

God and Secularity in Modern Islam

S. V. BHAJJAN

Concept of God

Faith in the unity of God is called *tawbīd*. This is expressed in the *Kalimah* of Islam as 'La ilahā illallah' (There is no deity but Allah).

In the Arabic language the word *ilah* means 'one who is worshipped', i.e. a being which on account of its greatness and power can be considered worthy to be worshipped, to be bowed to in humility and submission. Anything or any being possessing powers too great to be comprehended by man and one that is not dependent upon anyone else, is also called *ilah*. The word *ilah* also carries a sense of concealment and mystery, that is *ilah* would be a being unseen and imperceptible. The word 'Khuda' in Persian and 'God' in English bear, more or less, similar significance.¹

The word *Allah*, on the other hand, is the essential personal name of God. *La ilaha illallah* would literally mean 'there is no *ilah* other than the one great Being known by the name of *Allah*.' He is concealed from our senses, and our intellect fails to perceive what He is.²

Besides the name *Allah* other names were given to God: *Al-Rabb* (the Lord), *Al-Rahaman* (the Merciful). This latter name was used for God in South Arabia much before the advent of Muhammad. But eventually this same name often became coupled with the name *Allah* such as in the formula '*Bismillah al-Rahmān Al Rahīm*' (In the name of God the benevolent, the merciful); which begins every Surah of the Quran except the 9th.

The Islamic conception of God is based on the teaching of the Qur'ān, the holiest book of the Muslims. Like the Bible, Qur'ān is not a theological treatise; it is a revelation. There is therefore in the book no systematic exposition of theological questions. Theological notions must be gathered from different parts of the book and somehow synthetized.

¹ Abul Ā'la Maudūdī, *Towards Understanding Islam*, Islamic Publications Ltd., Karachi, 1963, p. 94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

The Qur'an takes God's existence for granted. But his existence can be proved from the many signs of God in the Universe. Man is advised to contemplate God's signs and draw the right conclusion. 'Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and (in) the difference of night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty) for men of understanding' (3:190).

The unity affirmed in the Qur'an is absolute. *Allah* is numerically one only, without any associate. He is also one in Himself. He does not generate and is not generated. 'Lo! thy Lord is surely One' (37:4). 'It is inspired in me that your God is one God' (41:6). 'Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He Begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him' (112).

Idol worship is condemned. An idol cannot create, guide, speak and walk (7:192-195). To associate any being with God is an unpardonable sin. 'Lo! Allah forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto him. He forgiveth (all) save that to whom he will. Whoso ascribeth partners to Allah, he hath indeed invented a tremendous sin' (4:48).

In a well-known passage the Qur'an appeals to the Christians to desist from saying 'three' when speaking of God. 'O People of the Scripture, Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of Allah and His word which he conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not 'Three'. Cease! (it is) better for you—Allah is only one God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender' (4:171).

Allah is self-subsistent, self-sufficient, and absolutely transcendent. 'Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal' (2:255). 'His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth! He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is able to do all things. He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward, and He is Knower of all things' (57:2-3).

The doctrine of the nature of God is a central issue in Islam. There are certain passages in the Qur'an which call for a figurative interpretation. Some commentators have interpreted such allegorically anthropomorphic passages (68:7, 17:81) in the Qur'an. The question of the use of allegory became a matter of dispute. 'What gave rise to the dispute was that while the Qur'an strongly emphasized the absolute uniqueness of God, it yet described Him in anthropomorphic terms, ascribing to him eyes, hands and a face, and portraying him as speaking and sitting on a throne. The early traditionists held that the figurative or, more literally, the ambiguous verses in the Qur'an relating to God's attributes must be believed. To discuss such matters is

innovation or *bid'ah*. But the successors to the early traditionists held that God's attributes must be interpreted in a way fitting with his majesty.³

One of the themes most stressed in the Qur'an is the unlimited sovereignty (*rububiyya*) of God over the world because of the fact of Creation. 'Unto Allah belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is therein, and He is able to do all things' (5:120). 'He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifieth Him, and He is Mighty, the Wise' (59:24). To create, God had only to utter the word *Kun* (be) and the thing ordered was. 'But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: Be! and it is' (36:81).

In Muslim writings we come across two most commonly used words for God. One is *Khāliq* and the other *Mālik* (Creator and Master). Moulana Maududi writes:

'The universe is not a fortuitous mass of matter. It is not a jumble of uncoordinated objects. It is not a conglomeration of things chaotic and meaningless. All this cannot be without a Creator, a Designer, a Controller, a Governor. But who can create and control this majestic universe? Only He can do so who is Master of all; Who is infinite and eternal, Who is all-powerful, all-wise, omnipotent and omniscient; Who is all-knowing and all-seeing. He must have supreme authority over all that exists in the universe. He must possess limitless powers, must be the lord of the universe and all that it contains: must be free from every flaw and weakness, and none may have the power to interfere with His work. Only such a Being can be the Creator, the Controller and the Governor of the universe. Secondly, it is essential that all these divine attributes and powers must vest in One Being—it is virtually impossible for two or more personalities having all the powers and attributes equally, to co-exist... Therefore there must be one and only one supreme being having control over all others. You cannot think of two governors for the same province or two supreme commanders of the same army. Similarly the distribution of these powers among different deities for instance, that one of them is all-knowledge, the other all-providence and still another life-giver with each having independent domain in his own field—is also—unthinkable. These attributes are also untransferable. It is not possible that a certain attribute might be present in a certain deity at one time and at another time

³ Morris S. Seal, *Muslim Theology*, Luzac & Co., London, 1964, p. 53.

be found in another deity. A divine being who is incapable of remaining alive himself cannot give life to others. One who cannot protect his own divine power is definitely unsuited to govern the vast limitless universe. Thus Polytheism is a form of ignorance and cannot stand rational scrutiny. It is a practical impossibility. The facts of life and nature do not fit into that explanation. They automatically bring man to Reality, i.e., *Tawhīd*, the Unity of God.’⁴

There is a Supreme Being, over and above all that our un-
 wary eyes see in the universe, Who is the Will behind all phenom-
 ena, the Creator of this grand Universe, the Controller of its
 superb Law, the Governor of its serene rhythm, the Administrator
 of its all workings: He is Allah, the Lord of the Universe and
 has none as associate in His divinity.⁵

The attributes of God are called *ismā-ul-Husna*, the excel-
 lent names. The number of these names or attributes of Allah
 is given by Tradition as ninety-nine. It is the custom of many
 pious Muslims to employ in their devotions a rosary of ninety-
 nine beads to represent these names, and the repetition of them
 is called *dhikr* or remembrance. By some the attributes are
 divided into three classes, i.e. the attributes of wisdom, of power
 and of goodness. But the more common division is into two: *Ismā-ul-Jalāliyah*, the terrible attributes, and *Ismā-ul-Jamāliyah*, the glorious attributes. The former are more numerous and more emphasized than the latter. In addition to these terrible attributes there are five which describe Allah as hurting and avenging. He is a God who abases, leads astray, avenges, withholds His mercies, and works harm. In all these doings He is independent and all-powerful.

While we find that the ‘terrible’ attributes of God’s power occur again and again in the Qur’ān, the net total of the moral attributes is found in two verses which mention that Allah is Holy and Truthful (59:23 and 22:62). When God is called ‘The Holy’ in the Qur’ān, the term does not signify moral purity or perfection. The Muslim commentators have used as a synonym for *quddūs* (Holy) the word *ṭāhir*, which means ceremoniously clean or circumcised.

Muslim theologians persistently ascribed tyranny to God. Al-Ash’ari, for instance, says, ‘Allah, therefore, is Master of His desires, and if He were to send all created beings to Paradise there would be no injustice done, or if He sent them all to Hell there would be no tyranny. Wrong-doing (*zulm*) consists of disposing of things one does not own or misplacing them. But since He is the absolute owner, no wrong doing can be imagined of Him, nor can injustice be ascribed to Him.’⁶

⁴ Abul Ā’la Maudūdi, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Morris S. Seal, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Determinism and free will are both to be found in the Qur'an, but the main attribute of Islam was in favour of predestination, which for Muslims usually means determinism. When the Qur'an says: 'Allah hath created you and what ye make' (37:97), it is using the language of religion to declare God to be the only Lord and Creator. The statement is innocuous and could be spiritually helpful if taken to mean no more than that God was and is a beneficent maker and provider. But this is in fact a key verse used by determinists to declare God to be the only Creator and only Initiator, asserting that He alone is the one who acts at any time; Man is reduced to the status of a puppet who is moved about willy-nilly on the stage of human existence. Their interpretation of this and similar verses borders on perversity when they go on to assert that even wrong-doing and unbelief are not in man's hands: God must have willed them or they would not have occurred. They cast scorn on the idea that God could be disobeyed against his will.⁷

The love of God for men is mentioned several times, and he is called 'wudud' (the affectionate) twice in the Qur'an (95:8 and 7:85). However, God's love to man is rather a love for his good qualities than for the man himself (5:54). God is merciful and gives his best gifts to men. It is taken for granted that one who believes in God and his apostles will do good acts.

There were several ways of establishing contact or communication between man and God. In the Christian view perhaps the best would have been incarnation; but Islam has rejected it. Muslims feel that it would be too degrading for a transcendent God to become man, to eat, drink, be tortured by his own creatures, and even put to death. However close a man may approach God in his journeying towards him, even in his highest ascension, man remains man and very much remote from God. Man may annihilate himself, as say the mystics, and completely efface his personality, in order to act according to the will of God, but still—and let us repeat that—man remains man and subject to all his weaknesses, and God is above all these insufficiencies.⁸

Dr. Hamidullah suggests other means of communication between man and God. The feeblest of them is a dream. According to the Prophet, good dreams are suggested by God and guide men in the right direction. Another means is *ilqa* (literally, throwing something towards someone), a kind of auto-suggestion, or intuition, or presentment of solutions in case of impasses or insoluble or difficult problems. There is also *ilhām*, which may be translated as 'Divine inspiration'. Things are suggested to the heart (mind) of a man whose soul is sufficiently developed in the virtues of justice, charity, disinterestedness and

⁷ Morris S. Seal, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁸ Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, Centre Cultural Islamique, Paris, 1959, p. 46.

benevolence to others. The saints of all epochs in all countries have enjoyed this grace. Anyhow there remains in this the possibility of error of Judgement or of comprehension on the part of man. The mystics affirm that sometimes even the most pious men are led astray by their imperceptible ego, not being able to distinguish the base inspirations that come as a trial. The highest degree of contact, the surest and the most infallible means of communication between man and his creator, is called *wahy* by the Prophet Muhammad. It is not an ordinary inspiration, but a veritable revelation made to man on the part of the Lord, a celestial communication. As no physical contact with God is possible, a celestial message-bearer, commonly translated as 'angel', serves as intermediary or the channel of the transmission of the message of God to his human agent or messenger, i.e. the prophet. None except a prophet receives such a revelation through the intermediary of a celestial messenger.⁹

Muslim savants have constructed their entire system on a juridical basis where rights and duties are correlative. God has given us the organs and faculties which we possess, and every gift implies a particular obligation. To worship God, to be thankful to him, to obey him, to shun all that does not suit his universal Divinity—all these constitute the individual duties of everyone, for which each one shall be personally responsible.¹⁰

Certain mystics of early Islam have remarked: 'There is a truth about God known to the man in the street, another known to the initiated, yet another to the inspired prophets, and lastly the one known to God Himself. There is enough elasticity for satisfying the needs of different categories of man: learned as well as ignorant, intelligent as well as simple, poets, artists, jurists, theologians and the rest. The point of view and the angle of vision may differ according to the individual, yet the object of vision remains constant.'¹¹

To sum up the Quranic teachings about God, we may say that faith in One God is the most important and fundamental principle. It is the bed-rock of Islam and the mainspring of its power. All other beliefs, commands and laws of Islam, stand firm on this very foundation. All of them receive strength from this source. Take it away, and there is nothing left in Islam.

When a Muslim says, 'I believe in God', what does he mean? This question has been answered by Dr. Abdul Haq Ansari, Head of the Department of Arabic, Persian and Islamic Studies, Vishva Bharati, India.

'When a man of religion says, I believe in God, he first means to say that there is a being whom he calls God, and that God is there, not because he affirms, on the contrary, he affirms, because such a being exists.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Affirmation of God by a man of religion does not mean his desiring God to come into being or to continue and grow perfect. The second thing a man of religion says is that he believes that his God is in some sense related to him, to other beings and to the whole world. He believes in a being of some description—a God of a particular description, however inadequate his description may be, and no matter how many difficulties its verbal expression may involve. The third thing a man of religion says is that he takes his God as determining his ideals and norms. By ideals and norms he means here all that which is the object of desire, choice, decision, commitment and action. He accepts them and commits himself to them. The affirmation involved in this sense of believing is an intentional affirmation, and the proposition, 'I believe in God', is an existential, not a factual proposition. Fourthly, in saying, I believe in God, I am not only saying that I believe that God is there, or that I take him as my norm or determinant of my norms, or that I commit myself to obey his will, but I also say that I feel him, that I am overpowered by him, that I love him and fear him. Believing in God also means trusting him and having faith in him. When I say that I believe in God, I mean to say that God is not indifferent to what happens to me or what happens in the world, that he is not uninterested in my feelings, aspirations and strivings. I mean to say that he is interested and involved in my life and destiny, as well as others. I mean to say that I rely on him in the struggle of my life, that I trust in his goodness and his power, that I have faith in his guidance, assistance and protection. I mean to say that I believe in his promises and in his faithfulness.¹²

Muslim theology has clearly taken the view that man can affirm on his own resources the existence of a being that has something in common with the God of revelation. For a clear and full idea of God, however, it holds revelation to be indispensable.¹³

Secularity in Modern Islam

Muslim scholars do claim that Islam is the answer to all problems relating to multiple modern human situations and that it offers guidance in all spheres of man's life here and in the hereafter. It speaks to the modern man in a special way and gives him freedom to exert his mental faculties and to find ways

¹² Abdul Haq Ansāri, *Believing in God*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', New Delhi, August, 1971, pp. 33-35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

and means to live a good life in the sight of both man and God. It is also claimed that Islam provides a perfect system for human beings to live by and that through the Qur'ān God has conveyed to man everything that is needed. There is no scope for further revelation, message or 'divine word' from above. For Muslims the proposition that with Islam the prophetic movement comes to a close is not a mere expression of faith; it is a brute historical fact. The theological language of Islam describes it as the cessation of divine revelation to man, and the Qur'ān calls it the fulfilment of the Faith. In the personality of Muhammad history finds the last builder of a religion who claimed to have spoken the 'Divine Word'.¹⁴

Islam is an ideology. Unlike Christianity it makes no fundamental distinction between the spiritual and the temporal, between what is owed to God and what belongs to Caesar. Historically speaking Islam is an all-pervasive phenomenon which entails within itself religion and state, society and culture. Theoretically at least it is absolute by its nature, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted.¹⁵

In view of what has been stated above nothing spectacular can be expected from Muslim writers who may claim to belong to the modern age, as far as a new interpretation of their understanding of Islam is concerned. But it is surprising that the following views are those of a Muslim: 'This is palpably absurd, however offensive the word may sound to believers. Since leaders of Muslim opinion would not do it for reason of expediency, someone else must point out, that no scripture of any religion, "revealed" by God or "heard" by the Rishis, can claim finality in any field.'¹⁶

Again in the light of what has been stated above, Muslims generally tend to refer to the Qur'ān whenever there is any new problem for which an answer has to be found or any achievement of man either in the field of philosophy, psychology, science or technology. There have been efforts to discover all the new 'isms' in the sacred text of the Qur'ān. Even man's landing on the moon has been discussed by Muslim writers as having been foretold in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān makes it an imperative to conquer and subjugate the forces of nature. Socialism has also been said to have its roots in the Qur'ān. No wonder if 'Secularism' may also be traced back to the Qur'ān!

Historically speaking, the term secular society or secular state has been used to convey different meanings at different times. In nineteenth century Europe, for example, secularism was

¹⁴ S. Ālam Khundmīri, *A Critical Examination of Islamic Traditionalism*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', New Delhi, May, 1971, p. 1.

¹⁵ Muḥmūd-ul-Haq, *Islamic Modernism—A Response to the Challenge of Modern Age*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', May, 1971, p. 80.

¹⁶ A. B. Shah, *Challenge to Secularism*, Bombay, 1968, p. 36.

identified with an anti-clerical attitude, and the Secular Society of England was an association of confirmed atheists who denied the values of organized religion and carried out active propaganda against the belief in God. As a result of this tradition the idea still persists that a secular society is a non-religious society.¹⁷

It seems highly doubtful whether the concept of secularization as it was evolved in the West can apply to the Pakistani situation. The same is the case with the Indian Muslims, to whom secularism is still taboo.

Islam does not admit any distinction between the religious and the secular. Secularism as an ideology has not only got certain historical associations in its very origin but has also acquired certain ideological implications in modern times. So it should never be used naively in a generalized manner. The so-called modernists in the Muslim community are committing exactly this very mistake. Truth to say, they are confused and confusing. So it is that they have rushed to apply some abstracted virtues of secularism to Islam and have drawn the conclusion that Islam also can harbour 'Secularism'.¹⁸

In a democratic country like India the state demands liberalism and tolerance in religious matters. In a Communist dictatorship the attitude is anti-religious. But both of them want to suppress religiosity in social affairs, with the difference, of course, that the second is ruthless and exercises tyrannical compulsions, whereas the first does it with finesse and apparent persuasion. As far as the effect of these two methods is concerned, 'the democratic one is more dangerous for religion. It succeeds in performing a major operation with anaesthetic!'¹⁹

I think that the Muslims, especially those of India and Pakistan, are not much worried about the meaning of secularism, but they are afraid of the process of secularization, considering it to be a movement initiated by irreligious leaders whose purpose is to destroy religion. The fear of the Muslims is based on a very narrow understanding of the process of secularization. To them it is a clash of two institutions of authority, i.e. religious and temporal. A Turkish Muslim writer suggests that 'the principal conflict in the secularization process is not necessarily between religion and the world, as was the case in the Christian experience. Rather the conflict is often between the forces of tradition, which tend to promote the domination of religion and sacred law, and the forces of change.'²⁰

¹⁷ Ali Dessouki, *Towards a Comparative Study of Secularization: Christian and Islamic Experience*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', May, 1971, p. 50.

¹⁸ Abdul Moghni, *Socialism and Islam*, published in 'Radiance Views Weekly', Delhi, 24 October, 1971, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Niyāzi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, Montreal, McGill University Press, 1964, p. 3 (quoted by Ali Dessouki, *op. cit.*, p. 54).

This approach has been called for to explain the configuration of religion-state relationships in Muslim countries where no organized Church authority exists and where society has been governed by a tradition which carries the sanction of religion. Every institution charged with the responsibility of maintaining this tradition 'acted in the name of the sacred'. There never was a distinction or differentiation between religious and temporal functions. The ruler acted both as Caliph and emperor. Temporal and religious functions were fused and sacred values were preserved without being attached to a specific institution separate from the temporal. In Muslim societies the 'religious' institution has not become a church, nor have the political or the temporal been autonomous. Thus, to impose the Western Church-State category on a Muslim Society is not only to misread the actual institutional configuration of the 'religious' and the 'secular' in the non-Western societies, it also results in a failure to understand the modern processes of secularization taking place in these societies.²¹

Reformist Movements in Islam

There have been movements in Islam from the very beginning of Muslim history, especially after the death of the Prophet. These movements were mainly religious and they brought into being different religious sects. But the movement which can be called modern-as well as religious and reformist was started in Arabia in the beginning of the eighteenth century by a man called Muhammad Abdul Wahab. This movement is known as 'The Wahabi Movement'. Even up to the present time any Muslim who vigorously agitates against the traditional set-up of Islam is termed a 'Wahabi'. The Wahabi movement was 'started as a reaction against the corruption of religion and popular Sufism, stagnation of Islam due to the immobilist attitude of its Ulama and the general degeneration among Muslims. It was both puritanical and progressive, narrow and energetic.'²²

This movement preached fundamentalism and raised the slogan of 'back to the Qur'an and the Sunnah', thereby wholly rejecting modernism, westernism or secularism. Paradoxically the movement turned out to be the precursor of the modernist trend in the Islamic world in general, as some of the modernists were avowedly inspired by this movement in their drive for purification of the faith while at the same time advocating change and reform.²³ It was the first stirring in the life of modern Islam which greatly influenced the reformed movements in the Arab world and elsewhere.

²¹ Ali Dessouki, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²² M. A. Saleem Khan, *Saudi Arabia: Wahabism and Oil Survey of Contemporary Development in the Muslim World*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', May, 1971, p. 91.

²³ Mahmūd-ul-Haq, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

The history of such reformist movements in Islam is interesting in the sense that on one hand it reveals the religious bias of the leaders and on the other their zeal to change the *status quo* as well. For example the most celebrated Egyptian reformer Shaykh Md. 'Abduh started a movement which had several similarities in spirit to the Christian Reformation in Europe. He gave the slogan of 'back to the Qur'an and the Sunnah' and at the same time advocated the freedom to search for values better fitted to the modern age. He rejected 'the orthodox claim that the Shari'ah has been finally formulated by the ancient doctors' and endeavoured to create a new relationship between reason and revelation.'²⁴

According to the orthodox 'Ulama' the fundamental task of the Islamic Movements is to wage a relentless war against the modern age as it is called a reversal to Jāhiliyya (age of ignorance).

The Shari'ah

The traditional view is that no aspect of human life is outside the review of Islamic Law. It contains infallible laws for the entire life of man, whether his metaphysical needs or normal aspirations, secular aspects of life or the greater details of state administration. Besides the Qur'an one of the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence is the Sunnah, which is based on Hadith literature. Post-medieval Islam is governed by the belief that tradition (Hadith) covers the whole of human life. Modern Muslim scholars, however, are very careful in the use of *hadith* literature to find answers to some delicate problems of modern society. 'But it still remains a challenging task to question the validity of the proposition that the tradition covers the entire human life.'²⁵

Once in a while one comes across views expressed by Muslim scholars themselves: 'the whole attitude behind this proposition is essentially authoritarian, the indisputable quality of the medieval mind. It has on this account been suggested that most of the contemporary Islamic movements are a continuation of the medieval attitude. Almost all the authors of these movements, emphasise the need of re-interpreting the tradition in accordance with the needs of modern times, without however, suggesting a new world outlook and a new epistemology which has taken into account the progress in the field of sciences, natural as well as social, psychology and even religious phenomenology'.²⁶

Muslim scholars, especially those whose education has been on western lines, are more aware of the difficulty in supporting the traditional view, but they are a negligible minority. The

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁵ S. Alam Khundmiri, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁶ Mahmūd-ul-Haq, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Muslim masses, especially those of India and Pakistan, are still under the influence of the 'Ulama', who are generally conservative in their outlook and keep away from contemporary frontiers of knowledge. However, there are 'Ulama' who have a following among the educated also. Some of these 'Ulama' have written on topics such as socialism, capitalism and secularism and advocated changes as well. For example, one of the Pakistani 'Ulama', Chaudhry Ghulam Ahmed Parwez, whose education has been on western lines, has written a treatise with a very provocative title, *Mao Tse-tung and the Qur'an*. In this treatise he has suggested that 'Communism's proposed economic system is very much similar to the economic system enunciated in the Qur'an, although the philosophy of life of both, despite their limited harmony, are fundamentally in direct contradiction'.²⁷ But despite their making use of modern terminology, they adduce from the Qur'an and the Sunnah essential support for their religiously oriented views.

The Sufis

Besides the 'Ulama' there are Sufis (mystics) who too have a strong hold on the minds of Muslims in India and Pakistan. These Sufis, though having secular views about religion (with some exceptions), do emphasize the transitory character of worldly existence and generally keep quiet on the issues modern man is facing. Most of them are still trying to resist modernism, the normal growth of the scientific and philosophical values which are the bases of modern civilization.

To think that the 'Ulama' and the Sufis are going to accept secular values sooner or later is a dream which in my humble opinion will not materialize for another century at least. This may sound rather pessimistic, but the fact is that even some secular tendencies which we find in some Muslims around us are more or less like a mirage. The change is external and on the surface. The deeper strata of the Muslim society are still untouched. And also the change on the surface is politically motivated. This situation can change with the change in the trends of politics. There are already strong movements in some Muslim countries such as Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan which propagate the re-establishment of a theocracy based on the model of the past glory of early Islam.

Some important factors

The coming into being of the State of Israel and the defeat of the Arabs in both the short wars with Israel are two important factors which have brought Muslims face to face with secularism. The Muslims fully realize that only a strong faith

²⁷ Hafeez Malik, *The Spirit of Capitalism and Pakistani Islam*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', May, 1971, p. 38.

in Allah and his Prophet and following the teachings of the Qur'an are not enough. They have to do something else too. They have to turn to other non-Muslim nations for help and guidance in technology and science. They have to pay attention to the fast-changing situation of this modern world and introduce modern education into their schools and institutions. They need a modern army equipped with modern weapons to defeat Israel. For this they have to bring in specialists from outside and send their young men to other countries, some of which are not Islamic at all. These contacts do bring new ideas and thoughts and change the age-old pattern of thought and practice.

Some small Muslim States in the Middle East are depending heavily on Communist countries like China and Russia. Communist literature in Arabic can be freely used in these countries. Young Arab students are reading 'Thoughts of Mao' in Arabic and being influenced by them. Muslims are willing to face the danger of Communism rather than to beg for a peaceful settlement with Israel.

The Black Liquid Gold

One of the chief factors to bring modernism into some Middle Eastern countries is the black liquid gold, i.e., oil. Oil has not only brought easy riches; it has also brought science and technology. In the wake of some modern amenities secularism has also arrived, though its impact is not very strong as yet. But the changes that are taking place in some of these countries are surprising. For example, talking about Saudi Arabia a writer says: 'It is changing so fast that one is unable to categorize it: "transitional" is a poor term and "modernizing" depicts only a partial reality.'²⁸ The inexorable socio-economic modernization, which has been taking place in all the Afro-Asian countries since World War II, was accelerated by the oil; and what it meant, the wealth it brought, the increase in the mass media, education inside and abroad, transport facilities, urbanization, workers' colonies, contacts with the foreigners is to mention only a few of its manifestations in the Saudi Arabian context. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia hopes to see his country emerge as a Modern state in which science and technology will harmoniously complement the Islamic spiritual heritage.

Some Modern Issues and Muslims

(a) FAMILY PLANNING

The 'Ulama' have misunderstood what family planning means in the modern age. They do not think in terms of population explosion and scarcity of food in the world. They only take the theological implications into consideration and condemn the programme. The religious arguments used against family

²⁸ M. A. Saleem Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

planning are that 'it is an artificial method of interfering with God's Decree; that it promotes sexual immorality; that the Prophet had forbidden it; that the Prophet has said that he would take pride, on the Last Day, in the numerousness of his followers and, finally, that population control is a dangerous policy advocated by Western experts to the nations of the East of whose rising numbers the West was frightened'.²⁹ Parwez says that in order to contain the population explosion in Pakistan, the slogan of birth-control by self-control should be popularized.

(b) EDUCATION

The traditional Islamic education has been entirely in private hands and controlled by the 'Ulama' who have been jealous of their province of instruction without allowing any intrusion either by the Government or by modern learning.³⁰ Secularization involves the disappearance of religious control of the symbols of cultural integration. For instance, with the expansion of literacy and the development of secular press, as well as the cinema, radio and television, religious institutions have steadily lost their dominant position as media of communication. The position of religious institutions as a source of information has been eroded by the effectiveness of other channels of communication. In the sphere of education, not only did secular schools replace religious schools but within the secular schools the significance of religious education has diminished.³¹

There is a sharp distinction between the religious and the secular sciences when one looks at the *Mektabs* through which education is imparted to Muslim children and youth. From the beginning of Muslim modernism, the modernist has been at pains to prove to the community the value of modern education, particularly scientific education, on Islamic grounds. This activity has gone a long way to encourage the Muslims to take to modern learning increasingly. But this modern education has grown in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent essentially in isolation from the traditional education of the *madrassas* (*Mektabs*) and the two systems have remained separate from each other, dividing the society with a deep and pernicious type of dichotomy.³² But even those who are moderate in their views are of the view that the threat from secular forces in the sub-continent can be met by imparting religious knowledge to each and every Muslim child, but of course, on modern lines. There is therefore a great fervour in establishing and reorganizing *Mektabs* throughout India.

Mr. Asadullah Kazimi, formerly Additional Director of Education, U.P. Government, writing on *Mektab* education in

²⁹ Fazlul Rahman, *The Ideological Experience of Pakistan*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', November, 1971, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³¹ Ali Dessouki, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³² Fazlul Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

India says: 'This fervour has been generated by a general movement in Islam which seeks, besides other things, to reconstruct Muslim thought, give it a new orientation and a new sense of direction. Unlike Pan-Islamism it is a popular movement and seeks to establish, besides other things, a working equation between the political and religious leadership in Islam. It seeks inspiration from both the past achievements of Islam and the urgencies of modern age. Religious education is a new concept in Muslim educational thought. Since Islam never made any distinction between religion and life, education in Islam was never compartmentalized into secular and religious. Islam claims to be not only a system of beliefs but of life in its entirety and seeks to organize society on that system.'³³ Mr. Kazimi feels that any reorganization in the educational method should be worked out after having given due consideration to the problems of the community. He has even proposed to organize a part of the programme of teaching around a few well-selected projects which to him are (a) Qur'an (b) Handicrafts and gardening and (c) Social Service.

Mr. Kazimi is not sure as to the impact of this new fervour on Indian Muslims, but one thing is clear from his views—that the movement is actually to take the Muslims back to Qur'an and its teaching. He says: 'It would be rash indeed to predict the kind of Islam that will emerge out of this reconstruction. It will, however, be safe to say that there would be a greater emphasis on the Qur'an, and modern methods and techniques of research and scholarship will be brought to bear more and more upon its understanding and interpretation. It can also be hazarded that Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, will receive a greater and wider attention. It may well become once again the *lingua franca* of the Muslim world. Perhaps a new type of religious leadership, more sensitive to the urgencies of contemporary life, may arise. It has already arisen in Egypt and may soon appear in Saudi Arabia and in other parts of the Islamic world... Because of the peculiar position which they hold in India, the Indian Muslims will be called upon to play a significant role in this reconstruction.'³⁴

Mr. Kazimi is an educationist and has held responsible positions in the State Government. His views on religious education of Muslim children represent the thinking of very many educated and religious-minded Muslims of India. It is interesting that in spite of Mr. Kazimi's thought-provoking article, the able editor of 'Islam and the Modern Age' had to append the following note to the article:

'While complimenting the author on his well-thought-out and clearly presented scheme for elementary education of the Muslim

³³ Asadullah Kazimi, *Maktab Education in India*, published in 'Islam and the Modern Age', May, 1971, p. 63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

community in India we feel it necessary to suggest that some essential points have to be clarified to convince the reader that the Muslim children educated under the scheme will be able to adjust themselves with the general structure of national life in India. We should request him to write a short article on the co-relation of Mektab education with the life not only of Muslim community but of the whole Indian community in the area in which Mektab is situated by dilating on the scope of civic education and social service in Mektab scheme.’³⁵

(c) SOCIALISM

Ghulam Ahmed Parwez of Pakistan says: ‘While Islam supports a socialism, which eliminates the suffering of the weak and the poor, Islam cannot support a socialism which denies the existence of God, and affirms human equality on economic factors, because the Qur’ān recognizes the economic superiority of some over others’.³⁶ ‘God has bestowed His gifts of sustenance more freely on some of you than others (16:71).

These are the views Muslims generally hold on the topic.

Of the twelve political parties only three—the National Awami Party of the 86-year-old Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhāshāni, the Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Pakistan People’s Party led by the youthful Zulfikar Ali Bhutto have indicated their greater or lesser commitment to socialism. Muslim scholars are careful to use the term socialism with the word Islamic added to it. So whenever a Muslim leader expresses his views on socialism, he is actually talking about Islamic socialism, which he traces back to the Qur’ān and to the time of the Prophet of Islam. We quote here from the writings of some Muslim leaders of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent:

Parwez is of the view that in economic matters (rizq) various classes are essential, because the affairs of the world are dependent upon them; for the division of labour differential in classes is indispensable. The Qur’ān upholds this: ‘It is we who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and we raise some of them above others in ranks, so that some may command work from others’ (43:32). That equal opportunities were available to all was the responsibility of those who endeavoured, like the Prophet Muhammad and his four Successors, to establish the rule of God on earth. God holds in esteem only the *muttaqin*, those who fear God. Islamic socialism declares that the party dedicated to establishing the laws of Allah would be responsible for the sustenance of all those who would come under their responsibility. This party would eat only when all others have eaten to their satisfaction. To prefer others over oneself is the mission only Islamic socialism can undertake’.³⁷

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁶ Hafeez Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Also, for agrarian reforms and agricultural production, Parwez has proposed an intriguing model of Islamic communes. Enunciating the principle that the owner of the land is the trustee of the community, Parwez has attempted to reconcile the principles of private ownership with that of the collective good.

Parwez is not only concerned with the problem of land, but pays close attention to the role of science in a developing industrialized economy. To him 'poverty is the punishment of God' (16:112), and is deserved by those who ignore science and fail to exploit the bounties of nature. In his view 'real knowledge is knowledge of science and therefore the real Ulama are scientists; religious scholars have only usurped this honourable title for personal aggrandisement.' 'Despite Parwez's provocative language and style, and his courageous attempts to yoke science to the service of the gross national product through the utilization of modern technology, the fact remains that his socialism does not drift very far from the concept of private ownership.'

Maulana Maududi, Leader of the Jam'at-e-Islami, Pakistan, rejects unequivocally socialism and communism and believes that an economic system which aims to nationalize land, trade and industries is repugnant to the spirit of Islam, because such a system intrinsically violates humanity... The Prophet Muhammad, maintains Maududi, never questioned the moral or legal aspect of the early converts' possessions, and he had refused to impose price control on goods commodities even during a famine in Medinah. According to Maududi, Islam emphasizes only two social controls (a) fear of God; and (b) man's sense of responsibilities before God. All man-made controls to regulate the economy, including newly-developed sophisticated revolutionary techniques, are rejected by Islam.³⁹

The late Dr. Khalifah 'Abdul Hakim, a renowned scholar of philosophy, who was head of the Institute of Islamic Culture in Lahore, is of the view that private ownership in general is considered to be harmonious with traditional Muslim thoughts. He says, 'Islam does not prohibit the holding of private property or the accumulation of private capital altogether', but all rights are subject to duties, or, as the Muslim classical jurists say, there is no right in which Allah has not a share (here Allah is interpreted to mean public interests).⁴⁰

By promulgating the laws of inheritance regarding property together with the *Zakah* and the prohibition of usury, Islam, in the eyes of Dr. Hakim, eliminated the possibility of wealth concentrating in progressively fewer hands. Also in this way Islam created an elaborate Plan of social welfare for the worker and

³⁸ Hafeez Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Dr. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Islam and Communism*, Lahore Institute of Islamic Culture, 1951, p. 180, quoted by Hafeez Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

the needy. 'The Prophet of Islam remained a worker all his life', declared Dr. Hakim. 'It was he who said: "The worker is the friend of God" and the most honourable sustenance is not what is got from exploitation and unearned income, but is that which man's own hands have produced.'⁴¹

Trade according to Dr. Hakim does not provide unearned income. If it is honest trade, a Muslim could engage in it even during the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Qur'an says: 'O men of faith, do not devour the goods of one another with injustice, but trade based on mutual agreement and goodwill is allowed. There is no harm in your trading while you are engaged in pilgrimage' (4:28, 2:198). How could a Muslim consider trading as immoral when the Prophet of Islam himself engaged in trade and set an example to all honest traders?⁴²

Professor Abdul Moghni of Patna is of the view that as far as the general concepts of social justice and welfare states are concerned, the votaries of Islam cherish them as their own ideals. The Muslim can well co-operate with any system, different from Islam, for the realization of these ideals. But this ought to be duly noted that the Muslims can do so only from the standpoint of Islam and within the limits prescribed thereby, without surrendering an iota of their ideology and identity.⁴³

(d) MUSLIM PERSONAL LAW

Another important issue, which has involved many Muslim scholars to write for and against, with both secular and religious points of view, is the Muslim Personal Law. As far as Pakistan is concerned there have been some changes in it, but within the framework of the Shari'ah. The debate is still going on in India.

One Dr. Mushirul Haqq, a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, says:

'In the common sphere of life Muslims are willing to let secularism prevail; but their personal life, they think, is their own, and must be governed by the rules of religion which they follow. The fundamentalists consider the personal law to be an essential part of their religion and therefore stand for *status quo*. According to them any change by "outsiders" in Muslim Personal Law would amount to repealing the Shari'ah. Therefore any attempt to reform it or to introduce a uniform Civil Code through an act of Parliament, they assert, is against the ideal of secularism by which they mean religious freedom. The secularists first started their campaign with a demand for "reform" in Muslim Personal Law but now stand for a common civil code without which they think "secularism is meaningless". This group is further divided into moderates and radicals. The moderates are in favour of first educating the Muslim masses and any

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁴² Hafeez Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴³ Abdul Moghni, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

change in Muslim Personal Law brought about if the Muslims themselves ask for it. The radicals want immediate change and do not care if the Muslim community is ready or not.⁴⁴

There is a Muslim writer who, because of his outspoken views on Indian Muslims, is known as an 'angry young secularist'. His name is Hamid Dalwai. His book *Muslim Politics in India* was published in Bombay in 1969. He says: 'We have to support Muslim modernism in India. We have to insist on a common personal law... All marriages must be registered under a common civil code... If either a dargah or a temple obstructs the passage of traffic on a thoroughfare, it ought to be removed. Government should have control over the income of all religious property... The status of all Indian women should be governed by a single common civil code. The purdah should be legally banned. Family planning should be made compulsory for all, for example by compulsory sterilization of one of the partners after birth of the third child. The Muslims who oppose reform on the ground of religion should not be entitled to full citizenship right. Those Muslims who oppose reform on the ground of religion should be governed strictly according to the Shari'ah law in its entirety. For example, if they are caught stealing, their hands should be cut off in public. If they speak a falsehood they should be publicly whipped. A Muslim woman who is found guilty of adultery should be stoned to death.'⁴⁵

The radicals are urging the Government to introduce a uniform civil code. They are convinced that nothing spectacular is going to happen by the way of Muslim opposition if the secularists in Parliament and the Government were to go ahead and enact a uniform civil code. But Dr. Haqq is of the view that 'if the problem is carefully examined, keeping in mind the fact that Muslim community by and large still attaches great—some may say, undue importance to religion, we may come to the conclusion that something more than spectacular may happen'.⁴⁶

There are some Muslims to whom marriage and divorce are purely secular and civil affairs. But they are a class by themselves and really do not need any reform in Muslim Personal Law. It is that 'religiously sensitive' class of un- or ill-educated Muslims which is said to be in need of reform. This class of Muslim, however, always depends for guidance on the 'Ulama'. It is unlikely to move forward unless its excessive religious sensibility is moderated by means of 'secular-modern' education.⁴⁷ And to the 'Ulama' 'religion and secularism are just like two swords and cannot be encased in one sheath'.

⁴⁴ Mushir-ul-Haqq, *Religion, Secularism and Secular State: The Muslim Case*, published in 'Religion and Society', Bangalore, September, 1971, p. 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Dr. Haqq has quoted a retired Muslim University professor as saying:

‘I am not at all afraid of practising orthodox Hindus; they know how one feels if he is deprived of his religious identity. It is the non-practising so-called secularist Hindus who are a real threat to us. Once they are in power they will do their best to wipe out Islam from India. They will impose upon us Hinduism in the name of Indian tradition and civilization. They will discard the extraneous manifestation of Hinduism in which they themselves do not believe, and will ask us to do the same with Shari’ah. Then what is left with us? Nothing: no religion, no history, no identity.’⁴⁸

Perhaps the professor was expressing the fear which most Indian Muslims have in their mind. Professor Moghni also seems to hold such a notion; this is what he says: ‘Frankly only the religious minorities have been sought to be “secularized” in the country. And the faith of the majority is widely and unmistakably reflected in the working of almost all the departments of the state, so much that even a professedly Muslim President in India thought it expedient to bow down before the national tenor of secularism, immediately after the inauguration of his office.’⁴⁹

Another concept which is still not clear to many Muslims is that of ‘mainstream’. ‘Perhaps there is a tacit understanding that the customs and the traditions, the aspirations and way of life, the beliefs and practices, and loves and hates of the majority community—in toto, to be copied in ditto—is the mainstream. To celebrate Holi not Id is mainstream; *namaste* is mainstream; veneration to cow is mainstream; Hindi is mainstream; and of course being the abusive enemy No. 1 towards Pakistan is the mainstream.’⁵⁰ This is a typical attitude which most Muslims have towards ‘mainstream’.

Dr. Haqq sums up his views on Muslims and secularism in these words: ‘If secularism denotes only that a secular state should not be partisan in matters of religion, it is believed to be in accord with Islamic tradition which gives religious freedom to every citizen. This concept of secularism is not alien to the Muslim and therefore he sees no contradiction between his religion and secularism.’⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁹ Abdul Moghni, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Abid Raza Bedar, ‘*The Validity of Indian Musalman*’, in ‘*Secular Democracy*’, New Delhi, 1/8, September, 1968, p. 15 (quoted by Mushir-ul-Haqq, *op. cit.*, p. 46).

⁵¹ Mushir-ul-Haqq, *op. cit.*, p. 47.