

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### I

#### THE QUEST FOR THE MEANING OF ISLAM

It is quite common for learned scholars and laymen alike to raise the question ‘What is Islam?’ and answer it with a sense of assurance and certainty, as if their answer is the only conceivable one. Such persons hardly suspect that this simplicity is superficial. The reason is that Islam is neither a logico-mathematical or scientific concept that could be unambiguously defined, nor a physical object like a chair or table, or a biological organism like, a horse or cow whose properties could be catalogued or described without any room for controversy. The question ‘What is Islam?’ is very close to the questions ‘What is justice?’ and ‘What is beauty?’ and answers to these questions can never be simple, since the nature of justice or beauty is not out there for our perceptual or intuitive inspection, but is chosen by us out of several competing meanings of the words ‘beauty’ and ‘justice’. The individual assimilates the concrete meaning of such abstract words from his milieu, just as he assimilates the language, gestures, or morals of the group. But the individual remains unaware of the fact that his conception of beauty or justice or, for that matter, of Islam is only one particular model among other actual or possible models.

According to the orthodox view, Islam is a set of basic beliefs, values, and practices, which are the defining coordinates of Islam. The core of these beliefs, was formulated by the divinely inspired Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. One, who accepts these beliefs, accepts Islam, while one who denies or doubts their validity repudiates Islam. The basic beliefs or pillars of faith are: (1)

unity of God (*tawhid*), (2) revelation (*wahy*), (3) life after death (*akhirat*), (4) angels (*malaika*); while the five pillars of action are the formula of faith (*kalima*) ‘There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger’, prayers (*salat*), fasting (*soum*), wealth tax (*zakat*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (*Haji*). But this simplicity is deceptive, for the moment we try to determine what exactly is meant by such words as ‘God’, ‘prophecy’, and ‘angels’, etc., we find ourselves immersed in a sea of difficulties.

The difficulty is due to the fact that one’s concrete understanding or interpretation of religious concepts is an integral part of one’s basic worldview, which, to begin with, is a product of cultural conditioning. The individual assimilates the interpretation current in his own milieu and accepts it as true. This was as true for the period of the Prophet ﷺ as for any other. Even granting that the Prophet ﷺ was the recipient of Divine revelation, his basic conceptual framework was as much derived from his Semitic milieu as that of his contemporaries. It seems to me that just as the Prophet ﷺ spoke the Meccan style of Arabic, used Arabic syntax and grammar, wore Arab dress, lived in a pre-industrial desert economy, the Prophet ﷺ also shared the generally accepted historical, geographical, cosmological, and medical ideas or beliefs of his times. Most probably the Prophet ﷺ believed that the sun went round the earth which was flat, that mountains and rivers were instantly created by the Creator, that different species of animals were separately created, that plants had no sex, that epidemics and natural calamities were Divine punishment for human wickedness, that women were mentally and morally inferior to men, etc. It seems the Prophet ﷺ must have interpreted the Quranic verses about God saying ‘Be’, and of the universe coming into being, in the sense of instant creation rather than in the evolutionary sense. Again, if asked to explain the Quranic verse which refers to the motion of the earth, the Prophet ﷺ probably would not have interpreted it to mean that the earth moves round the sun, but in some other sense, which is difficult for us to pinpoint.<sup>1</sup> The implication is that the ‘cognitive concretion’, that is, the concrete understanding and clarification of generalized concepts such as creation, revelation, and God, etc., is always done within the conceptual framework current in the individual’s milieu.

Concrete interpretations need not always be explicitly formulated, but are implicitly present in the general conceptual framework or background of a given period. An implicit interpretation will be formulated or expressed only when there is some stimulus or need to do so. In this process the implicit beliefs become explicit. This is exactly what happened as a result

of the impact of Darwin's theory of organic evolution upon Christian beliefs, and the subsequent heated dispute between Christian theology and science. Before Darwin every Muslim and Christian believed that the original ancestors of the various species of plants and animals were first separately created by God, and subsequently they perpetuated themselves through sexual reproduction. This concrete interpretation may or may not have been formulated by any individual. But this was the actual view of almost all Christians and Muslims before Darwin. Similarly, some idea of the total time span was certainly implicit in the awareness of men living before Darwin. We may say that Christians usually believed the world to be about four or five thousand years old. But the geological assessment, as we know, was quite different.

## RELIGION AS AN EXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE UNIVERSE

Historically every religion has been an organic whole of (a) a thought-cum-value system, (b) a symbolic precept system, and (c) an institutional system. The thought-cum-value system interprets man's cosmic situation and projects intrinsic values and also instrumental rules for realizing them. The precept system comprises the symbolic practices dealing with the transcendental sphere, while the institutional system comprises the approved patterns of behavior in the social sphere.

Thought systems arise because man is never satisfied with bare perceptual experience, but wants to interpret or understand it as part of a wider contextual whole. All human experience stands in need of interpretation in order to become functionally significant for man, since isolated bits of information cannot be used for satisfying human needs. Science is not merely systematic description, but also systematic interpretation of empirical data. The interpretation consists of empirically verifiable and quantitative causal laws connecting different phenomena. Such laws are essential for controlling and manipulating the physical environment. This mode of interpreting physical data is called scientific explanation whose chief feature is its direct or indirect verifiability in terms of human sense-experience. Scientific explanation always has some empirical evidence on the strength of which one explanation is preferred to another.

The above type of explanation, however, does not exhaust the full range of human interpretation, which includes man's ethical, aesthetic, religious, and metaphysical responses, which are not less significant for man's life than scientific explanation. Without the latter man cannot use the environment for satisfying his needs, but without ethical evaluation he loses his sense of direction. Similarly, without the aesthetic response man cannot create or appreciate beauty, and life without beauty lacks a dimension of value. As we know, beauty evokes aesthetic joy, which brings about the spiritual revitalization of man.

The metaphysical or existential response is rooted in man's yearning to decipher the total meaning or significance of the universe as a whole, and to relate himself to it accordingly. Man yearns to grasp the depth-significance of the universe as a complex state of affairs, whose empirical structure is disclosed by science. Biology, for example, tells us about the nature of life and death, but not how to relate oneself, or what attitude to adopt towards life and death. Man could respond to the universe at the empirical, ethical, or other levels without its existential interpretation. But this would amount to ad hoc responses to ad hoc environmental stimuli, and man would not be able to give any inner justification for his different responses. Let us examine this point in some detail.

The universe has some basic features which may be said to be its warp and woof, and which remain the same throughout history, e.g., the features of law and order, harmony and beauty of nature, man's moral sense, as distinct from concrete moral codes, the struggle for survival of the species and of individuals, pain and suffering, hope and joy, birth, growth, decay, and death. Natural science does not concern itself with the significance or meaning of these features of the universe, that is, whether they are just accidental features and could therefore disappear from the cosmic scene, as accidentally as they appeared, or whether they stand rooted in the constitution of the universe and thus have an ontic status or permanent reality. Now the way in which one interprets these features simultaneously influences the personality orientation of the individual, and is, in turn, influenced by the original bent of the personality itself. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between the existential interpretation and the personality orientation. The interpretation becomes important, since it influences man's inner responses to the universe in a most subtle manner, though the interpretation has no *prima facie* bearing upon man's empirical, ethical, or aesthetic response. But the fact is that different existential interpretations

constitute different ways of treating the universe or relating oneself to it, and this inevitably influences the individual's life-style and also raises the question as to which particular style is right, and why so.<sup>2</sup> To give an analogy, the practicing scientist does not concern himself with the question whether or why nature behaves uniformly, but takes it for granted, as if it were self-evident or necessarily true, or because it works. But the denial of causal uniformity does not involve any logical contradiction; nor can it be logically proved. We accept it for two reasons: first, our actual experience suggests as if it were true; and, second, if it were not true, no point would be left in our scientific enquiries, which we deem as valuable and worth pursuing. Likewise, there would be no point left or, to be more accurate, the urge to pursue values would be far less intense, if values were chance and ephemeral products of the blind dance of atoms, without the conservation and growth of values being ontologically guaranteed, despite all seeming obstacles. The concept of God is precisely one particular form of this faith. Belief in God implies that values like truth, goodness, and beauty are neither chance products, nor ultimate and un-derived features of the universe, but have their source in the ultimate and Supreme Being with whom man could establish an '*I-Thou*' dialogue. The existential interpretation is neither a hypothesis, nor a partly justifiable postulate; it is a motivational re-enforcer that integrates the individual's thoughts and feelings into a stable inner way of life or mode of treating the universe, as distinct from ad hoc and ever variable responses or attitudes.

An existential interpretation may be compared with dream interpretation or with a poetic metaphor without being reducible to them. The significance of the dream is not a matter of verifiable knowledge but of insight, intuition, or personality projection upon the canvas of the dream. Likewise, the poetic metaphor is not a matter of verifiable description or theory, but of expression of the feelings, emotions, and imagery evoked by some object, situation, or experience. The object of dream interpretation is self-understanding, that of a poetic metaphor self-expression, while that of an existential interpretation, the person's stable attitudinal adjustment or orientation to the universe as a whole, or to some significant aspect of it, e.g., death, conscience, and sexual love, etc. One may, for instance, interpret death as the final release from the tyranny or tragedy of life, or as the blind axe that destroys the tree of life, or as a change of abode or of bodily apparel, or as the destination of life, or as a welcome union with the Infinite. These interpretations have a poetic flavor, no doubt. Their primary aim, however, is not to give pleasure, but

to give meaning and direction to life. Likewise, the interpretation that life is a hard and rocky battleground differs from the interpretation that life is a blooming garden, not merely in terms of the imagery, but also in terms of its directive function. The first interpretation suggests the ethic of power and of action; the second the ethic of beauty and of contemplation. Similarly, different interpretations of Eros will imply different codes of sexual conduct, even when there may be agreement on all the relevant facts of life. Similarly, to interpret conscience as the voice of God within man or as the Divine spark makes for a different quality of man's inner life as well as his relationship with society than to interpret conscience as the 'internalized censor'. These existential interpretations enable man to conduct his life in a consistently meaningful manner. In one word, their primary function is orientative rather than aesthetic, although when the proffered orientation really grips the individual, his entire being is suffused with a sense of profound joy, perhaps, more intense than aesthetic pleasure itself.

The existential interpretation is not a substitute for, and hence not a competitor with scientific explanation, just as a poetic metaphor is not a substitute for a scientific description or theory. But an existential interpretation, by virtue of its essential directive function, may well promote or impede scientific enquiry, or in some cases, even of a particular scientific hypothesis. For example, the interpretation that man is the vicegerent of God, Who has granted man power and dominion over the rest of creation, including the sun and the moon, the wind and the ocean, tends to promote scientific enquiry, while the interpretation that man is only an accidental self-glorifying worm, born out of a cosmic accident, tends to inhibit the arduous and sustained labor which science demands. Indeed, as Whitehead points out, the theistic interpretation of the universe facilitated the belief in the ultimate rationality and orderliness of nature as the creation of a perfect Creator.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the idealistic interpretation of Reality being ultimately mental or ideal might have facilitated the empirical discovery that conation is present in plants and minerals. It also seems to me that Spinoza's concept of *Substance and Psycho-physical Parallelism* was congenial to the growth of an integrated and inter-disciplinary approach to the physical and the biological sciences. Whether or not this likely interaction factually occurred is a matter of research in the field of history of ideas. The crux of the matter is that while an existential interpretation always has an ethical function, in some cases it could also stimulate scientific theories.

An existential interpretation of the universe is by definition not verifiable. However, it must take into account the full range of the different features of the universe without suppressing any feature, which may not harmonize with the favored interpretation. This task presupposes a base of reliable factual knowledge as the data of the interpretation. Thus, one must be aware of the evolutionary feature of life, though knowledge of factual details is not called for. Likewise, one must be aware of the extent of struggle, suffering, and tragedy in the universe (and not merely of its beauty and harmony) to avoid the existential interpretation from being weighted in favor of some selected features of the universe. The interpretation must thus harmonize with the data and reliable conclusions of science. For example, the interpretation that every event serves a cosmic purpose does not appear to harmonize with geo-biological blind alleys and waste. Or the interpretation that God loves and cherishes His meanest creation does not appear to harmonize with the biological struggle for survival. Likewise, the interpretation that the universe was instantly created out of absolute nothingness does not harmonize with the scientific concept of evolution.

If and when the interpretation does not harmonize with the scientific conceptual scheme, a revision of its concrete sense may remove the prima facie discord. We may say, for instance, that God's love for His creation is not the same as mother's love for her child, or that what appears as evil works as an instrumental good in a larger context. This task involves redefining, analyzing, explaining, making distinctions or comparisons either in the spirit of a free exploration of the given data or in the spirit of a defensive reconciliation between theology and science. In the former case, the role of reason is primary, while in the latter it is secondary. The theologian explores new meanings of traditional concepts in a spirit of defensive reverence to the tradition, while the philosopher freely reflects upon the validity of the religious interpretation. He checks whether the actual data of human experience harmonize with the religious interpretation. This activity, however, does not involve deductive or inductive reasoning but existential elucidation, that is, the illumination of one's hidden depth attitudes, choices, interpretative responses, or images. An existential interpretation which is chosen by the philosopher is thus functionally similar to, but genetically or methodologically different from, religious faith.

An existential interpretation of some kind or other is unavoidable. We can only opt for this or that interpretation, but we cannot opt to do away

with all interpretation as such. We may claim to avoid all contact with metaphysics or religion, which we may view as the hallmarks of a pre-scientific mentality. Yet the fact is that we cannot live as integrated human beings without some kind of world view or total perspective on the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> And this total perspective, be it religious or philosophical, is at bottom always an existential interpretation of the basic features of human experience cosmic law and order, the mysteries of birth, growth and death, the beauty as well as the fury of nature, good and evil, joy and tragedy.<sup>5</sup> Religious faith is the pre-logical acceptance of an interpretation because of its existential grip over the believer.

Religious faith should not be confused with credulity or trust. A person, for example, may come to have 'faith' in any belief in the sense that he maybe subjectively certain of its truth, and feel no need for testing his belief. Thus, a mother may have such strong faith in the integrity of her daughter or the intelligence of her son, that she may not be bothered by the adverse opinion of neighbors and teachers about her children. Since, however, these beliefs are of a type that can be tested and proved, the refusal to test them cannot be accepted as reasonable. Unshakable faith in beliefs, which could be verified, is not justifiable. But faith in God or life after death is a different matter, since no argument or observation could clinch the issue. It is here that genuine faith touches its proper sphere, and can realize its full possibilities of growth and maturity.

As already mentioned, man passes judgments of fact as well as judgments of value. Those states of affairs which are judged to be good in their own right and, hence, worthy of being established, preserved, or fostered, as the case may be, are intrinsic values, while the means or conditions required for realizing them are instrumental values. For example, punctuality, moderation, courage, industry, endurance, cooperativeness, etc., are all necessary for establishing such states of affairs as universal love, justice, the equality and dignity of man, and his integrated growth. Instrumental values are thus dependent variables, while intrinsic values are independent coordinates of any value system.

The distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values is, however, not rigid. Indeed some values may be both intrinsic and instrumental, while some others may be regarded as intrinsic in one context and instrumental in another. Thus, good health is both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. Similarly, the good will, in Kant's sense, namely man's general desire to do



his duty rather than seek pleasure, is both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. Similarly, a clearly instrumental value such as physical cleanliness tends to become an intrinsic good when its cultivation produces aesthetic delight in the individual. Again, an intrinsic value such as social justice or respect for human beings operates as an instrumental value for promoting the self-realization of the members of a group. Nevertheless, the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values becomes crucial in those cases where adherence to an instrumental value may ultimately obstruct intrinsic values as such.

This tension or clash is not merely a theoretical possibility or a hypothetical situation, but repeatedly occurs in man's history. For example, the early Jewish and Islamic injunction to grow and multiply in order to glorify God was obviously necessary (hence, an instrumental value) for the survival of a nascent group. But under entirely changed demographic conditions, the adherence to this rule obstructs universal self-realization or the integrated growth of human beings. Similarly, many age-old and respected rules, regulations, and social customs such as the position of women and children, rules of marriage, etc., may turn out to be misconceived in the light of factual knowledge, which was not available when the rules were framed. Fidelity to the end is thus more important than obedience to the rules that might stultify the end. This, however, does not imply that means are unimportant and may be ignored without peril. Indeed, the usual formulation of the problem of ends versus means is very misleading, since a complete separation of the means from the actual concrete end is not possible. Nevertheless, intrinsic values or ends desirable for their own sake must be accorded primacy over values that are mere means to their realization.

The emphasis upon intrinsic values encourages the individual to strive for the more important goals of life and not to feel satisfied with mechanical compliance with instrumental rules without bothering to assess their relevance in a changing world. A lop-sided concern with intrinsic values occupying a relatively lower rank in the hierarchy of values must also be avoided. Without the concept of rank of value the individual fails to develop a sense of proportion, which is essential for the good life.<sup>6</sup>

All value systems acquire concrete meaning for a group in its concrete situational context. Without situational concretion abstract values such as justice, charity, chastity, and honesty function as variables whose validity cannot be ascertained. However, no situational concretion can be final.

Every age inherits the values of the past but gives them a fresh interpretation. The failure to distinguish between an abstract value system and its situational concretion inclines one to think that any change in the latter destroys the basic value system as such. This makes one cling to the past and stops all ethical growth.

## II

### FIELD TENSIONS AND FIELD INTEGRATION

There is a continuous interaction between the life experience of a religious group and the growth of its religious concepts and values. All cultural systems including the religious are situationally evoked. Many of us are apt to hold that while the beliefs of other religions have been so evoked, our own religion did not grow within an historical situation but was born readymade. But this amounts to the adoption of double standards and is invalid. Even the same individual does not stick to the same meaning at different stages of his life, since experience and reflection continually modify his concrete understanding of general concepts. In the formal sense the nuclear core may remain identical, but, in the concrete functional sense, even the core may change. The concept of God, for example, may evolve over a long period of time, so that the concrete meaning of the word 'God' becomes quite different from its earlier concrete meaning. Yet, the word 'God' may remain intact. Sometimes a new expression, say, 'Being', 'Reality', 'First Cause', may come into use. The choice of words depends upon whether or not one wants to break away from the tradition.

The illusion of changeless fundamental concepts arises through the tendency of words and names to persist in our living vocabulary, in spite of changes in their concrete connotation. Even a radical shift in ideas may take place without a corresponding change in our linguistic habits or vocabulary. This is quite natural though highly misleading, since it tends to conceal the fact of change.

The history of culture shows that all fields of human culture, such as religion, art, philosophy, science, etc., interact and influence each other, so that the total culture of a group is an organic whole. Change in one-sphere spills over into all others. There is regional resistance to begin with. But in

the course of time significant changes in any one sphere of human culture penetrate the total cultural *gestalt*. To give some illustrations, the invention of photography had its repercussions for painting, the scientific formulation of the theory of evolution profoundly altered philosophy and Christian theology, the industrial revolution led to social, moral, and economic revolutions, and the advent of contraception is gradually influencing the norms of sexual morality. Religion, as a segment of the cultural *gestalt*, cannot escape transformation in this evolving universe.

Not only the fields of art, literature, and science, but also those of economics, politics, religion, and morality all interact. Religion may claim the right to legislate for all the fields, as if it were the sovereign. Even so, the religious authority is influenced by the inevitable interaction between the different fields of human life. There is a dialectical interaction between a religion or an ideology and the socio-economic field rather than a one-sided dependence of ideology upon the economic structure. In practice this produces field tensions or conflicts between the pull of two or more fields of human experience. Thus the thought-cum-value system of a particular religion may pull us towards a male dominated society, while its techno-centric economy may pull us towards a more or less complete equality between the sexes. Similarly, tensions may develop between the fields of art and science, or art, religion, and morality, etc.

Field tensions may also arise due to conflict between the value system of the religion and the authentic values of the individual, for example, if his religion prescribes human sacrifice, while his conscience rebels against the idea, despite all his sincere efforts to accept it. Likewise, if the Quran were to prescribe stoning as a punishment for adultery (as a matter of fact, this is not the case), and the Muslim's conscience were to revolt against the idea, a field tension would arise and raise the problem of authenticity.<sup>7</sup> The believer could either suppress this tension, or rationalize the command, or, without concealing his disagreement surrender his judgment to the wisdom of the Quran. But if he is not prepared to do so, and wishes to live as an authentic integrated person, he must either attempt the task of field integration or repudiate his religious tradition altogether. In the West, Whitehead and Tillich have followed the first course, while Freud and Russell the latter.<sup>8</sup> It seems the latter course is fraught with the danger of throwing away the baby with the bath. Let us consider in greater detail the various types of response to field tension. They may be called repression/suppression, isolation, rationalization, and, finally, integration.

Field repression/suppression implies that some field or dimension of experience is repressed/suppressed by the individual in order to escape the pain of conflict. One individual may repress the dimension of reason, while another that of spirituality. But neither the intellectual yearning for clear concepts and a unified world view, nor the spiritual yearning to transcend one's private interests and reach out for some higher impersonal values can be destroyed, no matter how much these yearnings may be repressed or suppressed. Even as the sex instinct finds other outlets in the case of repression/suppression, so do the above needs. It appears that class hatred, bigotry, racial prejudice, and chauvinism, etc., are all partly the products of suppression of either the dimension of spirituality or reason or both. Field repression therefore does not produce a lasting inner peace.

Field isolation means that the different fields of human culture are deliberately kept isolated from each other. This approach again proves highly unsatisfactory, since it denies the organic unity of culture. Field isolation cannot withstand the natural impact of the different fields of human culture. The attempt at field isolation leads to a painful sense of fragmentation and the fear of facing life as a whole. Field isolation breeds an inner sense of uneasiness, though it may outwardly help to keep one's faith.

Rationalization is the attempt to overcome tensions by explaining them away with the help of far-fetched alterations in the meaning of words, false generalizations, selective sampling of data, seductive but weak analogies, confusion of meanings, or types of discourse, and, last but not the least, a defensive or justificatory use of reason as distinct from the analytical and exploratory. Field rationalization is a more or less conscious attempt to justify a traditional thought system as a partisan rather than as an autonomous person.

Field integration means a systematic dialogue between the different fields of human experience with a view to overcoming actual or possible tensions between them. The process of integration involves the pruning or revising of definitions or uses of the basic words in question such as God, creation, and justice, etc. A striking need for field integration arose due to the impact of the theory of evolution upon the concrete interpretation of the Bible and the Quran. Intelligent believers felt uneasy at the conflict between the religious concept of Divine creation and the scientific concept of evolution. The concept of 'evolutionary creation', as distinguished from 'instantaneous creation out of nothing' removes the conflict partly, but not

completely, between the fields of religion and science. The notion of gradual emergence still conflicts with Divine omnipotence, and the existence of pain and evil conflicts with either God's omnipotence or goodness. These difficulties prompt one to make still further alterations in the concept of God and Divine creation or goodness, etc. The need of field integration cannot be dismissed as the intellectual luxury of philosophical minds. It is rooted in a concern for one's intellectual integrity and disinterested search for truth instead of fragmented loyalties. In the final analysis, field integration is more a search for authenticity than for intellectual curiosity.

The search for authenticity *prima facie* clashes with an existential surrender to God or Scripture, and appears to be rooted in pride, or a reliance on one's own judgment, and hence the negation of genuine religion, which is supposed to be rooted in surrender to God. But many highly intelligent and deeply religious minds hold self-authentication as an essentially religious surrender to the God within man rather than as a species of pride. This is the existential approach to religion and it enables the individual to retain his spiritual autonomy without the danger of the autarchy of his surface self or the Freudian '*id*'.<sup>9</sup> This approach, however, does contradict the traditional conception of religion, as surrender to an external authority.

The existentialist approach to religion, as I understand it, affirms a three-fold autonomy of science, of individual conscience and of society. This means affirming the autonomy of science in the sphere of empirical truth; the autonomy of individual conscience in the sphere of values; and finally the autonomy of the human community in the sphere of institutional matters. According to my approach, religion belongs primarily to the second category and only marginally to the third. Religion thus becomes an authentic concern with the meaning of the universe rather than an institutional way of life. The meaning is not a propositional truth claim, but an existential interpretation, which quenches the restless longing of man for a stable total perspective or worldview. Spiritual satisfaction can, however, occur only when the perspective is existential and authentic, that is, it wells up from the depths of the person.

A religious response degenerates into a pseudo-religious one, if it fails to grip the individual. A religion should rise from the heart rather than the head, even as maternal love is a demand of her innermost being without the aid of Kant's categorical imperative, or Bentham's (d. 1832) hedonistic calculus. Neither the laws of logic, nor the rules of verification, nor the lure

of utility, whether temporal or eschatological, but only the soft whisper of the spirit wields the final authority in the sphere of religion.<sup>10</sup> It may happen that while the basic world view of a particular religion appeals to the believer, he is unable to agree with a particular point or norm of the tradition. Should he then reject the religious tradition, which nurtured him and in which his spiritual roots are embedded? It seems, in such a case self-authentication rather than rejection of the tradition is the proper response. This response presupposes religion in its mature form, that is, religion as surrender to an internal authority rather than to an external.

The inner authority is man's creative conscience or God within man. Submission to an external authority obviously negates freedom, while submission to an internal authority is quite compatible with freedom. Spiritual autonomy is the inner spontaneous demand of man, and submission to an external authority goes against the grain of man, so to speak, even though he may be quite happy and productive, if there be no conflict between the prescriptions of the authority and his own inner demands.

There is another significance of the distinction between an external and an internal authority. If man could submit to an external God without any reservation and with complete authenticity, he would certainly have the inner satisfaction that he would never err to the extent that he obeyed the commands of the infallible God. But the difficulty is that man never encounters God in a direct manner in the same way as he encounters his conscience, or a book, or a person. Submission to God means, in the functional sense at least, submission to God through some mediator or channel. Man's submission to God is thus always indirect and mediated rather than direct and immediate. For example, to a Christian, submission to God amounts to submission to Jesus, the Christ; and to a Muslim, submission to God amounts to submission to the Quran as the revealed Will of God, or, in most cases, to the Quran plus *hadis*. To certain persons, such an indirect submission may not raise any difficulty, and their commitment or faith may be perfect. Indeed, they may be blissfully unaware of the distinction between an immediate submission and a mediated submission to God, just as most non-philosophers are blissfully unaware of the various problems connected with the perception of physical objects, or the mechanism of the perceptual process. They perceive things and are not bothered by the problems or theories of perception. Similarly, many deeply pious believers just believe without being bothered by the intellectual difficulties involved in those beliefs. They honestly feel and believe that the Quran is the Word

of God, or Jesus the Son of God, and readily submit themselves before them, as if they had submitted before an unmediated God. But once the reflective impulse or process is set in motion, no matter how or why, man loses the original innocence of faith or commitment. His joy in surrender is corroded by doubts and felt intellectual difficulties. Once the reflective process starts, it cannot arbitrarily be stopped at the portals of sacrosanct beliefs. The reflective process is like an all-consuming fire, which spares nothing. The goal of this process is complete field integration. Should the movement of thought be checked or suspended, man becomes inwardly restless and fragmented. The reflective attitude conflicts with submission to external but not to an internal authority. This makes the distinction between the two crucial.

The difficulties of submission to an external authority have been pointed out. But submission to an internal authority is not free from difficulties of its own. The principal difficulty lies in the fact that man can easily deceive himself into believing that he is submitting himself to the internal authority of his conscience, when, in fact, he may be guilty of rationalization or in-authenticity. Thus, man's spiritual autonomy or freedom is ever perilously near the dark leap into license. 'The fear of freedom', as Erich Fromm calls it, is thus quite natural and understandable.<sup>11</sup> Rationalists are often inclined to dismiss this fear as born of immaturity or distrust in the essential goodness of human nature. But their confidence in human capacities is as one-sided and dangerous as is the fear of freedom, or the evasion of self-responsibility and the resultant surrender to an external authority, whether religious or secular. Consequently, the inwardly free man needs to be extremely cautious that his freedom does not degenerate into license under one garb or the other.<sup>12</sup>

## FIELD INTEGRATION, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Man cannot function in an interpretative vacuum, in the belief that pure morality and science would jointly suffice. To ignore this truth was the crucial mistake committed by many Western science-oriented thinkers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The concept of the supposed self-sufficiency of pure morality without some metaphysical foundation or other was generated by the erosion of the traditional Christian theistic interpretation. The case of morality without metaphysics or religion appeared to grow

all the more strong with the gradual realization that no metaphysical or religious belief could be proved to be true either deductively or inductively. The Western intellectual's despair pushed him into a positivistic humanism or pure 'ethicism', according to which morality is sufficient for man, and that religion is either a pre-scientific illusion or, at best, a consolation for William James's tender folk.<sup>13</sup> This implied that the progress of science and technology and the eventual eradication of social evils such as poverty and exploitation would ultimately deprive religion of its function as well as its present appeal in the presence of widespread insecurity and injustice. But this belief in the all-sufficiency of science and morality is only a product of man's incurable romanticism.

The history of Western Europe after the First World War shows the inadequacy or falsity of the belief in pure scientific morality without any interpretative support or base. The mono-dimensional fixation upon the peculiar methodology of the natural sciences, or, in other words, viewing scientific explanations as the only model of valid interpretation, generated a new variety of skepticism after the First World War. This variety embraces not merely particular religious beliefs, but all values as such. This total and all-embracing skepticism or nihilism saps the springs of all human endeavors, generating in man a total despair and a sense of futility or absurdity of life. The logical terminus of this attitude is the quest of death, which is judged as the only means of release from the tyranny of being aware of absurdity, but helpless to overcome it. In some cases this basic despair seeks to disguise itself in a total hedonism. The quest of pleasure and the quest of destruction are desperate attempts to overcome the growing and creeping crisis of the spirit through killing or numbing the body. The phenomena of drug addiction, alcoholism, 'sexualism', and even such apparently disconnected 'isms' such as extreme nationalism, religionism, scientism, and 'artism', etc., are symptoms of an inner spiritual imbalance or 'ontological deficiency'. They all betray an inauthentic human existence clinging to either escape mechanisms or fragmented loyalties instead of loyalty to an integrated value system. This inauthentic existence turns man into an insecure and anxious being. This breeds suspicion, aggression, and intolerance, etc., and also an inner resistance to the promptings of man's creative conscience. This condition may aptly be termed as a hardening of man's spiritual arteries. Neither the reiteration of traditional creeds nor their intellectual defense cures this malady. Only a dispassionate self-confrontation and more refined methods of philosophical analysis can liberate Western man from his unfortunate



nihilism.

The Eastern man, whether Muslim or Hindu, has not yet fallen a victim to this nihilism. He is, however, inwardly uneasy and in need of firm support. Outwardly he may be serene and self-assured, but various field tensions do inwardly disturb him in proportion to his awareness of the contemporary conceptual framework. He is not fully aware of the need of field integration, but inner conceptual fermentation is unmistakably present.

The Muslim having a traditional or conservative approach to Islam would not concede this point. He would assert that the different sciences, both natural and social, do not have any bearing upon or relevance to the proper understanding of Islam. This contention is true in the sense that the detailed theories and hypotheses of science are not relevant to the truth or falsity of fundamental religious beliefs and moral values, which remain unaffected and untouched by the modifications in our scientific theories or advances in factual knowledge. But the scientific perspective or world view comprising such basic concepts as universal causation, uniformity of nature, evolution, relativity, etc., do profoundly affect our concrete understanding of such essentially religious concepts as creation, revelation, miracles, etc. It is true that religious faith is essentially a matter of an existential commitment rather than of a logical or scientific proof; it is also true that the scientific worldview cannot be established through deductive or inductive reasoning alone, but also needs an extra-rational ontological commitment. Nevertheless, the concrete interpretation of every worldview is inevitably molded by the thought system of the person. Since all social and natural sciences are nothing but critically organized thought systems, they are directly relevant to such concrete interpretations. To the extent that an individual refuses to enter into a dialogue with science, he is like a person who refuses to observe or perform a certain experiment, lest this may go against his established beliefs or attitudes.

The reason for this field isolation is perhaps due to a totally false conception about a complete discontinuity between the field of religion and of science. This belief is fairly widespread. It is, however, only due to an oversimplified conception of both science and religion. Science is viewed as purely factual, while religion as purely valuational or spiritual. It is then held that there is no connection whatsoever between facts and values, or between science and religion. Consequently, it is thought, there is no need for a mutual dialogue between these two fields of human experience.

This approach completely ignores the complexity of both religion and

science. It is highly misleading to say that religion has nothing to do with facts, which come under the domain of science, or that science has nothing to do with values, which come under the domain of religion. On the one hand, every religion has its distinctive thought system or worldview, apart from a distinctive value system. Every religion thus has a connection with the realm of facts. On the other hand, science generates its own distinctive values, even though it is admittedly not concerned with values, but with the explanation of facts. In other words, science has a 'valuational temper' of its own. For example, the scientific methods of observation and experiment and formulation of verifiable hypotheses lead to a distaste for speculative metaphysics or a hair-splitting theology, both of which fail to possess any operational definitions or concepts. Similarly, a techno-centric society generates the new value of equality of the sexes, or the value of speed, or the ethics of planning, etc. Moreover, science is not only relevant, but also crucial for realizing basic values, and it also has a positive bearing on the concrete interpretation of these basic intrinsic values. The inevitable conclusion, therefore, is that the slogan of a neat demarcation between the domains of science and religion breaks down.

Scientific developments, however, do not prove or disprove religious beliefs such as the existence of God, or life after death. In fact, if religious beliefs could be proved or disproved on the basis of evidence, religious faith would forfeit its distinctive flavor and become just like other beliefs. Religious faith is 'existentially certain', not 'inductively certain' like the factual truths of science, or 'deductively certain' like the truths of mathematics or logic. The developments of science do not, and cannot, prove or disprove our religious beliefs, qua existential interpretations of man-in-the-universe, as distinct from pseudo-scientific or pre-scientific truth claims, involving the subject matter of science itself. But the concrete interpretation of religious beliefs cannot help being influenced by the impact of scientific developments. Science and religion thus interact, and yet they do not interact, in the sense in which interaction takes place between two elements within the same field. The interaction between religion and science is complex, like the relationship between facts and values. Though distinct, facts and values cannot be totally segregated. Concrete value judgments can neither be justified nor realized without adequate factual information supplied by science.

The most significant feature of man's present situation is science or technology. Perhaps the two most vital consequences of this are man's experience of power over nature and progressive inter-cultural communication. The

exercise of power over nature tends to corrode those conceptions of religion that discourage man's self-reliance and encourage the ethics of surrender to an all-powerful Divine will.

The ever-growing communication between different cultures progressively transforms more or less stagnant mono-cultural societies into more or less dynamic multi-cultural ones. This renders the traditional commitment to the 'faith of one's forefathers' more difficult. The diversity of thought-cum-value systems generates a healthy doubt as inevitably as prosperity generates parking difficulties in the big cities. The individual is conceptually uprooted from his traditional conceptual soil and pushed into a multi-cultural universe where he has to choose his own conceptual latitude and longitude. Tensions arise between his religious beliefs or thought system and the thought systems of other fields of culture. Tensions may also arise between his expected course of events and the actual course of events or between his aspirations and their fulfillment. This experience of tension, frustration, surprise, and doubt is as essential for man's conceptual growth as is the experience of wonder, uniformity of sequence, success in prediction, and manipulative control over his environment. Tension and frustration induce him to reexamine his beliefs and to remove their inadequacies or mutual contradictions. The leisure generated in affluent societies also tends to promote a growing concern with fundamental human problems, even though this concern is likely to be preceded by a period of an immature hedonism. Affluent societies would eventually be drawn towards a reflective multi-cultural interpretation of religious experience, or a faith that inquires rather than shuns inquiry.

The concrete re-interpretation of basic Islamic concepts thus becomes inevitable due to the growth in our factual knowledge and improved conceptual tools. This reinterpretation involves an ever-growing convergence or integration of the basic concepts of all the different natural, social, and humanistic sciences. This integration does not imply the creation of a super-science or super-philosophy sitting in judgment on the conclusions of the different sciences. All it means is that the basic well-established concepts of the various fields of human knowledge cannot be viewed as irrelevant for the concrete interpretation of the faith. For example, the geological concept of time, that is, an enormous time span with many distinct long periods; or concepts of biology, such as the gradual emergence of life, ceaseless variations, mutations, evolutionary blind alleys; or the conceptions of sociology, such as the impact of patterns of production and distribution on moral

and religious ideas; or the concepts of psychoanalysis, such as man's fear of freedom, defense mechanisms; or the concepts of semantics, such as the different functions of language—all these basic concepts are crucially relevant for a more mature understanding of one's religious tradition.

Let us now examine in some detail how some of the above concepts of the natural and social sciences have demanded the reconstruction of basic religious concepts in the case of Christianity.

## DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION

The conflict between Newtonian physics and Christian theism was very mild indeed in relation to the conflict between Darwin's theory of organic evolution and theism. Newton's theory had only turned the Creator into a super-mathematician but had not abolished the concept as such. Darwin's theory, on the other hand, abolished the Divine office, since the concept of evolution was supposed to explain and account for all the marvels and complexities of living beings and the universe as a whole.

The entire Christian world was shocked and baffled by this challenge. Initially the Church totally rejected Darwin's theory of organic evolution. But the evidence marshaled by Darwin was too systematic to be ignored. Soon scientists all over the world accepted Darwin's approach. Later on the majority of the Protestant and even Catholic intellectuals assimilated the concept of evolution into their religious framework in varying degrees. This assimilation was done through the belief that evolution was the mode of Divine creation.

This assimilation or integration of biological evolution into the Christian framework satisfied the religiously oriented scientist on the one hand, and the scientifically oriented theologian on the other. But very soon fresh intellectual difficulties were generated. For example, why should an omnipotent God choose such a wasteful and tortuously long road of creation through evolution? The facts of dysteleology and of pain and evil also continued to oppress the religious consciousness. Consequently, the highly sensitive and well-informed intellects of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Bergson, William James, Paulsen, and Lloyd Morgan, etc., rejected the pre-Darwinian religious conception of creation on the one hand, and Darwin's concept of mechanical natural selection on the other. These thinkers formulated their

own conceptions of evolution or evolutionary creation, which are basically similar in spite of differences in terminology.<sup>14</sup>

The Islamic conceptual framework or thought system is, however, still pre-Darwinian. Consequently, a tension exists between science and religion in the deeper recesses of the educated Muslim mind. Integration of scientific concepts with religious concepts is imperative in this crucial matter. To the extent that the official Islamic thought system rejects evolution and its philosophical bearing on traditional theism, it will lack real conviction for the contemporary mind. Only when the followers of the different religions can integrate their respective religious thought systems with well-established contemporary concepts will they become integrated believers who are not pulled in different directions by science and religion.

## KARL MARX'S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

The next tension between religion and science was generated by the work of Karl Marx, who may aptly be regarded as the 'Darwin' of Sociology. Marx forcefully and strikingly projected the concepts of social evolution and social causation. What natural selection was in the scheme of Darwinism, technological changes were in the scheme of Marx. Just as the basic concepts of organic evolution and ceaseless variations have been firmly accepted by biologists, the concepts of social evolution and social causation have been firmly established in the conceptual scheme of contemporary man.

A sociological cause is an organic blend of economic, political, cultural, and ideological forces acting upon the human individual or group. Social phenomena are determined by such laws and can be altered or manipulated with their help. Poverty, social inequality, and hereditary class domination, etc. are therefore, in principle, alterable. The prospect of the conquest of poverty was enough to generate a tension between this approach and the traditional view; that the division of people into the rich and the poor is God's own act, just like His creation of mountains, rivers, or deserts, and that man could only shower charity on the poor rather than seek to abolish poverty as such. The actual success of modern Western man in abolishing poverty in the developed nations has prompted creative Western thinkers to redefine the concept of God. This reconstruction has generated a religious ethic of planned action and life-affirmation, as distinguished from the medieval religious ethic of fatalism and other-worldliness.

The traditional Islamic approach, however, continues to be pre-sociological. According to it, social or political changes such as the rise and fall of nations or groups, the fluctuations in wealth, power, or rank, the states of prosperity and adversity, etc., are either due to Divine providence, or at most due to individual human merit. The traditional Muslim is apt to suppose that poverty as well as affluence is the way of God to test the faith and character of human beings, or that the number of children born to a couple is decided by the Will of God, or that poverty can never be abolished. Consequently, the sociological approach that poverty or other social evils are as much eliminable as the physical diseases such as plague, and smallpox, etc. appears to him as being a tall and arrogant claim. He believes that such irreverent interference with a Divinely established social order is inspired by the atheistic materialism of Karl Marx and his tribe.

A corollary of this a sociological orientation is a mistaken reading of history by the average Muslim. History shows many instances of good men or causes losing to bad men or causes supported by brute force. Even where good causes win, careful sociological analysis reveals that mere goodness is not the total cause of victory, but technological superiority always plays a crucial role in such victories. This approach appears to conflict with the traditional Islamic interpretation of history according to which the affairs of the universe including victory or defeat in wars are regulated by Divine providence.

Logically speaking, there should be no difficulty in reconciling the operation of Divine providence with the advantages of technology or the operation of social laws on the analogy of natural laws. But the concept of social law is usually absent from the conceptual framework of the average Muslim. Consequently, he attributes the success or failure of nations in peace and war to purely ethical or moral factors, apart from the Will of God. Thus, sexual laxity, drinking, and gambling, etc., to the neglect of religious obligations and duties, is adjudged the main cause of the defeat and decline of nations. This naive pre-sociological approach is equated with a genuinely religious approach, and contrasted with the atheistic or materialistic interpretation of human history. The average educated Muslim thus misses the complexity of social causation, and mistakes the part for the whole. He misses the relevance of technology and ultimately of the crucial role of the scientific attitude in the rise and fall of nations and the march of history.

The traditionalists as well as many liberal Muslims of the Amir Ali

School are also not sufficiently aware of the depth and range of modifications necessary in the traditional understanding of the basic values of Islam, such as brotherhood, equality, and tolerance, etc., for making them relevant to contemporary Muslims who are exposed to the thought of Mill, Marx, and Freud. Unless this is done, many new socio-political and economic patterns are liable to be rejected straight away by Islamic societies, even though those patterns might promote the basic intrinsic values of Islam itself. It is indeed a pity that reputed Muslim writers such as Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, go on repeating that it is not Islam but the Muslims that need reformation. This is indeed true in the sense that moral and social evils such as dishonesty, selfishness, ignorance, etc., are traits of Muslims rather than of Islam or the Quran. But such a formulation is highly misleading as it obscures the need for the emergence of new dimensions in the Islamic thought-cum-value system.

## RESEARCHES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Another tension is generated by the concepts of modern psychology and psychoanalysis. Religions affirm that God grants the petitionary prayers of His supplicating creatures. Modern psychology, on the other hand, has empirically proved the crucial role of suggestion and other positive mental attitudes in promoting or maintaining human health, happiness, and success. This approach clashes with the view that health, happiness, and success are the fruits of Divine favors. The psychological approach, on the other hand, implies that human success and happiness are governed by socio-psychological factors.

Freud's psychoanalysis poses a still more powerful challenge to religion, as he provides us with a complete scheme of psychological dynamics governing all mental phenomena without exception. Freud's concept of unconscious motivation is the counterpart of social causation. His concept of sexual or libidinal determinism is the counterpart of the economic determinism of Marx. Again, Freud's concept of repression of the libido is the counterpart of Marx's concept of exploitation of labor. The concepts of '*id*', as a surging sea of irrational drives and repressed impulses, and of the death instinct have debunked man much more seriously than Darwin's theory of man's animal ancestry, or of Copernicus's heliocentric theory. While Darwin's theory had

debunked man, it had not destroyed man's confidence in his future. If he had evolved from anthropoid ape to man, he could evolve still further from man to superman. Indeed, this was the actual line of thinking adopted by most of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Western thinkers. Freud's debunking of man, on the other hand, left him without hope and faith.

Freud's conception of religion as an illusion is rather dogmatic and one-sided. But the awareness of the numerous elements of value in Freud's depth-approach is essential for acquiring insight into the complexities of human nature. A critical concept of man is the prerequisite of a mature and adequate conception of God. The concepts of suggestion or autosuggestion, father image, fixation, resistance, compensation, wish fulfillment, guilt or inferiority complexes, defense mechanism, neurosis, neurotic fear or anxiety, etc., are highly significant for understanding the dynamics of human behavior and for a genuine and authentic religious commitment, as distinguished from inauthentic faith. But almost no notice has been given to the above concepts by Muslim religious thinkers, apart from literary critics and poets.

## THE PRESENCE OF SUFFERING IN THE WORLD

Another major tension is generated by the extent of suffering in the world. The tension arises due to the conflict between the course of events expected in a world created by an omnipotent and benevolent God and the actual course of events. For example, when a virtuous woman is raped, or a child murdered in front of his parents, or when a life full of promise is cut short by untimely death, while insane or physically crippled patients live on to a ripe old age, or the indiscriminate suffering caused by natural calamities, accidents or infectious diseases; all these facts evoke serious doubts about God's goodness or power. It is the solemn duty of all authentic theists to resolve this tension without intellectual dishonesty.

## TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH

In the end, here is an example of a hypothetical tension generated by an ever-advancing technology. Let us suppose man eventually acquires control over the sex of the unborn child. Then there would be a tension between the belief that the determination of sex is an act of God, Who produces the male or the female according to His own sweet will and man's actual



control over the sex of the unborn. It should be obvious that if the concept of God has to be retained, it will have to be reconstructed in order to resolve this hypothetical tension and harmonize it with man's actual experience. We could then maintain that natural laws gradually unfold themselves to the inquiring human mind, and that the postulation of natural laws does not contradict the concept of God, viewed as the Primal Source of the law and order in the universe, rather than as an invisible Old Man with a magic wand in His hands.

Tensions arising out of the different fields of human culture must first be acknowledged before they can be removed. The denial of religious difficulties, on the other hand, creates mischief precisely because this merely serves to conceal rather than heal the tensions. The function of field integration is, therefore, strikingly similar to the function of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis leads to the integration of the total human personality, while field integration to that of different languages and concepts of the different streams of human culture.

### III

#### FIELD INTEGRATION IN EARLY AND MIDDLE ISLAM

Every religion in its early phase is free from interpretative complexities of dogma and doctrine and thus also free from field tensions. This state may well be called the stage of ideological innocence or non-differentiated integration. But with the passage of time field tensions arise and demand resolution.

The germs of inquiry and of field integration in Islam were present in the intellectual approach of the fourth *Khalifa*, Ali (d. 661), and later on of Hasan al-Basri (d. 728) and Jafar Sadiq (d. 765). But the need for field integration came to the fore in a big way with the rise of Mutazilite dialectics (*kalam*) in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This movement was followed by the more orthodox Asharite School, which continued to dominate the Islamic world right up to the last century. These movements were considerably influenced by Christian theology and Greek thought and, in all probability; some *Sufi* doctrines and practices of a later period were influenced by Vedantic Monism

and Yoga. Let us briefly review these efforts at Islamic self-understanding in the early and middle period.

## THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

The first source of field tension was the conflict between the belief in free will (which seemed to be a pre-supposition of morality) and the belief that nothing happens without the will of God, and the inequity of Divine punishment if human beings were not free agents. This field tension led to the emergence of the theories of pre-destinarianism and freedom of the will, with their protagonists attempting to justify their views with the help of Quranic verses of their choice.<sup>15</sup> In general the Mutazilites stood for free will, while the Asharites for a qualified pre-destinarianism (*kasb*). This is not the place to go into the details of this controversy. Suffice it to say that it helped in the clarification of the concept of God and His attributes of justice, omnipotence, and omniscience, etc., as well as the nature of man and his capacities and limitations. In other words, the controversy led to field integration between philosophy, psychology, theology, and ethics.

The next source of field tension was the Aristotelian distinction between substance and attributes. God was one, but His attributes were many, like mercy, knowledge, love, power, creation, etc. It was felt that plurality of attributes eroded the unity of the Divine Being. Let us see why this difficulty arose. When, for instance, we say that God is forgiving, we do not mean that He became forgiving at a particular time when He forgave a sinner, but that He is always forgiving or that the attribute of forgiveness is part of His eternal nature or Being. But then, this makes the attribute of forgiveness coeval and co-eternal with God and thus erodes the concept of God's unity. The Mutazilites, therefore, tended to conceive God as pure Being without attributes, which were viewed as anthropomorphic projections upon God's Being, which was essentially unknowable. But this position was difficult to reconcile with the Quranic references to God's attributes and with the orthodox conception of God.

The Asharite theologians held that God's essence is not a bare unity devoid of all qualities. Rather, Divine qualities are the modes of the one Divine Being or Essence, though we are unable to grasp the nature of the Divine attributes, except in metaphorical language, which is only partly ap-

plicable to God. It seems to me that the Mutazilite theologians overlaid the distinction between substance and attributes, and rushed to the conclusion that attributes erode Divine unity, and therefore cannot really inhere in God as Substance. The Asharite doctrines of Divine attributes based on the union of metaphor and transcendence (*tashbih wa tanzih*) was far more balanced. In any case, this particular field tension or controversy did a lot to clarify the concept of God.

The most explosive field tension was the controversy about the nature of the Quran. The Mutazilites held that belief in the eternity of the Quran eroded the Islamic doctrine of the unity of God, since; in this case, the Word of God (which is not literally identical with God Himself) becomes co-eternal in time. Moreover, being in the Arabic language, the Quran follows the man-made grammar and syntax of that language, and thus could not possibly be eternal or uncreated. This was not acceptable to many orthodox Muslims for whom the Quran was the pure locus of Divinity without any human elements. The Quranic reference to the preserved tablet (*lawh-e-mahfuz*) also seemed to imply the eternity of the Quran.<sup>16</sup> This position was taken up by the Asharites. They held that the Quran was eternal in the sense that God foreknew the contents of what He would subsequently reveal in time to His chosen Prophet ﷺ. It is true that before the creation of the world there was no language including Arabic. But God's foreknowledge included the Quran in the Arabic language with all its man-made vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, apart from Divine ideas, which, however, our finite minds cannot grasp. However, even if we accept the above Asharite approach, the Quran, in its concrete Arabic form at least, would seem to comprise some human or temporal elements, thereby ceasing to be the pure locus of Divinity. Thus the same difficulty would arise once again. The only way out would be to claim that Arabic has a supernatural origin and a higher status than the other languages of the human family. Perhaps this line of thinking (which was implicitly present) was acceptable to the Asharites, but not to the Mutazilites, who were relatively less susceptible to Arab ethnocentricity and more speculative in their theology.

The above and similar other field tensions were sought to be removed by Mutazilite theologians like Abul Hozail (d. 841), Nazzam (d. 845), Jahiz (d. 868) and Asharite theologians such as Ashari (d. 935), and by philosophers such as Kindi (d. cir. 870), Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) who dealt with a wider range of philosophical problems. In the course of time neo-Platonic theories of emanation and Aristotle's theory of

the immanence of form in matter led to the radical redefinition of concepts such as God, creation, revelation, personal immortality, and the eternity of matter, etc. Many theories such as perpetual Divine Creation, the negation of causality in the sense of necessary connection, the growth of lower forms of being into higher, the distinction between metaphorical and literal uses of language, and the essential unity of all religions, etc., were raised and discussed with remarkable thoroughness and perspicacity.

Muslim philosophers had been profoundly influenced by Neo-Platonic thought and held Aristotle and Plato in the highest veneration. Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, among others, maintained that there was no essential difference between the basic truths of Greek philosophy and the principles of Islam, such as unity of God, revelation, and life after death, etc., apart from the difference in the language of philosophy and of religion. The language of philosophy was abstract and logico-metaphysical, while the language of religion was concrete, anthropomorphic, or metaphorical. But their essential import or significance was the same. Thus, according to them, the Lord of the worlds, as mentioned in the Quran, is the same as Plato's Idea of good or Aristotle's Prime Mover. Similarly, the creation of the universe by the God of Islam is the same as the emanation of different levels of being from the Primal Source, which is pure Spirit. Again the Divine revelation of the Quran to the Prophet ﷺ through the agency of Gabriel (*Jibrael*) is the same as the illumination of the finite mind by the Active Intelligence. Thus the revelatory process is of the nature of melting or fusion of the finite mind into the Infinite or of illumination rather than of the transmission of sounds or signals from an external communicator. It seems this conception of revelation is free from the difficulties in anthropomorphic ideas about God's attributes or acts. But the trouble with Muslim philosophers was that, like all speculative thinkers of the past, they did not bother about agreed criteria of validity of their truth claims.

## SUFISM

The other movement, which led to field integration, is *Sufism*, which partly overlaps, but primarily succeeds, the movements of Dialectics and Greek Rationalism. *Sufism* lays primary emphasis upon direct spiritual illumination rather than on reason for removing field tensions and achieving inner peace and serenity (*nafs-e-mutmainnah*). The seeds of *Sufism* were

present in the Quran and the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Instead of giving arguments for God, the Quran repeatedly asks man to reflect on the marvels and mysteries of the outer world and his own self. Many verses of the Quran have a mystical flavor, and the Prophet ﷺ used to meditate throughout his life. Ali was especially interested in esoteric knowledge (*ilm-e-batin*), as distinguished from external knowledge (*ilm-e-zahir*). In the early phase of Islamic political and religious expansion, the influence of Greek thought and Christian theology stimulated the growth of external knowledge, both religious and secular. The spate of philosophical and theological controversies, the barrenness of external morality and legalism as well as later sociopolitical changes led to the growth of Islamic mysticism.

Islamic mysticism or *Sufism* is, however, far from being a way of pure gnosis without any rational or speculative elements, just as Ibn Sina's or Farabi's rationalism is far from being a pure intellectualism without mystical elements. Islamic rationalism is inextricably mixed with mysticism, though in varying proportions in different personalities.

The earlier *Sufi's* were simple pietists who emphasized the inwardness of morality and love of God without neglecting the Islamic religious law and without any metaphysical speculation on the nature of God, soul, and prophecy, etc. But mystics emphasizing the Gnostic dimension gradually emerged and acquired a position of pre-eminence. This in turn was followed by the systematic conceptualization of mystical experience, since no individual can avoid the task of field integration. Even the mystic who stresses direct mystical experience as the true source of knowledge has to live and act at the non-mystical plane for the greater part of his life. Consequently, even he cannot abjure the need of a coherent interpretation of the basic features of the universe, including his mystical experience itself. He cannot avoid reflecting upon the nature and meaning of his mystical experience and its reconciliation with his own normal experiences such as perception, causality, sense of space and time, sense of ego hood, sense of freedom, and a measure of control over the environment. The *Sufi*, no less than the philosopher, is thus drawn into the vortex of interpretative activity, whose range and depth, however, depend upon his intellectual powers over and above his spiritual talents. Some *Sufi's* (like philosophers and theologians) have therefore reinterpreted the basic concepts and values of Islam. But the philosophers were confined to external knowledge alone, while *Sufi* thinkers claimed access to both external and esoteric knowledge. They thus went back to the tradition of Jaffar Sadiq and ultimately of Ali, who was the intellectual and mystic

par excellence, while the theologians and philosophers remained at the level of Aristotle and Plato. Perhaps the two most outstanding *Sufi* thinkers are Ghazzali (d. 1111) and Ibn Arabi (d. 1240).

Ghazzali is the greatest mediator between the three main streams of Islamic thought and culture; the legalistic-cum-theological, the rationalistic and the mystical. Up to his time these three streams had developed more or less in relative isolation from each other. The mystical and the metaphysical approaches coalesced in such remarkably gifted figures as Farabi, and Ibn Sina, etc. But the mysticism of such philosophers was speculative rather than pietistic and hence did not attract the notice of the common man who cared for myths and miracles rather than metaphysics and mathematics. Many pietist mystics, on the other hand, were not sufficiently well equipped with philosophy to remove various field tensions. The jurists and theologians, on the other hand, were sharp dialecticians and experts in casuistry, but failed to distinguish religious feeling from religious conformism, and to progress from the realm of law into the realm of the spirit. Thus there was a clear lack of authentic communication between the philosophers, mystics, and jurists of Islam. The genius of Ghazzali led to an integrated multi-dimensional approach which repudiated neither reason, nor intuition, nor law. Unfortunately the cultural stagnation and decay in the Islamic East due to the Mongol violence in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries did not permit further growth or refinement of Ghazzali's irenic approach.

Many Western Orientalists are of the view that the decline of the rationalist temper and of science in the Islamic world was mainly due to the anti-rationalism or mysticism profusely injected by Ghazzali into the arteries of Islamic culture. Ghazzali's masterpiece '*Destruction of the Philosophers*' is regarded as Ghazzali's arrow that pierced into the heart of the philosophical or rationalist movement in Islam and literally destroyed philosophy. This is not the whole truth. What Ghazzali had attacked with great skill and power was not reason or philosophy as such, but rather Greek speculative metaphysics. Indeed Ghazzali's approach in the '*Destruction of the Philosophers*' bears some striking points of similarity with the analytical-cum-positivistic approach of Kant and also of the present. His approach to proofs of God and faith is in tune with contemporary religious existentialism. But Ghazzali, who was so systematic and methodical in his treatment of Greek philosophy, lacked a critical approach in the field of *hadis* literature. Moreover, he could not emancipate himself fully from the pre-scientific thought patterns, prejudices,

and limitations of his age, as is indicated by his disapproval of friendly and intimate relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

Ibn Arabi is, by far, the most daring speculative *Sufi* who has left a permanent mark on the Islamic thought system. He reinterpreted the Islamic formula of faith 'There is no god but Allah' as 'There is no being but the Being of Allah'. The monistic interpretation of Divine unity, as the Unity of Existence (*wahdat ul wujud*), in contrast with the traditional interpretation that God had created the universe out of nothing, was a redefinition of the concept of God. Ibn Arabi also redefined other concepts to fit them into his peculiar conceptual framework. His influence upon *Sufi*'s with an intellectual bent of mind has been very great, though in his own day the establishment rejected him.

It seems to me that the crucial flaw in Ibn Arabi's approach is the lack of a critical epistemology or methodology, since there is no criterion to test the validity of his mystical-speculative ontology. The traditional Islamic criterion lay in conformity to the Quran, as interpreted by the Prophet ﷺ and his trusted companions. If, however, the mystic feels free to give his own interpretation to Quranic verses in the light of his own mystical experiences, but fails to give any criteria of validity, his interpretation becomes an exercise in uncontrolled speculation. The stand that others could test the truth of the mystic's claims through their direct experience is misleading, since it does not distinguish the conceptual interpretation of the mystical experience with the experience as such. It is quite possible for two mystics to have a similar experience, but they may differ in its conceptual interpretation. Now Ibn Arabi can give us no criterion for the validity of his interpretation of his mystical experience. In this crucial respect Ghazzali scores over Ibn Arabi, since the former is much more cautious in making Gnostic claims. But at times even he floats in the thin air of speculative interpretation of his mystical experience without bothering about the question of validity. The mere fact that the truth claim does not clash with the Quran cannot suffice to make it valid.

After Ghazzali and Ibn Arabi, *Sufism* loses its intellectual vigor and becomes institutionalized. This was perhaps the social consequence of the socio-political upheavals caused by Mongol invasions of the Eastern Islamic world in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Sufism* in this period ceased to do the job of field integration. But it did promote the personality integration

of individual Muslims in troubled times, and also helped in propagating Islam in India and elsewhere through its exalted morality and spirituality. However, spiritual culture without the cultivation of reason is as lame as the latter is blind without the cultivation of spirituality.

The consolidation of Muslim rule in India by the 12<sup>th</sup> century led to the emergence of a plural society. The vast Hindu population with a rich cultural tradition had accepted the political presence of Islam, but they were in no mood for Islamisation, which had occurred in Iran and Egypt after the Arab conquest. The orthodox theologians stood for the cultural and social isolation of the Muslims, as far as possible, from non-Muslims. But the *Sufis* of the Chishtia order were quick to grasp the social and psychological aspects of the historical situation and stood for a liberal spiritual humanism in place of a theological legalism. This attracted many Hindus to the faith and practice of Islam.<sup>18</sup>

Muslim rulers and administrators in general tended to be guided by reasons of state and preferred the policy of tolerance and non-interference in the religious matters of their subjects. But the orthodox theologians ever demanded the subordination of the state to the Islamic religious law. It appears that but for the pressure of public opinion, under the influence of the orthodox theologians, many more Muslim kings and administrators would have leaned far more to the liberal approach symbolized by Emperor Akbar (d. 1605).

The strongest opposition to the spiritual humanism and liberalism which was gaining ground in the highly sophisticated urban elite during the time of Akbar and his successors in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century came from Shaikh Ahmad of Sarhind (d. 1624). The Shaikh, who belonged to the Nakhshbandia *Sufi* order, made it his life mission to rectify the wrongs perpetrated by Akbar and his host, and to restore Islamic *shariah* to its rightful place in India. He was also deeply opposed to the monistic philosophy of Ibn Arabi, which according to him, had corrupted the true Islamic notion of Divine unity. The Shaikh was on strong ground when he said that Ibn Arabi's conception of God was quite different from the orthodox view of God as the Supreme Creator and Lord of the worlds, the beneficent and the merciful, the Hearer of prayers and the Fulfiller of needs, etc. Ibn Arabi, on his part, could justifiably say that no finite mind could claim to understand God's attributes. The only way to understand the nature of God is to suggest a comparison and immediately to transcend it (*tashbih wa tanzih*). So



far Ibn Arabi would be in accord with the orthodox position. But when he claims direct knowledge of hidden realities through mystical experience (*kashf*) without giving any criteria of validity of his interpretations his position becomes shaky.

Shaikh Ahmad's critique of Ibn Arabi's position was thus quite powerful and made considerable impact on *Sufi* circles. But the unfortunate thing was the Shaikh's rejection of the spiritual humanism and liberalism of the Persian mystical tradition represented by the classical Persian poetry of Attar (d. 1229), Rumi (d. 1273), Sadi (d. 1291), and Jami (d. 1492), which was flourishing at court circles ever since Akbar. The Shaikh on the other hand stood for a rigid adherence to the *shariah* as a complete and closed code of conduct rather than for a creative fidelity to the Quran. The Shaikh had no understanding of the requirements of a plural society and the point of view of his non-Muslim Indian brethren whose ideals and interests pulled them towards a secular polity rather than the rule of Islamic law. He was also not sympathetic to the *Shia* Muslims. He, thus, put back the clock of the Indian secular movement, as it were.<sup>19</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Waliullah (d. 1763), the greatest Muslim philosophical theologian of the age, brought some fresh air and light into the portals of the Muslim mind through his concept of a common '*deen*' underlying the revealed Semitic religions, his permissive approach to denominational conformism within the four orthodox *Sunni* sects, his rationalistic approach to Quranic hermeneutic, and his irenic approach to the controversy between Ibn Arabi and Shaikh Ahmad. But he accepted the Islamic *shariah* as an organic totality, and his approach to the putative sayings of the Prophet ﷺ was not sufficiently critical. Moreover, his approach to socio-political issues was rooted in concepts and values common to both medieval Islam and Christianity.<sup>19A</sup> These ideas, which had started changing in Western Europe during the Renaissance, underwent a perceptible difference by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is the century, which witnessed the American and French revolutions, and also the industrial, the secular, and the sociological revolutions, which were rooted, in the earlier scientific revolution of the previous two centuries. The 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment blossomed into the knowledge explosion of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This has now compelled the Islamic thought-cum-value system to come to terms with modernity.

## IV

### FIELD INTEGRATION IN RECENT ISLAM

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is of crucial significance for not only Islam but all other religions, since it was in this period that Darwin's theory of evolution brought the conflict between modern science and religion to its sharpest point. For Islam it is significant for the additional reason that the process of slow cultural and political decay going on in the entire Islamic world for several centuries reached its point of culmination. The entire Islamic world became a virtual dependency of some European power or other, and all hopes of success in the future appeared illusory. This total political and economic defeat of the bearers of the Quran and of God's best community (*Khairul Umam*) inevitably evoked fresh questionings in the minds of the thinking Muslims the world over from Egypt to Indonesia. Thus the nadir of defeat and despair proved to be a stimulus for a constructive probe into fundamental problems of religion and human destiny.

Of all those who reflected on these problems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century three persons stand out as outstanding; Jamaluddin Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad Abduh of Egypt (d. 1905), and Syed Ahmad of India (d. 1898).

#### JAMAL-UDDIN AFGHANI

He vigorously pleaded for a united pan-Islamic state as a precondition of the political and cultural re-emergence of Islam in the modern world. Gifted and dynamic as he was, Afghani had a merely pan-Islamic rather than an international perspective. He was certainly right in criticizing the evils of theological hair-splitting and a static religious piety totally divorced from a living concern with socio-political problems and concerns. But he was unable to register the full meaning and implications of the scientific attitude, which is the differentia of the modern age. Grievances against the excessive conservatism of the Mullas does not constitute the full meaning of a truly liberal and rationalist approach to religion and life. Afghani was thus more of a dashing publicist for a pan-Islamic renaissance rather than a creative scholar who could integrate contemporary concepts and values into the traditional Islamic thought-cum-value system.<sup>20</sup>

## MUHAMMAD ABDUH

He took inspiration from Afghani but did not entangle himself in politics. He devoted himself to reforming both the administration and the teaching of al-Azhar, the oldest living university in the world. Abduh played a crucial role in weakening the hold of a static tradition upon the Arabic speaking Muslims. He never abandoned the traditional interpretation of fundamental Islamic concepts and values, but only stood for a limited adaptation of the institutional system of Islam to contemporary needs and the aspirations of a liberal mind. His reconstruction of basic Islamic concepts and values was marginal. Perhaps this cautious and moderate approach, together with the great prestige of al-Azhar, as a symbol of traditional Islamic learning, greatly facilitated the propagation of his ideas in the Egyptian milieu. His ideas were different from those of the conservative and stagnant minds of his associates, but not too different to isolate him from the broad thought patterns of his associates. He was a modernist in relation to the outlook of his milieu. But in comparison with Syed Ahmad or Iqbal he was rather conservative.

## SYED AHMAD

He was the principal architect of the Aligarh Movement, the father of Islamic Modernism, and the first to be aware of the need of field integration between religion and modern science. His sharp mind pierced through the armor of the medieval pre-scientific understanding of basic Islamic concepts. He realized that Islamic thought had not even caught up with the Copernican revolution, to say nothing of the Darwinian. One cannot help admiring his efforts, even though one may be unable to agree with some features of his approach.

Syed Ahmad was a great admirer of Waliullah, but knew that the latter's basic conceptual framework was essentially medieval. Waliullah, for instance, retained the medieval polarity between the Islamic religio-political community and the non-Islamic world. Syed Ahmad, on the other hand, had outgrown this Islamic communitarianism.<sup>21</sup> He had genuinely accepted secular democracy and liberal nationalism with the implication that religion was a personal relationship between man and God rather than a total way of life in the medieval sense. In other words, the cast of mind of Syed Ahmad was

almost (though not completely) modern. He went further than any previous Islamic thinker in viewing Islam as a simple Quranic theism without an all-embracing institutional system. He separated the proper spheres of religion and the state within the organic unity of a spiritual perspective, which was rooted in religious tolerance. This approach led to a pluralist fellowship of faiths in the place of the traditional concept of a religious brotherhood or community, be it Islamic, Christian, or Hindu.

Syed Ahmad was, however, primarily a philosophical theologian and apologist for Islam who used all the resources of his fertile mind to reconcile science with the Quran, accepted as the infallible and literally revealed word of God. His basic thesis was that science accurately and objectively describes the physical world, which is the Work of God. Now there cannot be any contradiction between 'the Word of God' and 'the Work of God'. The seeming contradiction was due to the mistaken interpretation of Quranic texts on the basis of pre-scientific ideas. In the light of this basic assumption Syed Ahmad proceeded to reinterpret those Quranic passages which seemingly violated the postulate of the causal uniformity of nature and also other well-established scientific theories of the time. This led Syed Ahmad to deny the actual occurrence of miracles, though he conceded their logical possibility, or God's power to perform them. Since, however, God had Himself willed the laws of nature and expressly said in the Quran that there is no change in Divine ways, nature always behaved uniformly.

The other basic thesis of Syed Ahmad was the essential harmony between reason and revelation, both of which were Divine gifts for man's guidance. Reason was given to all, but revelation was confined to the prophets alone. Their source was one and the same, though their spheres of operation might be different. Syed Ahmad thus stood for a scientific empiricism and speculative rationalism without, however, having a clear and critical methodology of science and philosophy. He accepted the findings of science as well as the findings of reason no less than the Quran, which is infallible, and then, proceeded to reconcile any apparent discrepancy between them with the help of a speculative hermeneutic. The attempted reconciliation involves rejecting the ordinary meanings of Arabic words or expressions. Syed Ahmad thus rejects the separate existence of Satan (*Shaitan*), of angels, of heaven and hell as locales, and of the literal truth of verses about the creation and fall of Adam, the ascension of the Prophet ﷺ, and the virgin birth of Jesus, etc.

Syed Ahmad's metaphorical or philosophical reinterpretation of the Quranic texts in question was bound to disturb, nay alarm, the religious establishment. The orthodox and conservative sections naturally dubbed him as a naturalist or as a champion of reason rather than of revelation. But the truth of the matter is that Syed Ahmad was not a pure rationalist philosopher, but a scholastic with a pre-rational faith in the Quran, as the revealed word of God, as well as a pre-critical faith in the harmony between revelation and reason. This concept of a pre-established harmony between revelation and reason was his heritage from classical Islamic philosophers: Kindi, Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd, etc.

Let us now briefly examine the validity of Syed Ahmad's position. It seems to me that Syed Ahmad commits what may be called the rationalistic fallacy; a fallacy which is committed by all those philosophers or theologians who claim to prove the truth or validity of their faith, which (according to them) was initially accepted because of the accident of their birth, but which is retained by them because of its coercive rationality or objective truth. This approach was the common feature of medieval Islamic and Christian thought, and continued right up to the time of Kant. Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Paley and many others always stressed the reasonableness of the Christian faith, and advanced putative conclusive proofs of God. It was Kant who denied the coercive power of such proofs and examined the proper scope and limits of reason. Barring a brief interlude of Hegelian rationalism, almost all post-Kantian philosophers and theologians such as Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, William James, Bergson, Otto, and many others have abandoned the rationalistic approach to religion in favor of a broad voluntaristic or existentialist approach. According to this viewpoint, religious faith is qualitatively different from logical or objective certainty, and is essentially incapable of any coercive proof. Thus there can be no proof of the existence of God, Divine incarnation, prophecy, and life after death, or of the truth of a particular religion. Indeed, if a coercive proof were possible, either in the logico-mathematical or scientific sense, no occasion or room for faith will be left at all, just as there is no room for faith in the spheres of logic and mathematics, etc. (Though there is a sort of 'faith' in the truth of the postulates of science or even of a scientific theory). Religious faith presupposes that the beliefs in question are not logically provable. In other words, faith is not like objective knowledge, but like the subjective truth of ethics and aesthetics. It is this essential non-provability, which gives religious faith its inwardness, tension, depth, and poignancy as distinct from the

external or objective tension-free certainty of science or logic. Syed Ahmad's rationalistic approach to Islam thus can be said to be valid only in the sense that it does not shun rational or scientific enquiry but affirms its need. But his approach is invalid when it claims that the truth of religion in general and Islam in particular could be rationally proved.

Syed Ahmad's approach to Quranic miracles and his Quranic hermeneutic are also invalid. The Quran contains several references to miracles performed by God or His prophets, even though Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had no power to perform miracles (according to the Quran). Now Syed Ahmad explains away the prima facie Quranic references to miracles by interpreting them as reports of natural events, which were misconstrued as supernatural due to the general human craving for the supernatural. Perhaps the most striking instance of this type of Quranic hermeneutic is Syed Ahmad's interpretation of the Quranic verse that no man had touched Mary who was with child. Syed Ahmad interprets this verse to mean that no man, other than her husband, had touched Mary who had conceived a child. Another instance is the Quranic verse that God punished sinners through natural calamities. Syed Ahmad says that natural phenomena are governed by natural laws, but men view them as a punishment for their sins.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, he gives a naturalistic interpretation of verses describing angels, demons and the people of the cave (*ashab al kahaf*), etc. Syed Ahmad shows great linguistic skill in reinterpreting Arabic expressions, even though his command over the language may not be perfect.

Syed Ahmad had a twofold orthogenetic justification for this type of hermeneutic. The first was the clear statement of the Quran that the Prophet ﷺ had no miraculous powers and was an ordinary mortal like other human beings, the only difference being that he was the recipient of Divine revelations. (The implication was that if the greatest of all prophets could not perform miracles, other prophets too must have been without any supernatural powers.) The second justification was the Quranic statement that it contained two types of verses; the clear and categorical commands (*muhkamat*), and the metaphorical or ambiguous verses (*mutashabihat*). Armed with this twofold principle of interpretation, Syed Ahmad perhaps felt no qualms in explaining away all Quranic references to the supernatural. This approach is quite valid and fruitful up to a point, but Syed Ahmad did not realize its limitations and went to the extremes of semantic speculation just to prove his point.

Forced interpretations of a text involve the fallacy of projection of one's own ideas upon the revealed text. It may be said that, by the very nature of the case, there can be no standard meaning of Scripture, and that all meanings are inevitably cases of projecting our own ideas upon the propositional canvas of the Quran. But it seems to me that the interpretations made by the Prophet ﷺ and his trusted companions, who were directly inspired and instructed by the Prophet ﷺ himself, must be treated as normative interpretations, at least in spiritual and moral matters. Now if the Prophet ﷺ believed in miracles, but miracles do not really occur, the Prophet ﷺ was mistaken in his interpretation of the Quran. This would imply that though he was the messenger of God, he was not the infallible interpreter of the Word of God. Syed Ahmad did not actually draw this inference but, it seems, this approach was latent in his thinking.

Syed Ahmad's attempted field integration led to his denial of miracles, including the Prophet's ﷺ bodily ascension to the highest heaven (*meraj*), his affirmation of revelation as the highest form of Divine illumination of the human consciousness without any intermediary role of angels, in the literal sense, his denial of the virgin birth of Jesus; in brief, a thorough 'de-mythologisation', of the Islamic thought system. This was no mean achievement, and one cannot but admire Syed Ahmad's imagination, clarity, candor, and courage.

But in his quest for integrating religion with science and philosophy, Syed Ahmad deprived Islam of its mystique or spiritually romantic elements, without, however, providing a critical and mature philosophy of religion, which could appeal to the modern Muslim mind. His approach lacked the organic unity and inner consistency of an authentic existential interpretation of man in the universe. This is why neither his closest friends and admirers nor the orthodox could agree with his peculiar blend of faith and reason. However, as the principal architect and inspirer of the Aligarh Movement, which produced or influenced a whole galaxy of liberal Muslims such as Chiragh Ali, Mehdi Ali, Imtiaz Ali, Hali, Shibli, Amir Ali, and Ghulam-us-Saqlain, among several others, Syed Ahmad acted as the master trend-setter. The work initiated by him in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was carried-forward in the present century by Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) and Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958), both of whom were men of genius.

## IQBAL

Through his book, *'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'* as well as his moving philosophical poetry, Iqbal has reinterpreted Islamic concepts and values in the light of contemporary thought. Iqbal realized that one's concrete understanding of religious concepts is organically related with one's basic conceptual framework, which grows with the growth in man's factual knowledge. But he also held that scientific knowledge based on sense perception could not disclose the nature and destiny of the human ego and of ultimate reality, as distinct from its appearance to our sense organs, or its conceptual reconstruction in scientific theories. The ultimate nature and destiny of the human ego, its relationship with God; the ultimate Ego, the attributes of God, the nature of prophecy or revelation, etc., are beyond the ken of human reason and can be known only through revelation or spiritual intuition which is a Divine gift to a chosen few. Iqbal, therefore, makes no attempt to prove God's existence, and immortality, etc., but follows Kant in rejecting the putative coercive power of the classical proofs for God. He emphasizes love and intuition rather than reason as the path, which leads to God, so that his approach to religion is existentialist. At the same time Iqbal reconstructs the concrete meaning of basic religious concepts to integrate them with the conceptual framework of contemporary science. He was an erudite scholar, though not an analytical thinker of genius like Kant, Jaspers, or Wittgenstein.

Iqbal rejects the anthropomorphic concept of God's attributes and actions such as creation, guidance, and punishment, etc. Though the nature of God can never be grasped by man, He may best be viewed as the Infinite Ego Who is the Source of all finite egos or monads which are centers of energy or the will to affirm one's existence. The ultimate reality for Iqbal is thus not matter, or even matter in motion, but the Divine Ego Who creates finite egos or centers of will as a manifestation of His creative powers and glory. Man is the highest created being. But his latent powers have not yet been realized with the exception of the Prophet ﷺ who was the perfect man and exemplar for all mankind.

Man, as the vicegerent of God on earth, can subjugate and direct all creation through the application of natural laws, which have been willed by God. God does not change them to perform miracles though He may



do so. Scientific laws are not logically necessary but are empirical generalizations.

In Iqbal's view, the proper way of self-realization or the growth of the ego is neither metaphysical speculation, nor mystical absorption into the Infinite Ego, but the conquest of nature through science and the conquest or disciplining of the human ego through obedience to the Quran and the *sunnat*. The conquest of the ego does not mean the suppression of its individuality but rather its growth through the full cultivation of the Divine attributes of power, wisdom, love, mercy, etc. The developed ego can then control and discipline its lower urges, not at the behest of external commands of God, but as the inward demands of his own developed nature due to the assimilation of the Divine attributes. The developed ego, however, remains the servant (*abd*) of God and at the same time experiences itself as free or autonomous.

The commands of God are to be found in the Quran, which is the revealed Word of God. We cannot understand the mechanics of revelation, but the conviction of its Divine Source may arise in us if we approach the Quran and the Prophet ﷺ with receptivity and humility in an earnest search for truth. Iqbal rejects all anthropomorphic models for understanding the mechanics of Divine revelation, that is, the model that Gabriel first gets the message from God and then communicates it to the Prophet ﷺ, or that Gabriel appears in the human garb before the Prophet ﷺ, or the model of an angel on the sky, or of mysterious sounds reaching the Prophet ﷺ, as if from nowhere. The Quran does refer to these modes of revelation, but they fall in the category of metaphorical verses whose mystery cannot be deciphered. However, poetic and artistic inspiration as well as psychical phenomena such as telepathy and veridical dreams do confirm the existence of modes of human experience over and above normal perception and reasoning. Just as the gift of poetic or musical genius is not universal, the gift of prophecy is confined to a few Divinely chosen persons. Iqbal's concept of prophecy is thus basically the same as that of Syed Ahmad, who in turn followed Waliullah and the tradition of classical Muslim philosophers.

Iqbal rejects the literal interpretation of the Quranic verses dealing with the creation of Adam and his expulsion from the garden, universal resurrection of the human body, heaven and hell as external locales. Iqbal accepts the evolutionary hypothesis. But he qualifies the mechanistic conception

of Darwin since he holds that the evolutionary force is rooted in the individual will to live and to assert its power, corresponding to its endowment (*taqdir*).<sup>23</sup> Evolutionary change, therefore, is not the mechanical result of the combination of chance variations and natural selection (in Darwin's sense) of the better adjusted species, but rather the result of a striving for self-perfection and a more intensive and permanent ego hood. The peak of evolutionary growth is man who is next only to God. Iqbal agrees with the famous lines of Rumi describing the different stages of growth; minerals, plants, animals, man, and higher still.<sup>24</sup> The urge to grow and develop comes from God Who is the ultimate Source of all being and value, and without Whom the evolutionary process would not have begun at all.

Iqbal's conception of evolution is very similar to Bergson's Creative evolution. But while Bergson posits an '*Elan Vital*', which is the vital ground or immanent principle of movement.

Iqbal holds the vital ground to be not merely an impersonal immanent *Elan* but a supra Personality or Super Ego, Whose mode of existence is, however, beyond human comprehension. The Divine Ego responds to human prayer, though not in the sense of a Heavenly Father wiping the tears of His children and giving them sweets. Iqbal's concept of evolution adumbrates Aristotle's view that every member of a species strives to reach the perfection appropriate to its form.

Iqbal holds that Islam is not merely a set of metaphysical beliefs and rituals but also a complete code of conduct. It thus differs from Christianity, which makes a clear distinction between the church and the state and enjoins on the Christians to render unto Caesar and Christ what respectively belongs to them. Iqbal holds that from its very inception Islam has been an organic whole demanding a total loyalty from the Muslim. Thus the Prophet ﷺ and the pious *Khalifa's* were the spiritual and temporal heads of the Islamic community, and there was no distinction between the sacred and the profane or the spiritual and the secular. However, the law and polity of Islam are not intended to be static. Indeed they must ever be renewed within the framework of the Quran and the *sunnat* to keep pace with the ceaseless creativity of human values. The Quran only gives basic guidance to the Muslim and exhorts him to exercise his reason within those limits. The *sunnat* too must be given the utmost importance but it can never equal the status of the Quran. This is because human reports about the Prophet

ﷺ may be mistaken, unlike the complete authenticity of the Quran.

The principle of movement or independent reasoning, however, applies only to the institutional system (*muamilat*) and not the prescriptive system (*ibadat*) as fixed by the Prophet ﷺ. Independent reasoning may be exercised not only through the consensus of the jurists (*ijma ul ulama*) but also through the consensus of the Islamic community (*ijma ul ummat*). Iqbal, however, does not give any further constitutional details in this context.

Let us now attempt a critical estimate of Iqbal. His existentialist approach to religion, his vitalistic and voluntaristic ontology and evolutionary cosmology, his rejection of life-negating mysticism, his ethic of self-realization through the conquest of nature and a dynamic religious morality and law, his awareness of the limitations of scientific knowledge, his emphasis on creativity of values, his concern for social justice, and his rejection of narrow nationalism are all very valuable. But Iqbal's concept of Islam as an organic total code of conduct (even though possessed of an in-built mechanism for inner growth); as well as his theory of Islamic communitarianism, is not valid for our times. Let us examine in some detail why this is the case.

Iqbal does not seem to realize that right up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century not merely Islam but all religions had been total guides to life rather than merely a set of rituals. It is true that the church and the state were never one in Christianity, though the two were united in Islam. Thus in Christendom the Pope and Emperor symbolized the domains of Christ and of Caesar, while in Islam the Caliph (*Khalifa*) was at once the spiritual and the temporal head of the Islamic community. This difference was, however, due to the historical situation of Christianity and Islam in their early history.<sup>25</sup> When Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century the Christian Church too claimed spiritual jurisdiction over the state, and the Church held Christianity to be a complete code of conduct for the believers. When Martin Luther (d. 1546) repudiated the authority of the Pope in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this repudiation was made in the name of true Christianity represented by his own Church, rather than in the name of secularism. The break from the Church of Rome did not imply any change in the conception of Christianity as a total conduct of life. Likewise, Calvin (d. 1564), who also founded his own church soon after Luther, claimed to provide complete guidance to his followers, including the spheres of trade, industry, education, law, and government, etc.

The effective breakthrough in the conception of Christianity however came in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the cumulative result of the gradual scientific revolution in Western Europe between 1500 and 1700, and its impact upon the social and industrial life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The scientific revolution was nurtured by the works of Copernicus (d. 1543), Kepler (d. 1630), Galileo (d. 1642), Newton (d. 1727), Descartes (d. 1650), while the revolution in social and religious ideas by the impact of Locke (d. 1704), Voltaire, (d. 1778), Rousseau (d. 1778), Adam Smith (d. 1790), Kant (d. 1804) *et al.*

Let us now consider the exact way in which scientific developments led to the gradual transformation of traditional Christianity as a complete way of life. Traditional Christian theism implied that every event, whether social, natural, or Divine, was purposive. The category of purpose or final end was the supreme explanatory principle of the cosmic process, though finite mind could not grasp the purpose of many events, which *prima facie* went against reason or justice. Human reason had, therefore, to be subordinated to faith. However, the rise of Mechanics and Dynamics culminating in the grand Newtonian cosmology showed that natural events could be accurately described and predicted in terms of pure mechanical causes without any reference to any purpose or end, whether human or divine. Reason was still necessary for formulating hypotheses and developing their implications, which were empirically tested. But reason was no longer the supreme and sufficient oracle, which decided what was the case.

The steady growth of natural science inevitably led to technological innovations for the satisfaction of man's practical needs. Technological innovations in turn led to social and economic innovations, like mass production factories, banks, joint-stock companies, insurance firms, managing agencies, auditing firms, etc. In the course of time these social forms or phenomena became objects of systematic theoretical study like natural phenomena in the earlier period. In other words, social phenomena also came under the jurisdiction of the scientific method, first, the economic behavior of man, and later his social, moral, and religious behavior. All this naturally led to a shift of intellectual influence and power from the church leaders to the university intellectuals and the business and industrial community whose interests lay in adopting a secular and scientific approach to problems of social organization in place of the closed ecclesiastical approach of the medieval period. This may be called the secular revolution of Western Europe, partly overlapping and partly succeeding the Industrial Revolution of England.

The secular revolution was nurtured by Locke, Hume, and Adam Smith in England, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesque in France, Kant and Lessing in Germany, and Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson in America. The secular revolution did not dislodge religion but transformed Christianity as a complete code of conduct into the modern conception of religion, as primarily a spiritual perspective upon the universe. In other words, religion came to be viewed as a personal relationship between man and his Creator rather than as total guidance or a mandate for every sphere of human life.<sup>26</sup>

It seems Iqbal was unable to look upon the secular revolution as a factor in the evolution of a mature religion. This was because Iqbal remained under the spell of the medieval conception of religion as a complete code of conduct, or what may be called religious institutionalism or 'religionism', in short. Iqbal does not realize that 'religionism', be it Islamic, Christian, or Hindu, raises quite unnecessary social, psychological, and administrative difficulties which make it unfit for plural societies, even though it may work relatively better in the case of the homogeneous. Iqbal's approach is utterly unsuitable for plural societies where it is absolutely essential to separate macro-social matters involving the entire nation, from micro-social or transcendental matters touching sub-groups or individuals. Muslims living in plural societies cannot accept Iqbal's understanding of Islam, which is rooted in medieval 'religionism' rather than in modern secularism.

The rejection of 'religionism' is not dictated by prudence or the situational compulsions of a plural society, but is the result of mature insight into the essential and non-essential functions of religion and the role of reason in human affairs. To hold that Iqbal's conception is true, but not prudent for Muslims of mixed societies would imply that such Muslims are second class Muslims who are compelled by their historical situation to acquiesce in the rupture of the organic unity of their religion. Nothing could be more misleading than this conclusion, which seems to be logically implied by Iqbal's conception of Islam. Just as Iqbal holds that a dynamic approach to the *shariah* is intrinsically desirable and valid rather than merely prudent, similarly, many contemporary religious minds, be they Muslim, Christian, or Hindu, genuinely accept the religion of the spirit rather than medieval 'religionism'. This implies that secularism is right and valid not only for plural societies like, say, India or Nigeria, but also for predominantly Muslim countries, say, Pakistan or Turkey, or a Hindu country like Nepal. Indeed secularism becomes a principle of the good life, like democracy or socialism, rather than a matter of policy or prudence.

It may be that Iqbal was prejudiced against the 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of secularism because it eventually led to agnosticism and atheistic materialism in the succeeding centuries, though the founding fathers of the secular revolution (like the earlier creators of the scientific revolution) were all sincere Christian deists. But secularism as such is pre-eminently neutral towards the truth of religion or the truth of a particular religion, though it does clearly and emphatically reject religionism.

It is noteworthy that while many brilliant Western minds of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century rejected not only religionism but also the religion of the spirit, the best Western minds of the present century are much more cautious in this respect. Indeed they have become deeply aware of the dangers and limitations of a new brand of dogmatism, termed scientism; the belief that scientific knowledge exhausts the full description and meaning of the universe. Contemporary thought has realized that reality is far more complex than the scientific picture paints it to be.<sup>27</sup> Many eminent thinkers now seem to be willing to concede that mere morality without an existential interpretation of the universe fails to sustain man's quest for value and plunges him into a destructive nihilism. In other words, though morality without God or Spirit may and does flourish, the cultivation of the spiritual dimension of man reinforces morality and creativity in general, thus enhancing the inner quality of life. Iqbal's fear of secularism, as it were, is thus not justified, in view of the perfect compatibility between secularism and the religion of the spirit.

Let us now examine Iqbal's theory of Islamic communitarianism and the implied critique of nationalism. According to this theory, the primary determinant of group identity and loyalty is the religious community rather than the nation, race, etc. He repeatedly criticizes nationalism as a narrow and restrictive focus of loyalty, as compared to a religious community rooted in shared ideas and values transcending all barriers of race, region, and language, etc. Iqbal was even critical of the League of Nations since its basis of membership was the nation-state, thus perpetuating the very evil it sought to cure.

Consistency demands that Iqbal concede that all religious communities are justified in making their religion the primary determinant of group identity and focus of loyalty. Iqbal cannot deny them this right on the ground that religions other than Islam are false. Now the moment this is done,

humanity again becomes divided into rival religious groups, if not warring nation-states. Is not strife between partisan ideological groups as bad as strife between partisan nation-states? The answer is quite plain. Moreover, if relations can be friendly between different religious groups they could also be friendly between different national groups. What makes nationalism harmful is thus not territorialism as such but rather chauvinism and aggressive intolerance. And these can also vitiate the virtues of communitarianism. It seems Iqbal equated nationalism with chauvinism just as some tend to equate faith with fanaticism. But one equation is as wrong as the other.

It is true that nationalism or rather nationalistic chauvinism has played havoc in modern Western history and Iqbal's fear of nationalism is, therefore, not groundless. But it is equally true that communitarianism or rather ideological fanaticism had played havoc in the medieval period producing endless strife between Catholics and Protestants or between Christians and Muslims, etc. Indeed reliable historians have claimed that casualties in the religious wars or persecutions of the medieval period far exceed the losses inflicted by nationalist wars in the modern period. Thus, in view of the smaller world population in the medieval period, religious communitarianism caused greater friction than has nationalism in the modern.

Let us now see how far communitarianism is feasible in the present world situation. We find that human societies have gradually become mixed or plural due to migrations, wars, and political integration, etc. Communitarianism with its stress on religious differences creates problems of emotional integration for the different religious groups, while territorial nationalism makes for a smooth and harmonious relationship between the different sub-groups composing the nation. Again, the world is today organized on the basis of nation-states, while communitarianism demands an entirely different focus of primary loyalty. Communitarianism thus leads to emotional stress for minority groups in mixed societies, as it tends to displace the state as the primary basis of macro-social identity and the focus of loyalty.

Take for example an American Jew, who is a member of two classes; the class 'American' and the class 'Jew', and by implication, of a third class, 'American Jew'. Now no conflict would arise as long as the class 'American' is deemed to be the primary group which includes Jew, and Christian, etc., as secondary classes or, in other words, when the dominant principle of functional classification is membership of a common state rather than a

common church. When, however, religion seeks to become the dominant basis of functional classification in a mixed society a tension is inevitable between the two rival bases of classification, each of which seeks for the pride of place.

Even if human society becomes religiously homogeneous, it is condemned to be spatially, racially, and occupationally plural and sexually dual, and all these differences will inevitably generate special affinities over and above the bond of religion. Under these conditions the administratively most convenient basis of macro-social unity is the nation-state comprising all the different religious, racial, linguistic, regional, occupational groups as parts of an harmonious and integrated nation.

Nationalism is not opposed to internationalism or humanism since both complement each other. Nationalism is also not opposed to religion but only to religionism. Again, nationalism does not imply the rejection of local or professional loyalties and interests since there is no mutual conflict, provided we accept a scale of values. Suppose several candidates apply for a job, or several sites clamor for a steel plant, or two nations dispute over some matter. Now nationalism, properly understood, does not mean siding with my country, right or wrong. Likewise, professional or local loyalty does not mean siding with my club, my profession, my city, my team, right or wrong. We must always back the right principle and not any religion, nation, or region. However, a conflict may arise between patriotism and justice in the case of a war. But this conflict is also possible when the belligerents are divided into religious communities rather than nation-states. This problem is thus not peculiar to nationalism.

The nation-state, as it now exists, cannot however be deemed to be an immutable and sacrosanct institution. The concept of sovereignty in the classical sense is in the process of being transformed into the concept of national autonomy within a supra-national confederation based upon cultural and economic interests. In the past smaller principalities combined, whether by force or by free will, to form the nation-state. In the future the present sovereign nation-states may evolve further into supranational confederations, like multi-national common markets and corporations within the present framework. Religious ties will facilitate economic and cultural cooperation since a common religion does constitute a powerful bond between individuals or nations. But a common religion is not the only bond, and by itself alone it can never suffice for inter-regional collaboration unless the people



share common politico-economic ideals and interests. Consequently, if the emphasis on religious brotherhood does not lead to religious parochialism or communitarian discrimination in international relations, the forging of special relations between sovereign states with a common religion is quite justifiable. This is the only valid sense of the traditional notion of Islamic brotherhood.

The history of the pan-Islamic movement also points to the same conclusion. Jamaluddin Afghani stood for the political union of all Muslim countries and Iqbal shared this ideal. But gradually Iqbal veered to the idea of a confederation of Muslim states functioning in close harmony but retaining their separate identity. But even this would not work in the absence of shared politico-economic ideals and international cooperation on secular lines. Pan-Islamism, therefore, must be secularized and not merely regionalized in Iqbal's sense.

There is nothing wrong with Iqbal's deep concern for the welfare of the Islamic community and the touching lamentations in his poetry over the decline and fall of the political and cultural glory of Islam in the past. But what strikes me as odd in a philosophical poet of Iqbal's stature is that he never sheds tears at the decline of other great cultures. Again, he is severely critical of the evils of Western diplomacy, but is apt to overlook the core of genuine idealism in the life and work of Western savants such as Mill, Matthew Arnold, Tolstoy, Max Mueller, Blunt, etc. Iqbal gives the impression of being a devoted partisan of the Islamic community rather than a universal savant who can look upon the fads and foibles of the human family with a sense of detachment rather than of resentment or bitterness.

To turn to another aspect of his social philosophy, Iqbal seems to waver in his evaluation of democracy and socialism. He believes in Islamic democracy and socialism but does not spell it out anywhere. He is apt to confuse the question of the structure of Islamic polity with Islamic piety. Thus he dwells on the need to avoid pomp and show, to be charitable and kind to the needy, to be prompt in paying wages to the worker, etc., but he does not spell out the ideal Islamic polity.

Iqbal's approach to the status of women is also unsatisfactory. Iqbal does not permit his ideal woman to be man's equal partner in life but regards woman as a perpetual ward and man as her natural guardian. Iqbal's ideal woman at best can only aspire to be the mother of the male super-man but

not super-man herself.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that Iqbal omits to deal with the crucial problems of pain and evil and of authenticity. But his greatest shortcoming is his rejection of secularism and inter-religious fellowship or universalism. It is important to point out these limitations of Iqbal since his medium is poetry, which, as sheer poetry, is one of the treasures of world literature. Indeed, as a poetic genius, Iqbal has the power to cast a spell on his readers through his word-magic even when one may totally disagree with his social philosophy.

## MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

In his early *al-Hilal* phase, Azad stood for a romantic pan-Islamism and a more or less traditional interpretation of Islamic concepts and values. But in his second phase, represented by his monumental commentary on the Quran, Azad formulates his mature conception of Islam.<sup>29</sup> His existentialist approach to proofs of God is much more in harmony with contemporary thinking than the pre-Kantian rationalism of Syed Ahmad. Azad outgrows the Muslim scholastic or rationalistic approach to the proofs of God and confines himself to the Quran, which does not give any arguments for God's existence, but only invites the reader to ponder over the mystery of the various aspects of nature and of man's inner self, and then listen to the inner response of his total being. The implication is that if man looks at the order, harmony, and beauty of the macrocosm and the microcosm, in the spirit of pure receptivity without any preconceptions or theories, the inner conviction will well up from the depths of his being that the universe is not a chance or accidental event or a brute fact, but a purposeful cosmos.<sup>30</sup> This cosmos cannot be the result of the blind dance of atoms without serving some end or purposes, even though the purpose may not be primarily anthropocentric, that is, centered on human welfare. This inner existential conviction can of course never be proved in the logical sense. But then logical proof is needed only when one is in doubt and not when one is existentially certain. When the lover's eyes meet those of the beloved in wordless communion, is there any need left to prove that one loves the other?

The intuitive conviction of the existence of God does not imply that we have intuitive knowledge of His attributes as well. In fact the finite mind can never grasp the Infinite. But the attributes of God, as mentioned in

the Quran, do give us analogical or metaphorical knowledge of the Divine Being. Azad thus steers the middle way between theological gnosticism and philosophical transcendentalism or 'negationism'. He is at once aware of the limitations of the popular anthropomorphic conception of God and also of the extreme agnostic negation of Divine attributes. The view that no attribute like love, wisdom, mercy, power, and creativity, etc., could be predicted of God, and that all we can properly do is to affirm His existence but negate every quality (in order to avoid inner contradictions) virtually amounts to the negation or denial of God. The qualified analogical affirmation of Divine attributes, on the other hand, leads to the spiritual growth of the believer through the partial assimilation of the Divine attributes. Azad thus believes in a personal God in the non-anthropomorphic sense.

Likewise, Azad accepts that God reveals His will to His chosen prophets through revelation (*wahy*), but Azad's conception of Divine guidance is rooted in his philosophical conception of fourfold Divine guidance through instinct, perception, reason, and revelation. Let us examine his conception in some detail.

Azad points out that the Quran uses the word '*wahy*' in the wide and narrow senses. In the wide sense '*wahy*' refers not only to suggesting or making signs by one man to another but also to God's guiding the bee to collect honey.<sup>31</sup> Azad holds that the instinctive behavior of animals is not the product of blind impulse, but of God's guidance to animals to perform those actions which are essential for their preservation and the realization of their potential excellence, in the Aristotelian sense. Thus Azad regards unlearned drives which have survival value for a species as a Divine gift to animals. In a similar vein, the capacity for sense perception through different sense organs is another form of God's guidance to His creatures. Sense perception enables the individual to perform instinctive actions more accurately and effectively. In many cases perception triggers the instinctive response and gives it concrete content and direction, as in the case of the searching for food or a mate. Thus instinct and perception fuse into each other in the economy of life.

The capacity to reason is the next mode of Divine guidance to His creatures, but this form of guidance is restricted to man alone, animals possessing it only in its rudimentary form. When the conditions of perception, whether internal or external, are not standard, that is, not in accordance with the Divinely intended structure and functioning of the sense organs,

reports given by the senses are not reliable, for example, the sun appears to be a disc when it is, in fact, much bigger than the earth itself, or the stick appears to be bent in water, when it is, in fact, straight. In such cases reason corrects or amends perception. Moreover, reason also enables man to intuit logical truths or the connections between concepts and propositions through direct inner vision, as if reason were a spiritual lamp, which illumined man's consciousness. Thus reason and perception mutually complement each other at the human level, just as perception and instinct do at the animal level.

The last form of Divine guidance is revelation. But even in this case there are two levels—the lower level of the intuitive flash of the poet, artist, and scientist, etc., and the higher level of prophecy (*wahy*). We can never understand the nature and dynamics of '*wahy*', which is restricted to the prophets alone. But it is clear that revelation is the highest level of the fourfold Divine guidance, since it complements and completes God's guidance to His creatures. There is no clash between revelation and reason if their proper spheres are not confused. Revelation guides man in the sphere of spiritual and moral truths, while reason, in the sphere of logico-mathematical and perceptual truths. However, reason does help us to discover instrumental rules for realizing basic ethical truths disclosed by revelation. Man's conscience, as a form of reason, also gives ethical guidance up to a point, but such reasoning in the sphere of morality and spirituality, without the confirmation of '*wahy*', ever remains subject to doubt and disagreement between men.

The net result of Azad's concept of Divine guidance is to demarcate the proper spheres of the operation of instinct, perception, reason, and revelation and to put forward the ideal of a balanced and integrated conception of Islamic piety and of obedience to the Quran and the *sunnat*. Neither the Quran nor the *sunnat* is treated by Azad as a textbook of law, politics, economics, physics, or astronomy, but as the fount of spiritual and moral truths. The Muslim must use his powers of perception and reason, which are as much Divine gifts as revelation, for acquiring knowledge of nature and also for the detailed ordering of society.

Azad makes a clear distinction between Islam as '*deen*' and as '*shariah*'. '*Deen*' may be defined as authentic faith in God and an authentic concern for right action for its own sake. *Shariah* is the law rooted in the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet ﷺ. Now Azad holds that all prophets have preached the same '*deen*', though legal codes have differed from prophet to

prophet. But these differences do not negate the essential oneness of all religions. Doctrinal differences arose because of misunderstanding the original 'deen'. The removal of these misunderstandings plus righteous action rather than a formal acceptance of the Islamic 'shariah', suffice for inter-religious understanding and salvation. Just as the biological structure of man is the same despite differences in complexion or facial features, similarly, the basic oneness of the 'deen' is the same despite differences in the religious law. This leads Azad to the concept of a federal religious unity of mankind rather than a conception of unity, which deems conversion to Islam as the condition of brotherhood in this world and of salvation in the next.

Azad's stress on religious tolerance and pluralism, however, does not imply that he gives up his belief in the uniqueness of the Quran and of the Prophet ﷺ as the last of the long line of prophets. What Azad rejects is the view that a Muslim, as a member of Muhammad's ﷺ community (*ummate-Muhammadi*), has a higher spiritual status than non-Muslims without any consideration of his ethical or spiritual condition. Spiritual merit and status depend upon spiritual attainments rather than upon membership of a particular race, family, religion, etc. It is sheer conceit to hold that an immoral Muslim ranks spiritually higher than a highly moral non-Muslim simply because of the formers faith in the Quran and the Prophet ﷺ.

Azad rejects Iqbals conception of Islam as a total guide to the good life without any distinction between the spiritual and the secular, and also Iqbal's conception of the Islamic community (*ummat*) as the primary and supreme determinant of group identity and loyalty. In these two respects, Azad accepts the essentially secular and nationalist or rather humanist outlook of Syed Ahmad. Both Syed Ahmad and Azad stand for Islamic universalism as distinct from the Islamic communitarianism of Iqbal. They also have the same concept of 'deen' as the basic unity behind the variety of religious laws. Their common emphasis on 'deen' as the essence of religion enables them both to accept the special status of the Quran and the Prophet ﷺ, without the implication that non-Muslims will not be saved, or that a formal Muslim is *ipso facto* superior to the non-Muslim, or that human brotherhood is not possible without a world Islamic umbrella.

Azad's Islamic universalism made him full of sympathy and concern for the welfare of the human family rather than the Muslims alone. It seems to me that Azad's spiritual humanism was unfortunately misconstrued by his political opponents as an ideological concession to his political ambitions

in a country where the majority consisted of non-Muslims. Many alleged that Azad had compromised his authentic faith of the *al-Hilal* period at the altar of political ambition. This most unfair interpretation of Azad's genuine spiritual evolution must have weakened the potential appeal of his line of thought to his fellow Indian Muslims.

The crucial issues not raised by Azad are the problems of pain and evil, the problem of authenticity, the problem of moral and legal growth, and the concept of social justice. Let us now briefly deal with the above matters.

The problem of pain and evil arises when we encounter unmerited suffering and evil in a universe created by an all-loving and all-powerful God. Azad emphasizes the beauty, harmony, and goodness of the universe and dwells at great length upon the wonderful ecological balance and teleology of nature. But Azad almost completely ignores the suffering caused by different species and members of the same species struggling for existence, and also ignores the presence of evil. Azad follows the traditional approach that evil is merely a means for promoting a greater good. But this leaves unanswered the crucial enigma why an all-powerful Creator should resort to evil for promoting good.

The problem of authenticity arises when the individual experiences an existential conflict between his conscience and some scriptural injunction. One's conscience, for example, might demand complete equality between men and women, while the Quran definitely gives a higher status to man. Or, one may have a conscientious objection against the penalty of severing the hands of the thief, or against whipping. Azad's distinction between '*deen*' and '*shariah*' is very pertinent, and it may be said that the above matters are not part of '*deen*' but of the '*shariah*', and that Muslims are free to modify the law. But any amendment of any clear Quranic injunction implies that the Quran is not perfect.

Azad stands for secularism but he nowhere spells out the details of the politico-economic and social institutions, which he approves. One would like to know, for instance, what Azad thought about inter-religious marriages. We know that many individuals, both Hindu and Muslim, who loudly proclaim the virtues of secularism, view inter-religious marriages as an obnoxious evil, without realizing that this violates the meaning of secularism.

Similarly, Azad did not spell out his concept of social justice and socialism, which he professed. Azad did not concern himself with the crucial

question as to what were the features of the ethically good society over and above the virtues of the good individual.

## MAWDUDI

According to Mawdudi, Islam is the acceptance of unqualified and exclusive sovereignty of God in every sphere of human activity. In practice this boils down to implicit obedience to the Prophet ﷺ. Islam's ethic of submission is totally opposed to the humanist ethic of inner freedom, which is the common denominator of all man-made 'isms' like Democracy, Rationalism, Communism, etc. The individual Muslim, however, retains ample scope for exercising his freedom within the bounds of the sacred law. Similarly, the Islamic community also retains ample scope for the joint exercise of its discretion (*ijtehad*) to meet new problems in accord with the spirit of the Quran and the *sunnat*. This reform must conform to the spirit of the *shariah*, and only the Islamic scholar-jurists are qualified to decide what the spirit is. Hence, for all practical purposes, Mawdudi makes the consensus of the scholar-jurists (*ijma til ulama*) the supreme arbiter of the destiny of the Islamic state. Perhaps his followers do not adequately realize this crucial implication of Mawdudi's interpretation of God's sovereignty.

Mawdudi, indeed, speaks of the need of a new Islamic reconstruction of the basic concepts of all the natural and social sciences. Yet he rather dogmatically rejects the evolutionary hypothesis about the origin of the human species. Although he criticizes traditional Muslims for their conservatism and mechanical conformity to the letter of the *shariah*, in practice, Mawdudi himself remains as much tied down to the letter of the *shariah* as any other theologian, except in rather minor and marginal issues. He thinks that his significant message to contemporary Muslims is that they should reconstruct the traditional Islamic institutional system. But Mawdudi's concrete views on social or politico-economic matters, such as the position and status of women, polygamy, socialism, and equality of opportunity, etc., reflect an essentially justificatory approach to tradition rather than its sympathetic but critical appraisal.

The burden of Mawdudi's thought is (a) the sovereignty of God, (b) the organic totality of Islam as a complete code of conduct, and (c) Islamic communitarianism. The implication of the first is the rejection of the Western concept of the autonomy of the individual and the sovereignty of the state;

the implication of the second is the rejection of secularism; the implication of the third is the rejection of nationalism and secular internationalism. It will be seen that all these are already found in Iqbal, so that there is nothing new in Mawdudi. What is new is his political activism and dedication to the party, which he founded and still continues to lead. The secret of his appeal, in my opinion, is his simple but polished and powerful Urdu prose, the sheer volume of his writings on themes, which really touch the interests and imagination of his audience, his valuable translation and commentary on the Quran, together with a remarkably detailed and systematic index and, last but not least, the fact that much more than Iqbal, Mawdudi's understanding of Islam remains closer to the traditional thought-cum-value system. Iqbal had rejected many traditional concepts, such as, the view that the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ were implicit revelation (*wahy-e-khafi*) as distinct from explicit revelation (*wahy-e-jali*) or the Quran. It is Mawdudi's great contribution to the full understanding of Islam that he makes explicit what was implicit in the traditional concepts. Mawdudi thus cannot be ignored. The contemporary Muslim must either accept Mawdudi or the secular revolution.

## PARVEZ

The voluminous writings of Ghulam Ahmad Parvez (containing Quranic quotations in almost every paragraph) attempt a systematic reconstruction of the basic concepts of Islam in the light of modern ideas. He takes from Azad the concept of Divine Providence (*nizam-e-rububiyat*), but in all other matters he relies upon Iqbal without, however, being a mere imitator.<sup>32</sup>

Parvez' uniqueness lies in his Islamic or Quranic socialism. Iqbal had also criticized capitalism because of its exploitation of the poor, but he had never claimed that the Quran prescribed socialism. Similarly, Ubaidullah Sindhi and Hifzur Rahman had also stood for socialist ideas on secular grounds.<sup>33</sup> But Parvez actually deduces a socialist polity from the Quranic text by giving novel interpretations to Arabic words such as '*salat*', '*zakat*', and '*akhirat*', etc. Thus Parvez holds that '*salat*' or establishing of prayer does not mean merely the ritual of prayer but the establishing of a just social order. Likewise, '*zakat*' does not mean merely a tax on savings, but the appropriation by a welfare state of all the surplus wealth of individuals for running a planned economy. Similarly, Parvez interprets the term '*akhirat*'



as worldly welfare in addition to its usual eschatological sense.

To the objection that, if the Quran stood for socialism, why does it give such detailed attention to the laws of inheritance, Parvez replies that socialism could not come about at a stroke; detailed laws were, therefore, given for the transitional period. The advent of socialism will make these laws in fructuous rather than invalid, even as improvements in hygiene eliminate the need for curative medicines. To the further objection that if this were the real intention of the Quran why was this not accepted by the earlier Muslims, Parvez holds that the vested interests of the establishment and the essentially non-Arabic (*ajami*) ideas of the previous ages distorted the proper interpretation of the Quran and *hadis*.

Let us examine the above claims. Parvez commits the fallacy of projectionism by reading his own thoughts and values into the propositional canvas of the Quran. While it is quite permissible to interpret the Quranic reference to instantaneous creation as an evolutionary beginning, or the Quranic reference to six days as six geological periods, or the Quranic reference to the motions of the sun and the moon as motion in the Copernican framework, the situation becomes quite different if one interprets '*salat*' as an injunction to establish socialism. This amounts to a far-fetched stretching of the plain meaning of terms to make them conform to one's own ideas. One may well accept socialism on rational or ethical grounds and hold that, since the Quran does not oppose socialism, Muslim society ought to go socialist. In other words, matters of polity should not be mixed up with transcendental matters.

It seems Parvez attempts to seek Quranic support for a socialist polity for two reasons; firstly, because he thinks this would strengthen his case, and, secondly, because Parvez (under the influence of Iqbal) accepts Islam as a complete code of conduct meant for every walk of life. But his purpose is totally defeated, as is evident from the situation in Pakistan where the opposition to politico-economic leftism has not been softened or overcome merely by finding Quranic sanctions or support for socialist ideas. In fact, as sociology tells us, the roots of the opposition lie in the vested interests of the privileged classes who will quite understandably continue to support the status quo, justifying it in the name of orthodoxy. Thus Parvez' socialistic interpretation of the Quran will not work even in a Muslim society. But even if it did to some extent, it would not work at all in plural societies especially where Muslims are in the minority. Parvez' approach will give a religious

turn to an issue which cuts across religious groupings and which, as an essentially politico-economic matter, requires a national rather than a group consensus in a democratic state. In the final analysis, therefore, secularism provides the only route to socialism for Muslims, whether in homogeneous or in plural societies.

The difficulties of Parvez arise because he is unable to accept secularism, which implies delinking the politico-economic system from the purview of religion. It is significant that out of the about 6,200 verses of the Quran only about 250 are prescriptive in character, and out of these only about 10 deal with politico-economic issues.<sup>34</sup> Thus, for all practical purposes the Quran does not prescribe any polity. This was worked out by the early Muslim jurists and administrators starting from Umar, and will have to be modified by each generation to suit its own situational needs. If so, there is no point left in Iqbal's theory (faithfully reiterated by both Mawdudi and Parvez) of the organic unity of Islam and the implied rejection of secularism.

Secularism does not erode the Muslim's freedom in the transcendental '*I-Thou*' sphere. However, every society, whether homogeneous or plural, and every state, be it secular or religious, must inevitably constrain the freedom of the individual in social relationships. Consequently, the sense of external restraint is inseparable from the individual consciousness as such. The only difference is that in a plural society, which is predominantly non-Muslim, the sense of restraint will appear to flow primarily from an out-group, while in a homogeneous Muslim society, from an in-group. But it is pertinent to note that since the in-group itself can never be absolutely homogeneous, social-psychological tensions will again tend to arise between the constituent sub-groups. This is happening in Pakistan, which was established as a pure ideological state. Consequently, mutual understanding between different religious, linguistic, regional, and occupational groups becomes equally essential in both homogeneous and plural societies. Secularism is, thus, more relevant to the human situation in general than Iqbal's communitarianism with its restricted appeal to Muslims in a homogeneous or predominantly Muslim society.

## A NEW LOOK

Arab, Turkish, and Iranian Islamic modernists such as Ali Abdul Raziq (d. 1965), Taha Husayn (b. 1891), Ziya Gokulp (d. 1924) *et al.* also accept secularism, but they take another stand. They want the 'essence' of Islam to be maintained, while all accretions and details to be thrown away unceremoniously without any qualms of disloyalty to a long tradition. They are quite right up to a point, but unfortunately they oversimplify the issues involved and miss the essentially organic character of religious faith.

Ziya Gokalp and Raziq identify the essence of Islam with a simple monotheism minus the traditional conception of revelation, according to which the Quran is the infallible revealed Word of God. The conception of Islam, as entertained by Gokalp thus reduces Islam to a sort of 18<sup>th</sup> century British or French Deism, and to the view that religion is a matter of a personal relationship between the individual and God, without any beating upon the collective life of mankind. In other words, man is left free to order the social web of human life in accordance with his collective wisdom. The assumption is that men are quite capable of regulating their affairs satisfactorily in a democratic manner without any religious authority. This is a rejection of the traditional conception, according to which Islam offers complete and perfect guidance in every walk of life.

Ali Raziq's radical conception of Islam is marked by the incongruity and inadequacy of retaining the traditional Islamic conception of God without the corresponding traditional conception of revelation. If the traditional Islamic conception of God is retained, but the traditional conception of revelation is repudiated, mere belief in a God Who creates but does not guide His creatures, either through incarnation, in the traditional Christian sense, or through revelation, in the Islamic sense, satisfies neither the heart nor the head. A lacuna is left in this approach to Islam. Turkish and Arab Islamic modernists do not seem to be aware of the intellectual and spiritual difficulties inherent in combining an unqualified secularism with traditional Islamic monotheism. What Muslims all over the world require is the reconstruction of the traditional Islamic concepts of God and revelation so that they no longer conflict with science and secular humanism. In the absence of such

a reconstruction the combination of secularism with Islamic monotheism strikes a jarring note of discord between two incongruous concepts. Such a combination is an artificial or mechanical juxtaposition without inner organic harmony, and is liable to disintegrate. Such a patchwork synthesis leaves men as divided selves and split personalities, even though they may not be fully aware of their subtle spiritual predicament.

The same remarks apply to all those persons who are inclined to think that all will be well with Muslims, if their economic problems are solved, and that the reformation of Islamic concepts does more harm than good as it generates religious controversy. This line of thinking completely ignores the vital relationship between theory and practice in human life. Just as man finds it very difficult, if not impossible, to pursue morality without some sort of a theoretical basis or set of reasons for being moral (whether this base be supplied by theism, pantheism, or humanism, etc.), similarly it is very difficult, if not impossible, to pursue socio-economic objectives without a suitable theoretical rationale. Thus, if the members of a society consciously or unconsciously believe that poverty and riches are created by God rather than the results of human actions, their motivation will never be as powerful as of those who regard poverty a man-made evil. Similarly, the ideal of human brotherhood will never inspire a group, if it believes those who are outside the group will not find a place in heaven, no matter how morally good they might happen to be. Modernism as a mere socio-political expression will never suffice unless it touches those depths of the human personality where religion resides and operates.

We are thus justified in concluding that reconstructing the basic concepts and values of Islam is an unavoidable responsibility of Muslim intellectuals. Mere changes in sociopolitical infrastructure or, in other words, the schemes of modernization, as advocated by some Islamic liberals in India, Pakistan, and West Asia, will never prove effective unless they are rooted in a systematic and consistent thought system. Similarly, Mawdudi's program of the marginal reconstruction of Islamic polity will also not prove satisfactory. Neither Mawdudi nor the Turkish and Arab modernists attempt to reconstruct the basic Islamic thought system in the light of the ever-expanding frontiers of human knowledge. All said and done, only Indo-Pakistan thinkers like Iqbal (d. 1938), Azad (d. 1958), Fyzee, and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), etc. are sufficiently aware of this vital need.<sup>35</sup>

## FIELD INTEGRATION, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE: THEIR PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHIC

A fresh look at Islam by Muslim intellectuals is essential for giving enlightenment and guidance to the common Muslim, who stands totally perplexed by the antagonistic pulls of theocracy and democracy, clericalism and secularism, traditionalism and modernity. The average Muslim is more or less a split personality and must be helped to integrate himself.<sup>36</sup> The traditional conception of a monolithic religion poses a serious problem to him. As long as the inner logic of traditional Islam leads the Muslim in the direction of monolithic theocracy, and at the same time the logic of his historical situation pulls him in the direction of secular democracy, he can have no inner peace. To the extent that he refuses to come to grips with this basic conflict, he will continue to remain a split personality. The split is due to the basic conflict between the contemporary concept of secularism underlying the present Indian polity and the traditional concept of Islam, as a revealed code of conduct for every facet of human life.

The traditional conception further implies not only the Muslim's duty to submit himself to the discipline of the *shariah*, but also to try to convert non-Islamic states into Islamic ones. This approach makes non-Muslims suspect that all Muslims perpetually attempt to convert, if not subvert, their ways of life. The Muslim resents the suspicion of his loyalty, and feels that his loyalty to the Sovereign Lord of the universe is immensely more important than his image in the eyes of others. He believes that in trying to establish a Quranic world state he is really serving his fellow men better than they know how to serve themselves, rather than imposing an alien way of life.

Any alteration in one's religious convictions on grounds of political expediency or improving the community's image in the eyes of others is definitely wrong in principle. What is really needed is a genuine field integration and the realization that all cultural traditions, including Islam, need ceaseless self authentication, if they are not merely to endure but also prevail. This approach stands in quite a different category from opportunism and signifies inner growth rather than the loss of one's soul for the sake of worldly gain. It leads to an integrated human vision rather than to an eclectic compromise or patchwork synthesis dictated by situational needs or demands.

A mere pragmatic adjustment can never convince the person at the ex-

existential level, that is, in the depths of his being, even though it may appear to possess the virtue of situational expediency. No matter how well such a position may have served in the past and may promise to serve in the future, it will lack that power of existential conviction that prompts a Socrates to drink the hemlock with a smile, or a Husayn to embrace death as his highest destiny, or a Vietnamese woman to accept destruction in a foxhole, without the consolation of heaven, just for making the socialist dream come true for posterity. Now, whether we like it or not, some of the Western secular thought-cum-value systems such as Democracy, Socialism, and Communism, etc., do possess this inner structural harmony and existential appeal to their respective followers. This fire of conviction, needless to say, had once burnt in the hearts of the early Muslims also. But the fire gradually cooled down leaving behind only the ashes of a once living conviction. Religious faith is indeed like passionate love, which cannot be produced or extinguished at will. If love be present, the lover is carried on the wings of a sacred passion which makes the sacrifice of his comforts, nay life itself, a ready giving to the beloved rather than a painful duty. But if love be absent, neither logic, nor allurements, nor force suffices to impel such sacrifice, though prudence or sense of duty might prompt the service of others.

A basic difficulty that besets the traditional Indian Muslim is that he honestly believes in the superiority of his religion to all other religions, especially to polytheistic Hinduism, as he understands it. At the same time he finds himself in a hopeless minority as a result of the new democratic set-up in the country. Right up to 1750 A.D. the Indian Muslims had been the politically dominant minority in the country. Later the advent of British rule had deprived them of their dominant position, but they had never become dependent upon the Hindus. At present, however, the Indian Muslim is at a loss to know how to relate himself to Hinduism about which his information is very meager, in spite of the long contact between Islam and Hinduism. All that he does know about Hinduism is derived from a period in which Hinduism was decadent in many respects. The vital and creative period of Hinduism had ended with Harsha (d. 647 AD) almost four centuries before the effective political penetration into north India by the Ghori Pathans in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. Indian Muslims, therefore, never had any opportunity of seeing or studying Hinduism in its earlier period of creative glory. The early Arab scholars of the Abbasid period, who avidly translated Sanskrit classics into Arabic and learnt Indian numerals, astronomy, arithmetic, and chess, etc., must have entertained an image of Hinduism considerably different from that of the Ghori soldiers and administrators who established

themselves in Hindustan without much opposition. Perhaps something of the unconscious group pride still clings to the Indian Muslim mind. This was precisely the situation, which prevailed during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the establishment of British rule in 1857. But then the problem was posed by Christianity and the Englishman, with the result that Syed Ahmad was perpetually on the defensive against charges of appeasing the English and of watering down Islam to suit the then existing conditions.

It is thus necessary to correct and supplement the rather distorted and one-sided image of Hinduism in the minds of many Muslims. The grave evils that unfortunately crept into Hindu society long ago need not be glossed over by Muslims. Nor should the rather chauvinistic approach of some Hindu sections be silently accepted. At the same time the numerous elements of value in the long and rich Hindu tradition should be appreciated by the Muslim. In doing so the Muslim would find himself in a very distinguished company, indeed the company of some of the finest intellects of the world: from al-Bairuni to Max Mueller. It goes without saying that the Indian Hindus too must acquire an authentic and well-informed understanding of Islam, as distinguished from the rather superficial social contacts or mere political cooperation for short-term objectives.

Man is born egocentric, bred ethnocentric, but he is potentially 'value centric', that is, inwardly free to assimilate new values or to cultivate new dimensions in the traditional values. The inwardly free man is engaged in an eternal pilgrimage with no sectarian barriers in his way. His heroes are not Muslim, Hindu, or Christian, but just beacons of light that guide his own authentic quest for value. He is neither an imitator nor an originator, but only a truth-seeker gathering the pearls of truth wherever he finds them.

The study of the history of other religions will prove useful for acquiring a deeper insight into our own. Just as it is easier to detect the psychological defense mechanisms or motives of self-interest of others than one's own, so it is with groups. The limitations of other religions are much more easily grasped than those of one's own. Consequently, a critical sociological survey of other religions helps us to understand better the stages and laws of growth of our own culture or religion, its strength and its limitations. This comparative sociology of religions tends to dissolve our natural ethnocentricity and group self-conceit. Self-conceit prompts us to treat our own religion as a class by itself, and hence exempt from sociological laws that apply only to religions other than our own. Once we put aside natural ethnocentricity or 'group

snobbery', if I may call it so, we are in a much better position to appreciate the points of excellence of our own religion and its unique contribution to the human family at large.

History avers that no group or tradition can grow and prosper without intelligent self-interpretation. Modern Western culture has been particularly receptive to self-criticism and it is precisely due to this that it continues to grow and flourish. Protestant Christian thinkers such as Matthew Arnold, Tolstoy, Schweitzer, Bultmann, Tillich, Niebuhr, Ramsey, Robinson and others have revised traditional Christian concepts and values without breaking away from the tradition. The Catholic Church has not approved of these essays in conceptual reconstruction, and remains conservative in its approach. But now it is also displaying a new dynamism. Hinduism has been reinterpreted by Rammohun Roy, Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, and Radhakrishnan, etc. But it appears to me that the systematic reconstruction of Islamic concepts and values has relatively trailed behind in the modern era, though Muslim thinkers were in the vanguard of field integration in the medieval age.

The spiritual and religious history of the West is deeply relevant to Muslims. The achievements of Christian thought must be sympathetically studied for the light it could throw on our own problems and prospects. The counsel of some to accept Western science and technology, but not bother about its spiritual and religious history is both superficial and barren. Conceit is as irrational as blind imitation.

It seems to me that Muslims are relatively more sensitive than non-Muslims to criticism, no matter how objective and academic, on religious issues. It is a common grouse of even highly educated Muslims that Western non-Muslim scholars knowingly or unknowingly distort the truth about Islam due to religious prejudice or political hostility, etc. This makes Western scholarship suspect in the eyes of traditional Muslims. This is indeed most unfortunate. While most Christian writers were manifestly prejudiced against Islam right till the closing years of the last century, the approach of contemporary Western scholars of non-Christian cultures has undergone a qualitative change due to a number of reasons. It would be sheer folly and misfortune for the Muslims to ignore the sympathetic yet critical and balanced evaluations and findings of a Gibb or an Arberry merely because their agreement with traditional Islamic views may not be complete. A dogmatic or defensive rejection of the fruits of free enquiry is no less undesirable than mere fashionable imitation of things Western.



No cultural system, whether religious or secular, can be completely free from spatiotemporal traces. The sincere effort to transcend the limitations of the tradition while remaining loyal to its basic values constitutes creative fidelity to the tradition. The jurists of Islam have in theory evolved a very rational procedure for bringing about orderly changes in the situational concretion of the Islamic value system. But changes based on individual reflection (*ijtihad*) have been very slow and halting, utterly failing to keep pace with a rapidly changing and fast moving world. Even when changes have been accepted by some liberal Muslims, others have continued to question their bona fides. The true conservative seldom gives up the pious hope that the erring members of the group will recant one day. Consequently, he is averse to the 'legitimization' of even the *de facto* changes wrought by time into the religious tradition. However, if the changes take deep roots, showing no sign of dislodgement from the liberal sections of the group, the conservative in time becomes partly reconciled to them.

The creation of new values and the conservation of the old ones that have stood the test of time are both equally necessary. In fact they depend upon each other. The creation of new values presupposes a valuational base or support. Similarly, the effective maintenance of this base demands awareness of the subtle changes in the nuances of human experience. Eternal and intelligent vigilance is the price of keeping old values alive in the condition of dynamic interaction with the environment, rather than as showpieces in the museum of man's heritage.

Creativity ever spurs men to go ahead in the realm of values and to yearn for the better rather than be content with the good. The function of tradition, on the other hand, is to strike a note of caution, lest the pace of change increase to the point of giving diminishing returns. The function of tradition is not the stoppage of growth but only the regulation of the speed of growth. Thus the conservative approach has its own function in the economy of human progress, provided it does not overreach itself. However, the pure conservative or modernist approaches tend to assume the two dimensional, either/or, logic of evaluation, according to which an object is either good or bad and should either be conserved or rejected. This type of blanket evaluation misses the complexity of the object judged. Evaluation must be preceded by an analysis of the elements and structure of the object in question and separate elements must be evaluated separately. All cultural traditions comprise separate elements of value and of disvalue, instead of

being monolithic structures of either value or disvalue. The evolutionary approach ensures the blending of continuity and change. It criticizes and overcomes the elements of disvalue in the tradition while making the elements of value the nucleus of further growth.

Creativity and conservation should therefore dovetail into and supplement each other. Without creativity conservation leads to fossilization, while without conservation, creativity leads to irresponsible experimentation. While such adventures in the realm of art and literature may not be injurious, they could prove catastrophic in the realm of moral and social relationships. The new sex morality of Western Europe and America, according to which the game of sex may be played between any two willing parties without any mutual obligation arising there from, has played havoc with the spiritual growth of the contemporary Western man. It appears to me that the West is gradually realizing its fallacy and that a more balanced interpretation of sex is in the process of crystallization. Similarly, the limitations of different movements such as nationalism, capitalism, socialism, and scientism, etc., are being acknowledged. Humanity would have been spared countless tears, had the human judgment been more balanced and well informed. But man blunders, pays the penalty in the course of time, and forges ahead.

The revision of concepts is a continuing and self-correcting process. All attempted revisions are rooted in the concepts and values of the time and place of the integrating individual, though creative individuals are never merely reflections of their environment. No particular integration, whether made by an Ibn Sina or a Ghazzali, an Aquinas or a Kant, a Syed Ahmad or an Iqbal, can be accepted as final. The task of the systematic interpretation of the human situation is an unending collective task, at once the burden and the privilege of the human species rather than of any individual.

This conceptual evolution or reconstruction in the meaning of traditional symbols and images takes time. There may be said to be a 'conceptual lag' just as there is a cultural lag. The concept of conceptual lag makes us tolerant towards the tradition-oriented person. In this context the methodological approach of some Western philosophers is illuminating. They hold that philosophical or theological disputes arise because different persons select different features for emphasis within the same set of facts. Hence, the important thing is not the verbal formulation but rather the full awareness of the complexity of the set of facts. Provided this complexity is grasped, any formulation may be retained. This principle may be called the 'principle

of formulational tolerance'. This together with the concept of conceptual lag should help our modernists in carrying out an authentic and fruitful dialogue with the traditionalists, as recommended above.

The principle of formulational tolerance is not an innovation in the cultural tradition of Islam, as is attested by the well-known story of *Moses and the Shepherd* in the *Masnawi* of Maulana Rum.<sup>37</sup> Earlier still, both Ghazzali and Ibn Rushd had said that truth must be communicated to suit the mental level of the hearer. This approach releases us from the monopolistic grip of traditional formulations and also the jargon of our own pet interpretative system.<sup>38</sup>

The concrete life situation of every person being unique, the concrete problems or tensions arising out of the different fields of human experience vary from case to case. The need, urgency, and range of field integration can, therefore, never be uniform for all persons. Where field tensions are not pronounced and an individual is happy and satisfied with his religious beliefs field integration is unnecessary. To make him aware of field tensions that have been registered by philosophers or other sophisticated intellects, but not by an average person, and then to help him overcome those tensions through field integration would be partly similar to raising the blood pressure of a healthy individual to a high degree, and then again bringing it down to normal through some therapy. Nevertheless, the generation of doubt in a satisfied individual is not pointless, since this encourages the conceptual or spiritual growth of individuals by increasing the area and depth of their awareness. This is the legacy of Socrates. The average believer, however, no matter what his religion, does not realize the need for the continuous search for new meanings of old concepts in the light of advancing human knowledge.

The cumulative growth in man's factual knowledge in the modern era has profoundly modified the basic conceptual framework of those who are aware of these developments. Now many such people just find it impossible to accept traditional interpretations. At the same time they do not see any point in repudiating or rejecting their cherished tradition with which they continue to feel a sense of emotional involvement and identification. They still draw inspiration from the tradition, but are not prepared to abdicate their own spiritual autonomy. It is these people who yearn for a new interpretation of basic religious concepts in the idiom of contemporary thought. This is not tantamount to making concessions or 'adjustments' for the sake

of expediency or material gain, but reflects an awareness of the intellectual difficulties in the traditional thought or value system.

The quest for growth, must not, however, blind us to the power of the symbols and images of a tradition. These symbols must be retained and at the same time they must be reconstructed. If the symbols are discarded, the creative person isolates himself from the tradition and his new insights have no prestigious vessels to be poured into. If on the other hand the symbols are retained, it becomes very difficult to make them first absorb or assimilate and then convey the new ideas and values in question. The symbols cast their shadows and tend to obscure and distort the fresh stirrings of the human soul. Moreover, even if this difficulty be overcome there is another dilemma. If the symbols are retained in their traditional sense the reformer is heard and understood by the group, but the group does not move forward towards the vision of the leader. If the symbols are formally retained but their meaning or significance radically altered, he tends to suffer from a sense of intellectual dishonesty, and is also liable to be charged with hypocrisy by those who do not feel dissatisfied with the traditional meanings of the symbols in question. Every creative individual, therefore, has to solve this predicament. The fear of the charge of hypocrisy should not deprive him of the advantages of his membership of a living church or tradition. Provided he feels an emotional involvement with the tradition and genuinely finds many elements of value in the historical personalities and events of that tradition, he should go ahead with the task of reconstructing the tradition. The charge of hypocrisy cannot after all be treated as more discouraging or demoralizing than the charge of apostasy that was the order of the day in medieval times, nay, right up to our own.

The charge of hypocrisy will be valid only if the individual distorts his authentic meanings in order to get an audience. If the recommended changes in the meanings of the traditional symbols are fully and frankly acknowledged, employing those symbols for facilitating the genuine creative growth of the community can never be regarded as hypocrisy. Indeed this is the only way to further the cause of cultural evolution. The modifications in the traditional concepts and values should be viewed as fruits growing upon the tree of a living tradition rather than as alterations in an inherited inert brick and mortar structure for the sake of a better '*adjustment*' to life. This concept of growth, as distinguished from alteration, should dispel any lingering sense of disloyalty to the tradition.