of Love

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

There is an exceptional glare of love in man's eyes which is not found in any other creature. His heart is characterised with a softness and melting quality inspired by love and quivers with the touch of pain and suffering for others. Such a heart is not in the treasures of the angels and surely man alone can present to his Lord a heart full of sincere love for others.

The excellence of man lies in his love and mercy for others one person is pricked with a thorn but another person feels the pain. Man is gifted with tears which fall from his eyes when he sees a widow's head uncovered in helplessness, a poor man's kitchen unlit, and a sick man in distress. If such a drop of tear is put in the sea of transgression, it will cleanse it. If it falls in a forest of sins, it will burn it and fill the space again with the effulgence of virtue. The angles can bring forward anything, but they cannot present this drop of tear. The angles do not sleep due to their cognisance of Allah's being and attributes, but their vigil does not have the excellence of man's inability to sleep due to the sufferings of others.

The quality of love permeating through the human heart is a very precious gift of God. When something stirs it, it assumes a strange power. It rises above the consideration of religion, community, nation and motherland. It then only sees another man's heart and feels its suffering and is drawn to it by nature as is pulled an iron towards a magnet. ♦

## Around the World

### **‘To The Future’: Saudi Arabia Spends Big To Become AI Superpower**

ON A Monday morning last month, tech executives, engineers and sales representatives from Amazon, Google, TikTok and other companies endured a three-hour traffic jam as their cars crawled toward a mammoth conference at an event space in the desert, 50 miles outside Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The lure: billions of dollars in Saudi money as the kingdom seeks to build a tech industry to complement its oil dominance.

“To the Future,” a sign read at the event, called Leap.

More than 200,000 people converged at the conference, including Adam Selipsky, CEO of Amazon’s cloud computing division, who announced a \$5.3 billion investment in Saudi Arabia for data centers and artificial intelligence. Arvind Krishna, the CEO of IBM, spoke of what a Saudi minister called a “lifetime friendship” with the kingdom. Executives from Huawei and dozens of other firms made speeches. More than \$10 billion in deals were done there, according to Saudi Arabia’s state press agency.

“This is a great country,” Shou Chew, TikTok’s CEO said during the meet, heralding the video app’s growth in the kingdom. “We expect to invest even more.”

Everybody in tech seems to want to make friends with Saudi Arabia as the kingdom has trained its sights on becoming a dominant player in AI — and is pumping in eye-popping sums to do so.

Saudi Arabia created a \$100 billion fund year to invest in AI and other technology.

The spending blitz stems from a generational effort outlined in 2016 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and known as “Vision 2030.” For the tech industry, Saudi Arabia has long been a funding spigot. But the kingdom is now redirecting its oil wealth into building a domestic tech industry, requiring international firms to establish roots there if they want its money. If Crown Prince Mohammed succeeds, he will place Saudi Arabia in the middle of an escalating global competition among China, the US and other countries. Combined with AI efforts by its neighbor, the UAE, Saudi Arabia’s plan has the potential to create a new power center in the global tech industry.

In Washington, many worry that the kingdom’s goals and authoritarian leanings could work against US interests—for instance, if Saudi Arabia ends up providing computing power to Chinese researchers and companies. This month, the White House brokered a deal to in CAZ an AI company in the UAE which was intended partly to diminish China’s influence.

For China, the Persian Gulf region offers a big market, access to deep-pocketed investors and a chance to wield influence in countries traditionally allied with the United States. Deciding to set up in Riyadh comes with challenges. There’s the heat, reaching more than 110 degrees in the summer. ■

*(The Indian Express, 26-4-2024)*

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