

ESSAY 2

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM?

The expression '*religious fundamentalism*' first came into common use in approximately 1920 in the USA as the name of a vigorous Christian movement to oppose Christian liberalism, which had earlier swept the Western world from the mid 19th century onwards. The fundamentalist's looked upon the ongoing wave of liberal Christianity as a grave dilution of the very essentials or fundamentals of the Christian faith, as they saw it. They aimed to restore the said fundamentals to their central position in the Christian belief system. They also desired that religion should function as the rock bottom foundation of all human activity instead of being regarded merely as one of the players on the human scene, as it were.

The Steward brothers in the USA published several religious tracts on Christian fundamentalism between 1910-15. The Five Points of Fundamentalism were, inerrancy of the Bible, virgin birth of Jesus, supernatural atonement, physical resurrection of Jesus, and authenticity of Gospel miracles. To these might also be added the acceptance of the Bible in the literal sense. The fundamentalist movement reached a climax in USA in 1925 when its leaders prosecuted a Biology teacher on the charge that his teaching Darwin's theory of evolution to school children was an anti-Christian activity which came under a local legal ban. The prosecution attempt, however, failed.

The fundamentalist movement in the New World was a very late and minor attack on Christian liberalism relative to the much earlier counter-attack by the Catholic Church in the last quarter of the 19th century. Pope Pious IX enumerated and condemned sixty-nine propositions of modernism. Pope Leo XIII warned against 'Higher Criticism' of the Bible in order to check the growing trend among liberal and rationalist Christian circles to question the dogma of the literal truth and the authenticity of the gospels. Pope Pious X banned 'modernist' religious literature. By 1910 some modernist Catholics were excommunicated from the Church.

Christian liberalism (which was rather pejoratively called Christian 'modernism' by the Orthodox Church circles) was the mature fruit of the great liberal rational upsurge or 'Enlightenment' which had spread in Western Europe before and after the French Revolution of 1789. This had led to a liberal and permissive approach to institutional Christianity among the educated and rising upper middle classes in the entire West. No longer was religion supposed to dominate and legislate for every sphere of human activity and no longer did the writ of religion run supreme over the state.

Thus, the new economic thinking ceased to respect the traditional doctrine of the Church that interest on sums lent to others was sinful. Likewise, the new political thinking was premised on the rights of man rather than obedience to a king, as the shadow of God, or to the Pope, as the *Vicar of Christ*. The new world view affirmed that man was born to fashion nature and society after the ideals he freely cherished rather than to prepare for the hereafter, according to a rigid total code of conduct, that free enquiry, tolerance and compassion for others was the right and desirable response to cultural, religious and racial plurality found in human society, rather than the objective of universal conversion to the one true religion of Christianity. God, certainly, had not been dethroned or executed except for a brief period immediately after the French Revolution. But in the emerging value system of the 'Enlightenment' the belief in the fatherhood of God had become optional, while the brotherhood of man, the supremacy of reason and the tolerance of dissent the corner-stone of the new secular as well as Christian thinking.

The towering liberal thinkers who had ushered in the 'Enlightenment': Locke (d. 1704) and Hume (d. 1776) in England, Rousseau (d. 1778) and Voltaire (d. 1778) in France, Kant (d. 1804) and Hegel (d. 1831), Goethe (d. 1832) and Schiller (d. 1805) in Germany, among others; were neither materialists nor atheists, nor were they Christians in the traditional sense. They held on to Christianity or rather to Christian Deism, in their own way, remaining highly sensitive to the order and beauty as well as the chaos and sordidness of the universe. They also remained deeply committed to the spiritual and moral values of Christianity. In other words, they had 'liberated' Christianity from the stranglehold of theology and canon law but did not repudiate the basic 'Idea of the Holy' and the sense of inscrutable mystery underlying the universe. This constituted the nucleus of the liberal Christianity, as distinct from the traditional version of Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant.

To sum up, religious liberalism does not reject the function and the power of religion to nurse, purify and elevate the human spirit; it merely rejects the iron grip of religious authoritarianism on every aspect of human life. Religious liberalism, thus, stresses the crucial importance of cultivating the spiritual dimension of life along with other human concerns or needs: material, social, intellectual and aesthetic. Religious fundamentalism stresses the crucial importance of having faith in the infallibility of some scripture or person and of unquestioning obedience or submission to the said authority.

It is pertinent to point out that while the prefix, 'liberal', is quite illuminating in the literal sense, the other prefix, 'fundamentalist', is rather ambivalent. It illuminates but at the same time it also misleads those who may not be aware of how the term 'fundamentalism' became current coin. The word 'fundamental' means, as we all know, the essential part of a larger totality or whole. In this sense the 'fundamentals' of any religion, system of thought or discipline would mean the basic or essential core of the said religion or thought system. In this sense, therefore, all those Christians who stick to the essentials (as they see them) of the Christian faith but reject the secondary or tertiary detailed interpretations and institutions of the Church could be said to be 'fundamentalist Christians' with much greater justification than those Christians who do not bother to separate the essentials or fundamentals of Christianity from Christianity in the concrete historical sense.

The actual usage of the word, 'fundamental Christianity', however, is quite different. The actual use stipulates that a 'fundamentalist Christian' is one who accepts the fundamental importance and supreme authority of a religious authority in every walk of life and rejects the view that there may be some spheres of human activity where independent reasoning and spiritual autonomy may be more desirable, rather necessary for the pursuit of truth and human welfare.

In view of the established usage it is, perhaps, better to stick to it rather than to question or disapprove the appellation 'fundamentalist' in the context of Islam or any other religion. After all the word 'fundamentalism' is also used in a broadly similar, though not exactly parallel sense, in the contexts of say, economics, agriculture, industry, and various branches of knowledge. Thus, we could say, quite justifiably, that Marx stood for economic fundamentalism, Freud for sexual fundamentalism, Comte, the great French

thinker of mid 19th century, for ethical fundamentalism, while the Western civilization, in general, stands for industrial fundamentalism.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY

Today one hears a lot about Islamic fundamentalism, but hardly about the fundamentalist versions of other religions. The reason for this is not any prejudice or hostility against Islam or the Muslims, as the latter generally tend to believe. The plain fact is that while religious fundamentalism has practically withered away or is merely peripheral in major religions, other than Islam, fundamentalist thinking remains fairly strong and vigorous in Muslim societies.

The ongoing struggle of Muslim countries to free them-selves from the iron grip of Western political and economic domination also goes to reinforce fundamentalist thinking among Muslims. The search for national or regional self-assertion and dignity of the 'Muslim David' against the 'Western Goliath' often takes the form of or seeks inspiration from religious fundamentalism tinged by Messianic hopes of the eventual triumph of Islam in the world at large. The life situation of other large religious groups of the human family being quite otherwise they gravitate to other patterns of religious response or behavior.

Western Europe and America were the first Christian societies to outgrow the religious fundamentalism of the medieval era. As is well known, the USA was the first major state based on the principle that religion was a personal matter of the citizens of the American state which, as a state, did not profess any particular religion, but respected and guaranteed the freedom of conscience of all its citizens. The idea of a secular state, thus, never repudiated the validity of different religious faiths professed by its citizens as autonomous individuals. Hinduism soon followed the modern Western example.

As we all know, the people of medieval India were, predominantly Hindu, but the country was under Muslim hegemony for several centuries. It is utterly false and misleading to view this historical reality as a picture of Hindu-Muslim confrontation, or of Hindu enslavement under Muslim tyranny. The basic truth is that extended Muslim hegemony and religious, social and cultural interaction between the two major segments of the popu-

lation worked, slowly and silently, to a pragmatic separation of the spheres of politics and religion. In other words, the modern principle of separation of politics and religion came to prevail in practice, due to the peculiarities of the medieval Indian situation, without the word 'secularism' or the terms 'liberalism' and 'fundamentalism' coming into use. In effect, the rules and the elite (both Hindu and Muslim) functioned 'as if' religion was a matter of personal faith, while politics was centered on loyalty to the sovereign, quite irrespective of his religion. Though the Muslim *ulema* in general, in the name of Islamic fundamentalism, disapproved of this pragmatic separation, the *Sufis*, in general, preferred the path of religious 'quietism' and practical indifference to the state.

This was the scenario in which the *Battle of Plassey* in 1757 paved the way for British political supremacy and the resultant social and cultural interaction between the triumphant West and the decaying East. This interaction gradually led to the emergence of modern Hindu liberalism, to begin with, and subsequently, of modern Indian territorial nationalism, secular democracy and the struggle for liberation from British colonialism. Islamic liberalism in the modern sense, emerged approximately a century later, in the thinking of Sir Syed (d. 1898), Ghalib (d. 1869), Salar Jung (d. 1887), and Badruddin Tyabji (d. 1906) *et al.*

However, this approach could not adequately develop and get consolidated in Muslim thinking. For various reasons, which need not be elaborated here, the struggle against colonialism led to unresolved internal differences between different sections of Indian opinion over the sharing of power after independence. This resulted in the partition of the country in 1947 as the price for the transfer of power from the British.

Of late Hindu fundamentalism is trying to assert itself against the much more powerful and well established liberal versions of modern Hinduism which fructified first in late 18th century Bengal and, subsequently, in different parts of the land. So far Hindu fundamentalism in India is merely an emerging trend rather than an established pattern of Hindu response. In this case also the real but rather hidden players on the contemporary Indian scene are political and economic factors, rather than simple religious piety. In view of the enormous internal divisions and clashing interests of Indian society and the Hindu family itself a monolithic fundamentalist response does not at all appear likely. The sound and fury of some militant Hindu fundamentalists seems to have unnerved liberal sections, both Hindu and

Muslim. However, my perception is that if those who are genuinely committed to secular democracy (and I believe they are quite large in numbers) carry on their work on right lines secular democracy, as enshrined in the constitution of India, will prevail.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND SECULAR DEMOCRACY

The central point or purpose of this section is to articulate the following insight: Though there is a basic conflict between religious fundamentalism and humanistic secular democracy there is no conflict between religion, as 'spiritualized morality and faith in the Unseen', and secularism. This insight is very simple and fruitful, but many conventionally religious persons, especially among the Muslims, are apt to miss this crucial truth.

It is a rather common tacit assumption that the separation of politics from religion amounts to politics without any moral or ethical constraints. Many of those who oppose separating or de-linking politics from religion, disapprove of, in real terms, the idea of amoral politics rather than of secular politics as such. However, they are hardly aware of this confusion in their thinking.

The plain fact of the matter is that the principled separation of politics from religion entails neither the rejection nor the devaluation of religion and of morality. What the modern principle of separation does is merely to say that the proper jurisdiction of religion be restricted to the sphere of the moral and the spiritual dimensions of life. Religious liberalism accepts the principle of separation, while religious fundamentalism affirms that the jurisdiction of religion is total.

If we accept the principle of separation no conflict will ever arise between science and religion, or between reason and revelation and faith, or between secularism and spiritualism. In the domain of sense perception and empirical explanation, which jointly comprise factual knowledge, we ought to accept the exclusive authority and methodology of science; in the domain of spirituality and morality we ought to accept as final the inner authority of our authentic creative conscience or of some spiritual leader of our own choice, as the case may be. Likewise, in the domain of logic or deductive reasoning we may accept the authority of the analytical intellect, while in the domain of the metaphysical interpretation of the mystery of the

universe we may accept our own conceptual picture or existential insight, or the insights provided by some preceptor or guide. Yet again, in the domain of polity we may accept the authority of reversible secular legislation, subject to continuing democratic review, in the light of actual experience; while in the domain of art and culture we may accept the authority of our own aesthetic preferences of taste. In short, we can live harmoniously on different planes which will not clash, provided we do not seek to bring them all under the total jurisdiction of one single authority, be it religion, philosophy, logic, science or art.

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

I would like to round off the above conceptual analysis of religious fundamentalism with some specific remarks on Islamic fundamentalism in both theory and practice.

Sizeable sections of Muslims in different parts of the world still gravitate to the pre-modern fundamentalist approach to religion. Liberal Muslim intellectuals or leaders are apt to be criticized or denounced as opportunists rather than as honest seekers of truth, as they see it. A very large number of conventional Muslims are still in the grip of the rather facile assumption that there is only one model or paradigm of true Islam; their own conception. All other versions are looked upon as heresies. There is no developed concept of the tolerance of dissent and of plural interpretations of the Islamic creed itself. The traditional version of Islamic tolerance is restricted to acceptance of plural schools of jurisprudence and the prohibition of forcible conversion to Islam; the traditional version or concept does not include the dimension of the unfettered 'freedom of conscience' as a basic human right. The *'Fear of Freedom'*, as beautifully put by Erich Fromm, still grips the Muslim mind. This fear leads to their distrust of democracy in the present, their nostalgia for the golden period of Islamic piety in the past, and their yearning for a future Messiah.

Muslim believers are generally inclined to hold that other religions may allow the separation of politics and religion since their scriptures or founders have not provided complete and detailed guidance for life as a totality. Since, however, this is, precisely, what the Prophet of Islam has done, it is said that Muslims have the religious obligation to bring the totality of life

under the jurisdiction of religion. Many non-Muslim scholars also appear to endorse this view, despite the fact that several eminent Islamic liberals have unequivocally rejected this approach.

Indeed, it is incorrect to hold that among the various world religions Islam, alone, prescribes a complete way of life in addition to the prescribed code of spiritual discipline, prayer, and fasting, etcetera. The plain fact is that up to the closing years of the 18th century every world religion aspired to regulate every sphere of the life of its followers; food, dress, entertainment, laws of marriage, inheritance and punishment for crimes, methods of governance and trade practices, etc. It is quite immaterial whether these directives were contained in the principal scripture or in the ancillary regulations of the various religions, since they all claimed to be sacrosanct and authoritative.

What really differentiates Islam from other religions is the very early unification of church and state in the career of Islam while this process took centuries to get completed in the case of other religions. The union of church and state in Islam had been effected in the last few years of the Prophet's life at Medina. On the other hand, this union was achieved after centuries had lapsed in the case of Buddhism, under Ashoke, and of Christianity, under Constantine. Though the career of Hinduism refuses to conform to any usual slot the *Brahmanic* religion also proffered to be a complete guide or way of life for the faithful. However, the peculiar historical feature of Islam has definitely led Muslims and others also to believe that Islam alone teaches the organic unity of the spiritual and the worldly, or of the sacred and secular aspects of life.

The protagonists of Islamic fundamentalism, further, hold that the ever-changing human situation does not pose any difficulty in accepting that the Islamic canon law (*shariah*) is applicable in every walk of life. The reason given is that the Islamic doctrine itself authorizes the Muslim scholar jurists (*ulema*) to reinterpret, modify and develop the *shariah* to meet new needs and changed situations in the course of time. This is the position, which Iqbal and Mawdudi have adopted, though it would be unfair to bracket the two of them on the scale of religious fundamentalism.

The above mentioned line of thinking, certainly, does help Muslim society to meet the challenges of an ever changing human situation, and is, therefore, a definite improvement upon the extremely rigid and stagnant views held by some Islamic fundamentalists of the old school. Nevertheless,

the qualified liberal content of the approaches of Iqbal and Mawdudi will not suffice to meet the requirements of Muslims in the modern age. Their approaches do not question the underlying traditional assumption about the jurisdiction of religion. In other words, these approaches remain rooted in the traditional paradigm of religion as a total code of conduct rather than as 'spiritualized morality'. Consequently, the above approaches do not enable genuine Muslim believers inwardly to accept the modern idea of the separation of politics and religion, and its corollary that this separation does not, necessarily, lead to totally unprincipled or amoral politics.

The approaches of Iqbal and Mawdudi may work (up to a point) in purely or, predominantly, Muslim societies, but they will just break down in plural societies, which, as we know, are the general rule in the modern scientific and technological age. However, even in Muslim societies composed of different Muslim sects or denominations intra-Islamic tensions and conflicts are bound to arise when the spheres of politics and religion are not clearly demarcated.

Educated Muslims today are faced with a deep spiritual crisis. They are confused as to what is the true face of their cherished religion. The middle of the road or qualified liberal position of Iqbal and Mawdudi evokes somewhat less resistance than does the modern idea of separation of religion and state. It is true that Muslims in India today vociferously proclaim the virtues of secularism. But I, respectfully, submit that very few among the Muslim advocates of secularism have a sound and consistent vision or world view which could effectively support their rather superficial secularism.

The Islamic paradigm held by Iqbal and Mawdudi or the rulers in Iran, Libya and Saudi Arabia will not suffice for the present age. What the Muslims need today is an informed and honest questioning (based on the history, sociology and philosophy of religion) of the traditional idea of the function and jurisdiction of religions, including Islam. This questioning will, perhaps, reveal that the Islamic approaches of Sir Syed and Azad are more relevant and fruitful than those of others. This, however, is not to say that their positions require no amendments or inner growth. In the final analysis, the growth of new ideas and values and the ceaseless flowering of new dimensions within them is the only way to arrive at complete truth, which, however, recedes even as we just manage to catch a glimpse.

RELIGIOUS PREDICAMENT OF MUSLIMS TODAY

The predicament of Muslims in the modern age is that their religious tradition stands for the unity of religion and state, while the modern mind stands for the separation of religion and state. The Islamic tradition is that Islam is not merely a spiritual discipline, but a complete way of life, including a polity (*shariah*). Though not inspired like the Quran, the *shariah* is deemed as all embracing and sacrosanct. Only the *ulema* are empowered to modify it according to a definite procedure. But it would be absurd to claim or expect that the *shariah* should be binding on the Parliament of a sovereign secular state. Muslims in general hold that a sovereign secular democratic state is bound to fall headlong into ‘Satanic’ politics and the amoral pursuit of power. In other words, they equate the separation of religion from politics with immoral politics. They honestly tend to hold that the secular approach to politics destroys or erodes true Islam which is a seamless and complete map of conduct according to Divine guidance. This is the spiritual predicament of traditional Muslims all over the world including the followers of Mawdudi’s school of Islamic thought that is, relatively, liberal, but falls short of the fully integrated and spiritualized religious sensibility of the modern mind.

Western educated Muslims in general, and, particularly, those belonging to plural societies are, increasingly, becoming aware of this predicament. But they lack the moral courage and the credentials to question the validity of the time honoured traditional approach and the exclusive authority of the *ulema* in such matters. Another reason why the educated Muslim laity is reluctant to assert itself is the lack of proper grounding in religious learning and the Arabic language. These perplexed believers silently wait for the day when the *ulema*, on their own, will take the initiative to revise or redefine the proper scope of the *shariah*.

The *ulema*, hardly aware of the complex issues of modernity (understandably) suffer and, unconsciously, go on the defensive when confronted with the immense gap between medieval learning and the much more developed natural and social sciences in the modern age. I submit, in all humility, they, in the best interests of all concerned, should ponder on the full implications of four basic truths:

(a) granted that all Muslim believers must accept the Quranic text as infallible, no human interpretation of the text can claim to be infallibly true;

(b) interpretation, in some form or other, necessarily, enters into all efforts at understanding the Quranic text;

c) the proper understanding of any communication involves a frame of reference within which the 'addressee' interprets the words or expressions used in the original communication;

(d) the frame of reference as well as the concrete meanings or usages of words necessarily change in the course of time. These truths apply to all communications or languages including the 'Word of God'.

It follows that whosoever interprets the Quran, whether one be an Arabic speaking lay person or scholar, necessarily, interprets the Scripture relative to one's own set of Arabic usage and understanding of the context of the communication. The *ulema* are entitled to the utmost respect because they know the language and are also better informed of the history and context of the revealed contents. But this could hardly justify them to suppress the spiritual autonomy of other believers to reinterpret the Scripture. This was the stand of Martin Luther when he challenged the Pope's claim to be infallible.

Gandhiji took the same stand when he redefined Hinduism and purged it of much that was dear to orthodox Hindus. Muslims face a similar challenge and are called upon to define the quintessence of Islam in the modern age. Some *Sufi* versions of Islam have done so already. However, this task is a continuing one. The right direction for Muslims in the modern age is the critical redefining of the proper scope or jurisdiction of the *shariah*, and the dynamic cultivation of the 'essence' of Islamic faith and spirituality. Sir Syed and Azad strongly recommended this, while Iqbal did the same. Mawdudi merely recommended making adjustments in the polity of the *shariah*. This was his idea of combining modernity and tradition. He stood for a reformed and dynamic *shariah* but he just did not or could not appreciate the scope and spirit of religious liberalism, under the impact of the scientific revolution and European Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries. Mawdudi was, certainly, not a supporter of terrorism or Islamic extremism. However, one can say that they are the illegitimate and unwanted children of Mawdudi's earnest quest for Islamic resurgence without his having acquired a critical but sympathetic insight into the concepts and values of liberal religious modernity.

The indirect impact of the Aligarh Movement did produce some eminent liberal Indian Muslims, like Badruddin Tyabji (d. 1906), Amir Ali, Yusuf Ali (d. 1953), Iqbal (d. 1938), and Azad (d. 1958) *et al.* However, with the solitary exception of Azad, in his later mature phase, none of these luminaries addressed themselves critically (unlike the great Sir Syed) to the crucial issue of the essential nature and function of religion in the modern age. For all his vast range of learning and his poetic genius Iqbal reiterated that Islam was an organic unity of the spiritual and the mundane in a manner that indirectly perpetuated the hold of '*shariah*' as a seamless all embracing code of conduct. Abul Kalam Azad showed greater awareness and willingness to face this issue in a consistent and realistic spirit though his accessibility to Western thought was considerably less than that of Iqbal. However, Azad's more insightful and realistic approach was overshadowed by the charisma of Iqbal's immortal poetry.

Iqbal's poetic genius and wide exposure to modern European thought and culture had given him an international reputation. His impact upon the Indian Muslim educated classes was almost as great as that of Tagore on the liberal Indian mind as a whole. But Iqbal became many things for many people, stimulating and inspiring Muslim politicians, journalists, theologians and intellectuals alike, including some non-Muslim circles as well. Iqbal's Islamic outlook was liberal and dynamic and contained powerful elements of modern religious existentialism. He, following Sir Syed, made a laudable attempt actually to '*reconstruct religious thought in Islam*'. He also strongly pleaded for reconstructing the traditional corpus of the *shariah*. A young and bright *urdu* journalist, Abul Ala Mawdudi, responded though he was hardly gifted to understand and appreciate the creative genius of the poet philosopher. Indeed, Iqbal's insight into the human situation was incomparably wider, deeper and far more logically penetrating than that of Mawdudi, who was, essentially, a modern incarnation of the *Deobandi* approach to Islam. However, political factors just before and after the partition in 1947 pushed Mawdudi into ever growing prominence. Iqbal's eloquent and philosophically backed stress that Islam stood for the organic unity of the mundane and the spiritual greatly helped Mawdudi in expanding his influence among Indian Muslims. At a deeper conceptual level the two towering modern Indian religious thinkers, Iqbal and Azad, were religious existentialists, but they started to drift in different paths from the early thirties of the 20th century. This was a long period of political disillusionment and ideological confusion in the Indian sub-continent after the failure of

the Gandhian vision and promise of Hindu-Muslim unity in a free India. Iqbal's religious existentialism and radical plea for reconstructing religious thought in Islam gradually yielded to the rather simplistic approach of Mawdudi that the mere 'adjustment' of the *shariah* was the panacea for the ills of the modern age.

The Western educated Indian Muslims whose intellectual *Mecca* was the Aligarh Muslim University were seduced, as it were, by Mawdudi's catchy phrase '*God's sovereignty*' and Iqbal's eloquent expression '*the organic union of the spiritual and the mundane*' as the differentia of Islam. They then deduced that Islam was incompatible with modern secular democracy, and were unfortunately propelled into accepting the monstrosity of the two-nation theory as the justification for the creation of a separate and sovereign homeland for the Muslims of India. What is happening in the homeland is the virtual banishment of the dream of Iqbal, Jinnah *et al* and the virtual strangulation of the spirit of the religious existentialism of both Iqbal and Azad at the altar of the movement for the Islamization of the polity of Pakistan.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AS A MINDSET:

The expression 'Islamic Fundamentalism' irritates many Muslim quarters. I have the least desire to hurt Muslim co-religionists and will gladly abjure the use of this term. But the point is that some other expression will be required to designate a definite attitude or approach to religion or to a religious mindset clearly different from the mindset designated as 'religious liberalism'.

The term 'religious fundamentalism' was first used in the late 19th century to pinpoint the distinction between the new liberal version of Christianity and the dominant Catholic Church. The term, 'fundamentalism' was gradually extended to contexts other than religion. Thus it became meaningful to say that Karl Marx was an 'economic fundamentalist', or that Freud, a 'sexual fundamentalist', because Marx' primary stress was upon economic factors and Freud's stress was upon sex in their basic thinking.

The word 'fundamentalism' is quite useful in the above sense. But it is also used to refer to the roots or essence of a thought or value system. Thus, one refers to the 'fundamentals' of Marxism or, for that matter, to 'the fundamentals' of Philosophy/ Economics/ Mechanics, and so on. Now, it is one

thing to be committed to the 'fundamentals' of any religion, be it Islam or what not; it is an entirely different thing to be a 'religious fundamentalist'. Sir Syed, Iqbal, and Azad were all committed to the fundamentals of Islam, but they were far from being 'Islamic fundamentalists' in the technical sense which first emerged in the late 19th century.

In the technical sense 'religious fundamentalism' means that religion is the final and supreme lever for controlling and directing the course of life in all its myriad aspects or dimensions. In this sense, Christianity, Buddhism, and modern Hinduism have all abdicated this claim in modern times. However, some schools of Islam and Islamic political quarters still wield this claim as an ideology as well as vigorous practical politics. The expression 'Islamic fundamentalism' is thus quite current, while one hardly hears of Christian or Hindu fundamentalists. Unfortunately, some sections among the vast Hindu population of India are now being powerfully attracted to 'Vedic Fundamentalism'. It seems to me that this is a passing phase.

What are the fundamentals of Islam? For the best answer to this question I would rather turn to Sir Syed and Azad and (to a lesser degree) to Iqbal. The case of Jinnah is unique. For the major part of his life he stood for the fundamentals of Islam, and vigorously opposed Islamic fundamentalism, in the technical sense. But the trials, tribulations and temptations of politics made him drift into the direction of 'Muslim separatism' without his turning into a religious fundamentalist. The case of Azad is just the reverse. To begin with, he was a sort of religious fundamentalist but he flowered into an outstanding religious liberal.

The essence of Islamic fundamentalism is to stress the seamless unity of religion and politics as the twin sides of Islam. The essence of Islamic liberalism (as well as of all religious liberalism) is the proper demarcation of the function and sphere of religion. The present day Islamic militants go a step further and turn into '*Islamic Naxalites*', as it were. Dividing the human family into '*the party of God*' and '*the party of the Devil*', they outrun the, relatively, sober views of Mawdudi. Pakistan is now bearing the brunt of their violent irrationalism in the name of 'true Islam'. The vision of Islamic moderation and liberalism projected by Iqbal, Ayub and Musharraf will have to face and overcome immense obstacles due to the aberrations and blunders of the past regimes.

The dominant *Sunni* Islam combines belief in pure Monotheism with the belief that the long line of Divine messengers finally culminated in

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Though the Islamic formula of faith, ‘*There is no god except God; Muhammad is His Messenger*’ does not specifically refer to the finality of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Quranic text describes him as the ‘*seal of the prophets*’. His being the last and final prophet of God has been an integral part of the faith since its very inception. The different sects that arose within historical Islam did add some supplementary beliefs relating to the special status or function of some very exalted person or persons. These new dimensions of the parent stem of faith were (understandably) resisted and strongly opposed by the general body of the Muslims, yet, the innovators, eventually, managed to retain their Islamic identity. The only exception is the position, to date, of the *Ahmadi* Muslims in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia,

The Pakistan government, has, officially declared the *Ahmadi* sect of Muslims as a non-Muslim religious minority group in Pakistan, along with Christians, Hindus and others. The Saudi Arab government also treats the *Ahmadi* Muslims as non-Muslims. Even Iqbal, for all his Islamic liberalism, had cast serious doubts, and implicitly, if not explicitly, rejected the Islamic identity of the *Ahmadi* Muslims. Without entering into a detailed discussion of this issue, I must, in all humility, express my strong regret and disagreement with this approach.

I hold that the heart of the Islamic faith does not lie in any particular interpretation of any Quranic verse or verses or any theory of the nature and mechanics of revelation. The essence of the Islamic faith in God and His messenger is rooted in and flows from the belief in the absolute veracity of the historical Muhammad ﷺ, who at a particular point of time in his life, made the claim that he had received a Divine communication and command to proclaim the truth about the unseen. The heart of this belief does not entail any additional belief relating to the exact nature of the Spirit or of God and the mode of revelation. Nor can such transcendental beliefs ever be made transparently clear. All such beliefs are secondary conceptual elaborations that form the stuff of Theology. The essence of Islam is the simple faith enshrined in the simple Islamic creedal formula, rather than in any particular metaphysical or theological formulation of the nature of God and the exact mode of Quranic revelation.

The simple fact is that truth claims having a ‘transcendental component’ can never be made transparently clear in ordinary language or ‘proved’ as true or false. Thus, beliefs relating to God, Divine attributes, Divine

creation, Divine revelation, Day of Judgment, heaven and hell etc. are all 'condemned' to be ever 'opaque', and cannot but carry within themselves the seeds of plural interpretations.

All theories of revelation are secondary interpretations of the primary faith in the absolute veracity and authenticity of a person of flesh and blood who lived, worked and died in Arabia in the sixth/seventh century. Every theory flows from a set of presuppositions or background assumptions, and theories are bound to differ from age to age, and even from person to person, according to one's conceptual framework and range of awareness.

Modern Muslims should welcome the growing influence and progress of the inter-faith movement initiated by liberal Christians and Vedantic Hindus in the West. The pure Quranic teachings, free from the gloss of medieval interpretations, support and proclaim the same. The Prophet also desired to establish a spiritual commonwealth of Muslims, Jews and Christians when he initiated the *Covenant of Medina*, though his vision, then, could not be consummated due to *Realpolitik* of the time. Perhaps, the time is approaching when liberal Muslims, along with the rest of the great human family all over the world, will embrace the spirit of the Prophet's approach of interfaith and international cooperation.

All who accept the veracity of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and hold the Quran as the supreme mystery of faith and, furthermore, identify themselves with the Islamic community and desire to be so identified by others must be accepted as Muslim believers, irrespective of any internal diversity in creedal or legal matters. If some fresh dimensions emerge in the primal stem of the Islamic faith (enshrined in the *kalimah*) this (to my mind) is not a valid or sufficient ground for discriminating, persecuting or expelling the person or persons concerned from the Islamic community. My submission or recommendation to this effect, however, presupposes the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance from all sides concerned. In short, there is no alternative to the unqualified acceptance of plural interpretations of all religious creeds, of inter-religious as well as intra-religious tolerance, indeed, of full tolerance of even those who may not profess any religion or creed at all, provided they do not commit any violence against others.