



Al-Risala 1988

August

Model Minority: The Asian American Example

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The problem of the minorities is one of the most vexed questions confronting India today. A great deal of administrative machinery has already been geared to the tackling of this issue and a whole spate of letters and articles, well-intentioned and otherwise, have appeared in the media, without, however, any neat, concrete solution having been found. But have we looked at the problem from all possible angles? A glimpse at what is happening in other countries with minority problems would indicate that there is one line of action which has been almost totally neglected in India – that of self-help.

It is positively heartening to see what this has done for minorities elsewhere in the world. (Let us never forget that India does not stand alone in having such a problem). In the U.S.A., for example, the Asians settled there account for 2 per cent of the total population, but their success rate goes far and beyond their population ratio. It is true that the U.S.A., has provided them with opportunities which are available in very few other countries in the world, but it would be far from correct to say that it had solved the minorities' problems for them. Without the sustained personal efforts of the Asians themselves, success stories would have been few and far between. It is important to understand that it was this resolution and tenacity of purpose which brought them to the fore, and not the 'demand-and-protest' formula so beloved of the minorities in India, particularly the Muslims. America's Asian minority should serve as a model for the minorities of India. Their problems have equalled those of the Indian minorities in severity, but they have had the sense to open their eyes to the advantages all around them and to exploit them to the full. It is unfortunate that there are many people in this world who cannot or will not recognize an opportunity when it comes their way. As an English poet has observed:

Two men looked out from prison bars,
One saw the mud and the other saw stars.

If a class or community which considers itself disadvantaged or deprived goes through life seeing only the mud and never the stars, there is little hope of its making progress, with or without external encouragement. Considering that India's minorities seem to have spent a very long time concentrating their attention on the mud and doing very little reaching for the stars, they would do well to reflect that America's Asian minorities did not start off in any better a situation than they find themselves in today, and certainly had no ready-made sinecures ready and waiting for them. They had to start from scratch in an alien environment, cut off from their roots and traditions. They had to ignore disadvantages, create their own advantages and then learn to exploit them. India's minorities, in sharp contrast to this, are living in their own land, in their own homes, with the support of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. Then what exactly are they waiting for?

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The majority of the emigrants from Asian countries who have settled in America – the ‘Asian Americans’ – belonged originally to China, Korea, Indochina, etc., and when they first came to America, they could hardly converse in English at all, but, today, they are known as ‘super students’ in the best of America’s English Schools. Although they make up only 2 per cent of the population, they have secured 20 percent of the places in American institutes of higher learning.

This state of affairs has given Americans much food for thought, and detailed surveys have been carried out to pinpoint the contributing factors. The results of this research have appeared in various American and non-American publications such as the *Time* magazine (31 August, 1987), *Span* (December 1987), *Reader’s Digest* (August, 1987) and *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi, 30 August, 1987).

In every department of education, Asian Americans are ahead of their American counterparts. When Harvard Psychology Professor Jerome Kagan was asked to give his views on this subject, he said quit simply, “to put it plainly, they work harder.” It is just a question of these people considering education as their passport to success. And there is no doubt but that the American system of education has proved to be just that. The price they have paid to have that passport is plainly unremitting toil.

This is the kind of performance which has allowed them to demonstrate their excellence and has secured them the position of a ‘model minority’ in the land of their adoption. But there was no question of their having found all avenues open to them. Racial discrimination was a major obstacle, it being quite common for American youths to poke fun at them and call them ‘the yellow peril.’ There were also repeated instances of their being the objects of physical violence. But Asian Americans did not run away from this situation, and, what is even more important, they did not react by voicing protests and registering complaints. What they did do was put greater effort into whatever work or study they had undertaken. Their parents too helped them to stay away from the path of retaliation – which would have proved disastrous for them – and instead encouraged them to revere the work ethic. The atmosphere in Asian American homes was so success-oriented that if a boy scored 80% in a test, he would be asked, “Why not 85%. And if he scored 85%, he would be asked, “Why not 90%?”

Whenever a group is confronted with problems, there are generally two possible solutions. One involves self-help and greater diligence. The other – the one we see in India today – involves the constant registering of claims and protests, with the resultant head-on collisions. Opting for the latter policy does two kinds of damage, one being that, instead of solving the problem, it renders it more complex, and, therefore, more difficult of attainment. The other kind of harm which it does is to cause the group to lose the respect of others. Any group which attempts to lay the burden of its problems upon others, itself is bound to appear self-seeking, paranoid and degraded. The behaviour of Asian Americans presents the opposite example. They discovered very early in their careers that the solution to their problem lay in shouldering the entire responsibility for their own destinies, and refusing to react even in the face of severe provocation. Living ordered lives, at peace with their neighbours, they were able to find the time, energy and mental balance to work much harder than others. Not only did this solve their

own problems, but it brought an unexpected benefit to American society – a new competitive atmosphere. American youngsters who had slipped into idle ways because they had become over-complacent about the future, now found that if they were even to survive, they would have to work as hard as the Asian Americans. American intellectuals have been quick to acknowledge that this jolt given to their society has been healthy in its effect.

According to *Span* (December 1987) a middle aged man from New York said: “Thank God for the Asians. They’re bringing back standards to our schools (p.32).”

The work ethic, which used to be considered a western concept, has now become the special preserve of the Asians. Young Americans are now being admonished to conform to ‘Asian work ethics’ if they wish to be successful in their careers. This notion would appear to be borne out by the fact that whenever Asian immigrants have had to compete with the general run of Americans, they have proved to be the better qualified. As such, their presence has acted as a spur to young Americans to work harder. It is no doubt a sobering thought that Asians, in one generation, have achieved what it has taken others three generations to accomplish.

Analysing the distinctive performance of Asians in the U.S.A, New York’s University President is reported by *Span* to have said, “When I look at our Asian-American students, I am certain that much of their success is due to Confucianism.” (December, 1987, p.32) Certainly, Americans have reasoned that people who have begun to project such a high economic and intellectual profile within a relatively short period of time must have very special qualities of character to be able to do so, and this, in turn, has commanded a great deal of respect for what has developed those qualities, this is to say, the religion and culture of the eastern Asian countries.

If Confucianism can have such a salutary effect upon eastern Asians, cannot Islam lead Indian Muslims to even greater heights of achievement? After all, the Quran and *Hadith* lay similar stress upon hard work and self-sufficiency. It is related that the Prophet once refused to give a very poor man alms, and instead gave him a practical lesson in how to fend for himself. He asked the man what possessions he had and on being told that he owned only one sheet and one drinking vessel, he advised him to sell the latter and buy himself an axe-head with the proceeds. The man dutifully brought the axe-head to the Prophet, who fitted a haft on it himself. The Prophet then advised him to go and hew wood and sell it. In a few days time, the man came back to him, rejoicing that he now had much more money than his cup had fetched him. The Prophet also admonished his companions never to ask help of others. He preached strict independence, and never encouraged anyone to become a burden upon society. For example, he said that even if one’s whip fell down from the saddle, one should dismount from one’s horse in order to pick it up, rather than ask anyone to hand it up to one. These are very simple examples, but they do illustrate the spirit which the Prophet tried to inculcate in his followers.

One might well ask what has happened to this spirit in modern times. It appears to have become submerged and forgotten in the kind of national and communal dispute which is constantly being

provoked by shallow-minded leaders, who are more interested in their own popularity than in actual human uplift. If disputants could forget superficial differences and eliminate avoidable friction, they would set themselves intellectually free to pursue a more constructive line of action. Simply by basing their lives upon the eternal principles of Islam, they would be able to find the means to bring about a new revolution in this country. In this manner, Muslims would not only solve their own problems, but would give to this country a new standard which in time would come to be known as 'the Muslim work ethic.' Only when this happens, will Muslims establish themselves as an asset to this country, instead of the liability which they now are.

In order to re-integrate their cultural identity, Muslims have set themselves to launching one demand movement after another. To me, all such efforts are futile, because a cultural identity is something which cannot be achieved by just making demands. It is something which is generated by internal strength, something which makes its impact through the sum total intrinsic human qualities.

What Muslims should, more appropriately, aim at is a *moral identity*. Whatever distinction they hope to achieve should come from the willing, and conscious adoption of Islamic ethics. Once they have established their moral identity, their long sought-after cultural identity will, of itself, re-assert itself. This will come about quite independently of the demand movements which are so fruitlessly being launched at the present time. Then *Span's* evaluation of the Asian presence in America – "Their presence is going to be a great blessing for society" – may with justice be applied also to the Indian Muslims of today.

Success in the Sahara

In every failure lies hidden the scope for new success. This is an eternal principle of Islam, of which many practical examples are to be found in its history. One such instance relates to those Muslims for whom the door of Spain was closed in the 15th century. It was these same Muslims through whom the door of Islamic Dawah was opened in Africa to Berber tribes.'

Professor T.W. Arnold writes in this connection that "the Berbers, shut up in their mountain fastnesses and jealous of their independence, successfully resisted the introduction of the Arab element into their midst, and thus the difficulties in the way of their conversion were very considerable. Some unsuccessful attempts to start a mission among them had been made by the inmates of a monastery belonging to the Qadiriyyah order, Saqiya al-Hamra, but the honour of winning an entrance among them for the Muslim faith was reserved for a number of Andalusian Moors who were driven out of Spain after the taking of Granada in 1492. They had taken refuge in this monastery and were recognised by the shaykh to be eminently fitted for the arduous task that had previously so completely baffled the efforts of his disciples. Before dismissing them on this pious errand, he thus addressed them:

"It is a duty incumbent upon us to bear the torch of Islam into those regions that have lost their inheritance in the blessings of religion; for these unhappy Kabils are wholly unprovided with schools, and have no shaykh to teach their children the laws of morality and the virtues of Islam; so they live like the brute beasts, without God or religion. To do away with this unhappy state of things, I have determined to appeal to your religious zeal and enlightenment. Let not these mountaineers wallow any longer in their pitiable ignorance of the grand truths of our religion; go and breathe upon the dying fire of their faith and re-illumine its smouldering embers; purge them of whatever errors may still cling to them from their former belief in Christianity: make them understand that in the religion of our lord Muhammad – may God have compassion upon him – dirt is not, as in the Christian religion, looked upon as acceptable in the eyes of God. I will not disguise from you the fact that your task is beset with difficulties, but your irresistible zeal and the ardour of your faith will enable you, by the grace of God, to overcome all obstacles. Go, my children, and bring back again to God and His Prophet these unhappy people who are wallowing in the mire of ignorance and unbelief. Go, my children, bearing the message of salvation, and may God be with you and uphold you."

The missionaries started off in parties of five or six at a time in various directions; they went in rags, staff in hand, and choosing out the wildest and least frequented parts of the mountains, established hermitages in caves and clefts of the rocks. Their austerities and prolonged devotions soon excited the

curiosity of the Kabils, who after a short time began to enter into friendly relations with them. Little by little the missionaries gained the influence they desired through their knowledge of medicine, of the mechanical arts, and other advantages of civilisation, and each hermitage became a centre of Muslim teaching. Students, attracted by the learning of the new-comers, gathered round them and in time became missionaries of Islam to their fellow-countrymen, until their faith spread throughout all the country of the Kabils and the villages of the Algerian Sahara. (*The Preaching of Islam*, pp. 128-130)

The above extract shows that there are two distinctly different types of events associated with the mediaeval history of Spain. One is the tyrannical expulsion of Muslims from Spain by the Christians. The other is the great feats performed by those expelled Muslims in calling people to Islam. Present day Muslims, are highly knowledgeable about the former aspect of Spanish history. But few are aware of the latter aspect. How strange are those who can see the dark too well but fail to see light.

8 August 1988

Fear God at all times

Umer Ibn al Khattab wrote a letter to Abu Moosa AI-Ashari, in which he offered this advice: "Fear God always. Learn the Book of God, for it is the fountain-head of knowledge, and reviver of sunken hearts."

8 August 1988

Sitting among others, without distinction

The Prophet came to see Abdullah ibn Amr Ibn'ul-Aas. The latter offered him a leather pillow to sit on, but the Prophet sat on the ground, and left the pillow lying in between them.

God and the Voice of Human Nature

God is the voice of human nature. In normal circumstances this voice remains mute. But when life takes an adverse turn, this voice can be clearly heard. There are innumerable instances in history which bear out this assertion.

Mr. Altaf Gauhar, editor of *Dawn* and one of Pakistan's top journalists, was sent to prison in the early days of the Bhutto regime (1971-77). From writing informed and incisive analyses of the international situation, he now found himself reduced, as a political prisoner, to a state of helpless inactivity within the four bare walls of a prison cell. For someone in that position the best occupation has generally been found to be study of religious books. Altaf Gauhar therefore began to study a translation of the Quran. This, for him, meant breaking new ground and, to his astonishment, this proved a wonderfully fruitful experience. He now became acquainted with aspects of human life of which he had formerly been ignorant, because of the pressure of his journalistic engagements.

The life of solitude, dependence upon others in all practical matters, the disappearance of all worldly props – all these factors made the prison house a training ground for Altaf Gauhar to make the discovery of a great truth. His nature, without there being any overt intention, began seeking a Being more powerful than any other known power; a Being who is accessible to man at all times, and who can be depended upon to have the steadfastness of a rock under all circumstances, particularly at times when man has been pushed to the uttermost extremities of despair.

It was at such a moment that Altaf Gauhar opened the Quran at the first chapter, 'Fatiha' and came upon the words, "We worship You alone, and to You alone we turn for help." It suddenly flashed through his consciousness that this Being, whose existence for him had formerly been clouded by doubt and conjecture, was an actual living reality. In the fourth verse of this chapter, he found the secret not only of human freedom but of true human greatness. He at last understood man's eternal covenant with his Lord, according to which God blessed man in return for his humility, and gave him the earthly guardianship of His limitless Power. Gauhar writes: "I remember vividly the moment when I first realized the significance of this verse: 'We worship You alone, and to You alone we turn for help.' It was a dramatic moment of freedom, a moment in which fear disappeared, and I felt within me a resurgence of confidence and faith."

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A more simplistic testament to this aspect of faith was given by the famous Italian film actress, Gina Lollobrigida, when she came to India in 1975. When asked at a press conference whether she believed in God, Gina replied, "I believe in God. I believe in God more when I am on an aeroplane." (*Times of India*, January 3, 1975). Certainly, when flying in an aeroplane, we are at the mercy of all kinds of external factors such as electric storms and air turbulence, so that at such crucial moments we feel we need to be in more powerful hands than those of the pilot and navigator. It is only natural then that we should turn our thoughts to God. We often experience the same sense of helplessness on sea voyages. The Quran says, "Do you not see how the ships speed upon the ocean by God's grace so that He may reveal to you His wonders? Surely there are signs in this for every steadfast, thankful man.

"When the waves, like giant shadows, envelop them, they pray to God with all devotion. But no sooner does He bring them safe to land than some of them falter between faith and unbelief. Truly, only the treacherous and the ungrateful deny our revelations (31:31-32)."

Howsoever arrogant and atheistic a man may be, when he is confronted by difficult or hazardous situations, he spontaneously calls for God. This is proof that God is the voice of human nature.

The Russian dictator, Marshal Stalin (1879-1964) was a professed atheist, but there were many instances in his life, situations of adversity in which he instinctively thought of God. One such instance is recounted by Winston Churchill (1874-1965) who had gone to Moscow in 1942, during World War II, in order to discuss with the Russian leaders the setting up of a second front against Hitler. Churchill had formulated a plan called 'Torch' which he placed before the Allies, and since Stalin himself feared the advancing German armies, he became greatly interested in what it had to offer in terms of military strategy. Churchill states that while he was explaining the plan, he could see Stalin's approval becoming more and more obvious to the point where he suddenly exclaimed, "May God prosper this undertaking!" (Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (Abridgement), Casell & Company, London, p. 603)

Another such instance took place during Richard Nixon's last days at the White House. He had hoped that the Watergate tapes could fetch him a large sum of money when his term in office was over, and had not, therefore, destroyed them when the public exposure of their clandestine and illegal recording caused a nation-wide scandal. Had he done so, there would have been no danger to his continuing presidency. As it was, this piece of evidence covered him with such opprobrium that there was nothing for it but to resign.

With the revelation of his role in the Watergate affair, Nixon was so emotionally upset as to be on the verge of madness. He repeatedly broke down and wept while at the White House, and had actually made up his mind to commit suicide. He was kept under such close surveillance, however, that he could not carry this plan into effect. When the time finally came for him to make his exit, his family gathered around him to have a final photograph taken at the White House. There was not a single dry-eyed member of the family and the photographer had to wait for a very long time, for all of them to compose themselves before he could finally take the shot.

In a book entitled *The Final Days*, Nixon is said, as the end neared, to have asked his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to kneel down and pray with him. As Nixon put it: "You are not a very orthodox Jew and I am not an orthodox Quaker, but we need to pray." (*Daily American*, (Rome) 27.3.1976). Having given voice to what, for him, was a rather extraordinary sentiment, Nixon began to pray according to the Christian form of worship.

The socialist revolution (1917) which altered the entire pattern of living in the U.S.S.R., is claimed by the Soviet government to have completely stamped out religion. According to recent statistics, out of the 25 crore citizens of the Soviet Union, 22 crore were born after the October revolution, so that they grew up in a society without religion.

According to socialist theory, religion was a mere appendage of the capitalist system and, that with the elimination of the latter, it died a natural death, or so the government claimed. But, surprisingly, religion is not only still alive there, but is showing signs of a revival among the modern generation.

An interesting manifestation of the new spirit became a matter of public knowledge in 1973, when an Ilyushin jet plane nose-dived over western Bengal, killing the aircrew and all of the passengers. According to international law, as the crash had taken place on Indian territory, India was obliged to carry out the investigations. Nowadays it is easier to determine whether such accidents have taken place through mechanical or human failures, because aeroplanes are equipped with an automatic voice recorder – the Black Box – which keeps recording the conversations between the pilot and the control tower. This is situated in the tail of the aircraft so that it can be saved even if the aircraft, is burnt to ashes. When it was removed from the debris and played over, the Indian officers conducting the investigation were surprised to hear the words which had involuntarily risen to the lips of the Russian pilot as he hurtled earthwards: "Petere save us." (Saint Peter was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ and, among Christians Hans, he is considered a great saint.)

One of the least expected conversions to Christianity was that of Stalin's own daughter, Svetlana Alliluyena. Despairing of any betterment of life in the socialist world, Svetlana had come to India, where she could have taken refuge in one of the religions of the subcontinent. But the Indian authorities looked with disfavour upon her stay in India as not being in the best interests of Indo-Soviet friendship. She was therefore compelled to leave for Europe, where she accepted Christianity.

In her book, *Only One Year*, Svetlana writes of how discontented she was in Moscow and how, when she was seeking something which would give her peace of mind, she came upon these words in the Bible: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident."

In the U.S.S.R. of today such spiritual reawakenings are not uncommon. The lives and works of Solzhenitsin and Sakharov are respectively signs of this spiritual conflict. Had the former been allowed to accept the Nobel Prize, he would have spent the money on building a church for the Russians. A friend of Solzhenitsin once asked him what he considered the weakest aspect of the Soviet Union. He promptly replied that it was the absence of any means to satisfy the ordinary people's hunger for moral and spiritual truth.

13 August 1988

CALLING ALL READERS

Al-Risala is the organ of a mission whose aims and objectives are to propagate the Divine message. This is a voluntary effort. Those who are in accord with these aims and objectives should assist in conveying this Divine message to the people around them.

The simplest way to serve this cause is to accept the agency of the magazine in order to disseminate and proclaim this message as widely as possible.

Impressions of a Convert

Maryam Jamila (formerly Margaret Marcus, New York) is an American neo-convert, now living in Pakistan. She has written several books on Islam one of which is "Islam in Theory and Practice." One of the chapters of this book, called, 'Islam and Cleanliness' starts with.

The excessive dirtiness which characterizes the Muslim countries of the present-day more than any other single factor, disgusts outsiders and spoils their reputation. Ask any American or European traveler what he thinks of the countries and peoples of the Muslim world and he will invariably reply, "How dirty they are!" The sad fact is that this criticism is in most cases justified to such an extent that even new converts of Islam of European origin are sometimes driven to the brink of apostasy for this very reason. As an illustration, one good friend of mine – a German convert – remarked in a letter to me while she and her husband were trying their best to live an Islamic life in a Muslim land:

"My husband is utterly disgusted with the filth in this country where the walls in his office, especially on the stairs, are dark red with spat-out *pan* (betel nut), where men don't button up their trousers in the bathroom but rather only in walking back to their desks, where on the same tap he has to make ablutions for prayers, while others clean their artificial teeth leaving everything around red from *pan*, where at the same time the servants refill the bottles with drinking water and where on Fridays instead of coming neat and clean to the mosque, men with stinking clothes gather together... As the conditions are in Pakistan, my husband thinks that to keep his idealism in Islam alive, he must separate from the Muslims as soon as possible because in Germany he might be more useful in his missionary attempts...."

(Personal letter to me by Begum Fatima Heeren-Sarka dated August 11, 1964.)

After making a desperate effort to live in the Muslim society of Pakistan without success, the writer of the above lines returned with her husband to her native land the following year.

What a sad paradox it is that while Muslim countries of the present day are notorious for their filth, no faith lays so much stress on the necessity for cleanliness both in person and in surroundings than Islam.

Abu Malik said, "The Messenger of God, peace and blessings of God be upon him, said, 'Purification is half the faith.'"

– Muslim – *Mishkat al-Masabih* 3

Jabir said, "The Messenger of God said, 'The key to Paradise is prayer and the key to prayer is purification.'"

– *Musnad* of Ahmad Ibn Hambal, *Mishkat al-Masabih* 3

Ibn Umar said, “The Messenger of God said, ‘Prayer is not accepted without purification nor is charity accepted out of what is acquired by unlawful means.’”

– Muslim – *Mishkat al-Masabih* 3:1

Abd Allah ibn Umar reported that the Messenger of God said, ‘ “When one of you comes to the Friday prayers, he should take a bath.”

– Bukhari 11:2

Amr ibn Sulaim said, “The Messenger of God said, ‘Taking a bath on Friday is incumbent on everyone who has attained puberty and he should use the toothbrush and scent if he can find it.’”

– Bukhari 11:3

In Pakistan, as well as in other Muslim countries, there has been a great furore over the “establishment of the Islamic system.” Yet a convert has to take refuge in non-Muslim countries in order to keep his faith intact.

The responsibility for this state of affairs falls on those so-called Muslim leaders who have committed the unpardonable blunder of taking commandments *which were meant to be acted upon* and treating them as if they were meant only to be imposed upon others, or as if they were meant for everyone but themselves and their own bands of followers. For instance, the Quran gives us the imperative: “establish religion!” But this commandment has been conveniently misconstrued to mean, “Let religion be established upon the rulers!”

The Two Faces of Recognition

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) having proved a mediocre student during his school days, was once scolded by his father as being “useless and only interested in hunting and catching mice with the help of dogs.” When his schooling was completed, his father had him admitted to a medical college, but there his performance was equally lacklustre and he failed to complete the course. He then decided to become a priest and joined Cambridge University to study theology. But even there he met with failure.

However, all was not lost, for during his stay at Cambridge, he developed the interest in natural history which was to bring him world renown. This topic was not included in the degree curriculum; it was only his keen personal interest which spurred him on to making a study of it. This, along with his interest in geology, led him in turn to J.S. Henslow, a man of great learning and wide-ranging interests. Contact with him was the first step on the ladder to the peak of world learning.

It was at this time that the British government, having decided to conduct a coastal survey of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, sent off the naval ship ‘Beagle’ on a five-year voyage of research (1831-1836). By means of his personal influence, Professor Henslow secured Darwin’s appointment on this ship as a naturalist thus giving him the opportunity to explore the remoter regions of the world. At this juncture, Darwin could not on his own have obtained a position on the ‘Beagle’. It was entirely thanks to Henslow’s perception of his ability that it became possible for him to go off on this historic sea voyage.

During these five years Darwin had the opportunity to visit a number of different countries, and sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback, he penetrated far into their interiors. As he explored their jungles and climbed their mountains, he made a study of thousands of varieties of plants and animals, and collected samples to take back with him. He also collected the fossils of various animals which had been preserved intact underground.

The observations he made during his travels helped him to establish certain theories about the different species of animals. The most important was the theory that, although animals differ from each other as species, they have certain features in common, such as their adaptation to their environment. It was this initial observation which, after detailed research, took the shape of Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Although the author considers Darwin’s theory of evolution to be the result of an over-active imagination and, therefore, invalid, he does appreciate that there is a lesson to be learnt from Darwin’s life in that it shows how elders’ appreciation and encouragement of young people’s talents can act as a great spur to their progress and ultimate success. In any society where the already eminent display such sentiments towards struggling individuals of obvious merit, it is society as a whole which will be the beneficiary. But where elders are uninterested in sterling human qualities and are willing to listen only to

sycophants, the talents of highly endowed individuals will be left to wither away for want of encouragement. A society composed of such elders will never scale the heights of true progress.

There is another incident in Darwin's life which is quite admirable in the example that it sets. It seems that he wrote down his views on natural selection in 1852 and in June 1858, while his own theories were yet to be published, he received a letter from Alfred Wallace outlining an unpublished article of his which, in substance, was identical with Darwin's own work. Darwin could have responded by immediately publishing his own article in order to claim the credit for being the first to propound this theory, but he refrained from doing so. Instead, he decided to present Wallace's and his own views in a joint article to the Linnean Society of London. He felt that, presented in this way, his theory would have a much better impact. On June 20, 1858, the theory of evolution was, therefore, presented in the form of a combined article before an assembly of London's leading intellectuals. It immediately became a topic of great scientific importance. What no doubt hastened its acceptance was Darwin's willingness to forego his own personal glory in favour of contributing to a joint effort. The reward he desired was not recognition of his own personal merits but the general acceptance of this strange new theory. Such self-abnegation is an extremely rare quality, but that is the stuff of which great societies are made.

The Key to the Gates of Paradise

The divine scheme of things is such that our beliefs are constantly being put to the test. But instead of looking upon these moments of trial as ill-fated and unnecessary hardships, we should see them for what they are – golden opportunities to prove our worth and to gain the right to walk straight into Paradise. How tragic if we were to back away from them at the very time that our Lord was reaching out to us; if we were to withdraw, just when the gates of Heaven were opening for us.

Examinations are the most nerve-racking experiences in the career of any student. But it serves no useful purpose to withdraw at the eleventh hour, just on account of the nervous strain involved, for it is the result of the final examination which will determine the entire course of his future career. At the very moment when a student can acquire a passport to success – in the shape of a university degree – it is sheer lunacy to refuse to in sit the very examination which will certify his fitness to receive it.

Believing Muslims are subject to very similar compulsions, because they know from the Quran that God will reserve judgement on their fitness to enter Paradise until He has put them to the test in this earthly life. They know that if they pass this test, their admission to Paradise is ensured. Right-thinking Muslims realize that, difficult as the test may be, no good will come of trying to evade it. To ignore its challenge would mean sacrificing the most vital opportunity, just like the student who so ill-advisedly runs away from the examination hall because he cannot bear the mental and emotional stress he will have to undergo.

Under normal conditions, it is easy to take the side of the truth. But when difficulties loom large, people often abandon God's cause out of sheer weakness and inertia. Islamic on the surface, they are inwardly only concerned with what is convenient or expedient and, at the crucial moment, their piety simply crumbles away. Even when events do not fall into their normal, day-to-day pattern, so-called believers fall by the wayside, being unable to cope with anything of an unfamiliar nature. They are like people on the sea-shore who retain their mental balance so long as the sea is calm and the breezes are gentle, but who immediately go to pieces the moment a gale begins to blow and the waters are whipped to a frenzy. It is when one is surrounded by the towering waves of the ocean that one's religious fervour is truly put to the test.

The divine scheme of things is such that our beliefs are constantly being put to the test. But instead of looking upon these moments of trial as ill-fated and unnecessary hardships, we should see them for what they are – golden opportunities to prove our worth and to gain the right to walk straight into Paradise. How tragic if we were to back away from them at the very time that our Lord was reaching out to us; if we were to withdraw, just when the gates of Heaven were opening for us.

He Was Expelled from School

In the realm of God's creation, there are no limits to the humanly possible. Having had an undistinguished start in life should never, therefore, be a cause for despair. The ordinary circumstances of life – if we could but realize it – are the stepping stones to success. But before we launch ourselves on that path we would do well to listen to Sir Francis Bacon's final words of caution – and consolation: "Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes, and Adversity is not without comforts and hopes."

Although his beginnings were humble, Albert Einstein succeeded in revolutionizing 20th century science. The ordinary son of an ordinary father, he could not speak until the age of three, and showed no signs of having even average abilities up to the age of nine. He was even once expelled from school because his teacher feared that his poor academic performance might have a bad influence on the other pupils.

On completion of his school studies, he failed to qualify for admission to the Zurich Technical College. It was only on his second attempt, after due preparation, that he met with success.

Up to the age of twenty, Einstein showed no exceptional potential. In fact, 'Albert was a lazy dog,' was how a teacher once described him. Later, by dint of sheer hard work, he rose to such heights as no other modern scientist has been able to surpass. His biographer writes: "We may take heart that it is not necessary to be a good student to become Einstein."

Einstein's first scientific book was published when he was 26 years of age, after which his fame spread far and wide. He led a simple life, ate simple food, but often worked late into the night. At one stage, he was offered the presidency of Israel, but he declined. He believed, in fact, that politics was the cancer of humanity. He left Hitler's Germany with a price on his head – a reward of twenty thousand marks offered by Hitler's government (at that time a great deal of money) – but Einstein's standing was such in the scientific world that no one dared come forward to claim it.

Countless instances have been recorded in history which show that to achieve greatness, it is not necessary to be born great. A man can rise to greatness from the most obscure of beginnings – provided he is willing to strive for it. It is worth remembering that those who have to put up a struggle in the face of severe difficulties are more likely to develop in estimable ways, because adversity calls forth their hidden potential. It throws down a challenge which the aspirant to greatness must accept, failing which, he will sink into oblivion, if not actually perish. Where the comforts and convenience of prosperity will cause him to become sluggish and unenterprising, the whiplash of adversity will drive him into

purposeful action. In short, it will bring out the best in him. As Sir Francis Bacon observes in his essay, 'Of Adversity,' "Prosperity doth best discover vice, but Adversity doth best discover Virtue."

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21 August 1988

People are losing just what they want to find

The Prophet said: "How wonderful paradise is. Yet those who seek it have fallen asleep. And how terrible the Fire of Hell is. Yet those who dread it are also asleep."

In Giving We Receive

The Zamorin thought so highly of the Muslims that he definitely encouraged conversion in order to man the Arab ships on which he depended for his aggrandizement. He gave orders that in every family of fishermen (Makkuvans) in his dominion one or more of the male members should be brought up as Muhammadans.

Dr. Tara Chand's *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, is a useful book, which does full justice to Islam's contribution to Indian culture and certainly deserves a wide readership. A writer of considerable erudition, Dr. Tara Chand has shown that in the 7th and 8th centuries, when Muslim merchants landed on the coast of South India, they were accorded great importance. The local people called them, 'mapilla' which meant 'great son' and at functions Muslims were seated side by side with Nambotri Brahmins. This was an honour, which was not conferred even upon the Nairs of those times (p. 35).

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(Dr. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*
The Indian Press Ltd., Allahabad, 1963, p. 36)

This event took place in a period when Arab Muslims had a monopoly of navigation all over the world. When this first batch of Muslims landed on the coast of India, their distinctive speciality caused Indians to look upon them as fulfilling a great need, and they welcomed them as people through whom they could make more rapid progress. These Muslims were thus an invaluable asset to the Indians of those days. They gave to others, so others gave to them. Present-day Muslims, on the contrary, are only bent upon making demands upon others. They have nothing to give, and nothing is precisely what they receive in return.

In this world, it is not those who only know how to make demands who receive. It is the givers who are in turn, the receivers.

The Traveller Through Life

Abdullah ibn Umar tells of how the Prophet once took him by the shoulders and said: "Live in this world as though you were a wayfarer."

Of our passage through life Abdullah ibn Umar used to say: "In the evening do not wait for the morning and in the morning do not wait for the evening. Make the most of your life before you are struck down by illness or death." (Bukhari)

The Prophet's advice and the above-quoted *Hadith* clearly indicate what attitude a believer should adopt towards his earthly existence. He should feel that he is a traveller in a foreign land, making a temporary sojourn, with his true and ultimate destination always in his thoughts. He should not feel that he is at home, in his own country, and that he has made a permanent niche for himself. If he does, his life will most likely be cast in the wrong mould: he will give all of his attention to this life and not to the next. What he must focus his attention on is the temporary nature of his stay on this earth. This will enable him to bear all kinds of afflictions and losses without becoming embittered, in view of the fact that at any moment he may be on the brink of the new life which death will open up to him. Even strong feelings of revenge will be stifled by this thought, for will not the Great Avenger Himself see that justice is done in the Afterlife?

The time-conscious believer will strive to live his life in the most positive way possible. He will not ever in the evening 'wait for the morning' or in the morning 'wait for the evening'. Each moment of his is precious – too precious to be squandered in negative thought reaction.

Putting Faith into Practice

“Believers, obey God and obey His Apostle, and make not vain your deeds.”

According to Abu'l-Aaliyah, the Companions of the Prophet were at one stage of the view that no harm would come to them because of their sins, provided that they testified that there is no God but Allah, just as, conversely, no good deed would benefit anyone who held that God could have equals. Then a verse of the Quran was revealed which said: “Believers, obey God and obey His Apostle, and make not vain your deeds.” (47:33) After this, the Companions went in constant fear of losing whatever good standing they had with their Maker on account of their sinful behaviour.

Faith must be looked at as a kind of contract. When a man utters the testimony of faith, he is, as it were, entering into an agreement with God. He is making a promise to his Maker: (“I will take You, God, as my Lord and Master. I will follow, both in word and deed, the path You have revealed through Your Apostle!”) But what if, after mouthing the words of the contract, the signatory does not care to honour the spirit of the agreement? In that case, the contract would be worthless in the eyes of God. Quite obviously, if a man does not abide by the terms of a contract, he cannot hope to receive the benefits that should accrue from it.

Faith is of sterling quality only if it can stamp its impression quite indelibly on a man's thoughts, words and deeds, so that whenever he speaks, his words are in total consonance with the tenets of his faith, and whenever he acts, his deeds reflect the brightest hues of his beliefs. Unless faith becomes a beacon, guiding one past the reefs of life upon which one could so easily flounder, it is no faith at all.

The validity of every contract in this world is entirely dependent upon whether it is adhered to or not. If both parties feel it binding upon them to keep to its terms, the contract will remain valid – otherwise it might as well never have been drawn up. Similarly, the validity of the contract of faith may be judged by the extent to which its principles are regularly put into practice. If its terms are wantonly flouted, it will be declared null and void by God Almighty Himself.

Observing Faith

“He has ordained for you the faith which He enjoined on Noah and which We have revealed to you, and which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus, (saying) ‘Observe this faith and be not divided therein.’”

Quran, 42:13

All commentators of the Quran are agreed that “faith” here means the fundamentals of religion which are common to all the Prophets. It is not the laws and customs of each religion which are referred to, for the Quran has made it clear that these differed with each Prophet:

“We have ordained a law and a path for each of you. Had God pleased, He could have made you one nation.”

Quran, 5:48

Since the laws and the paths of each religion are different, all of them cannot be followed equally. Only teachings which are common to all the prophets can be followed by everyone alike. So the “faith” which we are enjoined to observe in the above verse consists of fundamental tenets, not detailed instructions. The point that is being made in this verse is that in detailed injunctions one can be flexible; one can adapt to the situation. Firm and unchanging emphasis should be laid on matters that are common to every religion. Only then can a truly religious spirit flourish in a community. If permanent emphasis is laid on the subordinate issues of religion, which change according to time and circumstances, people will become disunited and confused. An atmosphere will develop in the name of religion which is, in fact, harmful to religion.

In recent times this verse has been explained differently. That is, that it enjoins the enactment and enforcement of all Islamic laws as a complete legal system since the biggest obstacle to the enforcement of a complete legal system is the institution of government, the first task in observance of the faith – according to this interpretation – is opposition to the government of the time, so that power can be taken from it and a complete legal system implemented. In countries with Muslim minorities there is no opportunity for political struggle of this nature, so there this interpretation can be followed out only by campaigning through oratory and literature. But in countries with Muslim majorities, where opportunities are multiple, it has taken the form of direct attacks on the established Muslim government. The result of this has been civil strife, with immeasurable loss of life and property. Added to this, the spirit of religious unity – which was the real purpose of the enjoinder to observe the faith – has been destroyed. And all this has been done in the name of observing the faith. The reverse effects which movements for the observance of religion have had should have been enough to make its proponents revise their thinking; but instead they have attempted to indoctrinate their followers even further by writing new commentaries

of the Quran. Let us examine what one recent commentator of the Quran has to say on this matter. This is how he explains this verse of Sura 42 of the Quran:

Some people have observed that this verse enjoins the observance of that faith which is common to all the Prophets, and the laws of all the Prophets have been different. As the Quran says: "We have ordained a law and a path for each of you." So they have formed the opinion that this faith cannot refer to canonical rules and regulations; it refers only to belief in one God, the next world, the Scriptures, the Prophets and worship of God. At the most it includes those basic moral principles which are common to the laws of all the Prophets. But this is a very superficial interpretation, which has been arrived at by taking a cursory glance at the oneness of the religions, as opposed to laws, of the different prophets. This is a very dangerous interpretation. If not corrected, it will eventually lead to the sort of differentiation between religious faith and religious law which was behind St. Paul's faith – without-law theory which destroyed the religion of the Prophet Jesus. For when religious law is something apart from religious faith, and it is only the observance of religious faith that has been enjoined, then inevitably Muslims – like Christians – will come to think of religious law as unimportant and no end in itself, and make do with basic tenets of faith and broad moral principles. Instead of specifying the meaning of religion by analogies of this nature, why should we not refer to the Book of God and ask the question: Does the faith which we are enjoined to observe in this verse just consist of articles of faith and broad rules of ethics, or does it include religious laws as well?

(Tafheem-ul-Quran, by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, Vol IV, pp. 488-490).

The author then goes on to refer to various verses of the Quran in which faith (*deen*) includes religious laws and injunctions as well as articles of faith. He therefore concludes that all religious injunctions are a part of the faith, and the observance of faith entails the implementation of all of them.

1. The word "some" which commences this quotation understates the seriousness of the matter. The opinion that the author is refuting, is held by all commentators of the Quran worth mentioning, not just "some."
2. The author has no justification for calling this opinion superficial. The verse enjoins observance of the faith of all the Prophets, and says not to be divided in it. So one is bound in this particular verse to take the word 'deen' to mean that part of religion which is common to all the Prophets, not the part in which they are divided.
3. If one does not include payment of the poor-due (*zakat*) in verses where only prayer has been enjoined, it does not mean that one is denying the obligation to pay *zakat*. All it means is that this injunction is in another verse, not that which deals with prayer alone. In the same way, to say that religious laws are not included in observance of the faith does not mean that they are not to be followed. All it means is that this verse does not deal with religious laws. They are dealt with in

other verses, and their nature can be understood from the words of those verses. If, for instance, anyone were to extract the principle of public ownership from the verse of the Quran which states that "the earth is God's", he would be told that this verse has nothing to do with ownership. Certainly, there are injunctions in Islam regarding ownership, but they are contained in other verses, not this one.

4. The reference to St. Paul in this connection is totally out of place. Paulism is the belief that one cannot gain salvation by virtue of one's own actions or beliefs; one can only gain salvation by accepting the doctrine that the Son of God was crucified in atonement for man's original sin. In other works, Paulism holds that the salvation of man does not depend on what is normally understood by beliefs and actions; it depends on belief in a particular doctrine – the doctrine of atonement. Clearly, this is an entirely separate school of thought. It bears no relation to the author's explanation of the verse of the Quran enjoining observance of the faith.
5. It is not true to say that if it is only the basic tenets of religion that are to be observed, then other injunctions and laws have no place in religion. The Quran makes it clear that one is bound by religious laws according to one's capacity (Quran, 2:286). This means that if an individual does not have the capacity to implement a certain order, then in practice it will remain pending until that power comes into being. The fundamentals of religion are those things which lie within everybody's capacity all the time. There is no one who is not able to love and fear God at all times, and be kind towards his fellow men. That is why observing the fundamentals of religion is a universal order, which applies to everyone and at all times. Social laws, on the other hand, require power to be implemented. So their implementation has been made conditional. If one has the power, one should put them into practice. They are obligatory in accordance with the amount of power that one wields: the more the power, the more one is bound by them. From this point we can understand why the Prophet of Islam established constitutional laws during the Medinan period, whereas the Prophet Abraham did not do so throughout his whole life. In spite of this difference, both were complete believers in the sight of God; for complete faith comes from imposing religion on oneself, not from enforcing it on others.
6. Neither is the fear that Muslims will rest content with individual actions justified. In this verse we are enjoined to adopt belief in One God. In other verses of the Quran there is a universal order to disseminate this belief among mankind. The implementation of religious laws is, without doubt, a conditional order; but preaching the word of God is a universal one that is required of us at all times. This task gives the whole Muslim community a great collective purpose.
7. One word usually has more than one meaning. The word *deen* has been used in several different contexts in the Quran, and has a different definition and meaning in each instance. It is unreasonable to make a list of all these meanings, and say that observance of the faith refers to all of them. A word can only be understood from its relation to individual contexts, and not from an aggregate of its different meanings. The faultiness of this method of reasoning is clear from the fact

that in the first Sura of the Quran, the word *deen* is used to mean retribution. If this reasoning is considered sound, it means that in order to observe the faith, Muslims must make efforts to bring about the Day of Judgement, so that people may be rewarded or punished for their actions. Are the proponents of this revolutionary interpretation ready to include becoming masters of the Day of Retribution as part of their programme to make religion complete?

8. Taking observance of the faith to apply to the basic tenets of religion does not mean that one should be preoccupied with the prominent teachings of religion while passing over the rest. All it means is that, one should adhere to the religion on which all prophets are agreed, and which is fundamentally and permanently required of man. One should not base one's observance of faith on subordinate and controversial issues. It is not prominent teachings that are intended here; it is the basic teachings of religion on which eternal salvation depends that are intended. We do not have to use analogies to ascertain what the teachings of every prophet were. The Quran itself has informed us of them. Here are a few references:
 1. Not worshipping any other than God (21:25).
 2. Worshipping one God alone (41:14).
 3. Living in fear of God (16:2).
 4. Eating pure food and doing good deeds (23:51).
 5. Being just with one another (57:52).
 6. Being patient in the face of suffering inflicted by others (46:35).
 7. Associating oneself with the true call (3:81).
 8. Warning people of hell-fire, and giving them good news of heaven in the life to come (4:165).

This has been the religion of all the Prophets, and this is the religion that God basically and permanently requires of man. External actions can only be acceptable if the spirit of these teachings is found in them; without it, no action has any value. Furthermore, the whole of God's religion is incorporated in these teachings. Whoever observes them is observing the whole of religion; in the sight of God his faith is complete. Religion in its true essence is not an external system, which requires power for it to be enforced on people. In reality religion is an individual pattern of life. It is man's own being – the being that he lives with day in and day out, the being that he is born with and dies with – that has to be made religious; it is this being that has to be moulded according to the will of God. This is what observance of the faith basically is. Man's being is not bound by any law or political institution; it can only be controlled by man's own will. Man can not be ordered by others; he has to order himself. Observance of the faith, then is – of one's own free will, to impose religion on one's own being. Offering political opposition to rulers, and flogging others on the back, is not the way to observe the faith.

It is true that Islam looks at political power as something desirable. But it is God's reward to the faithful (Quran, 24:55). This reward is only obtained when a substantial number of Muslims observe the faith in their own lives. Only after observation of the fundamentals of religion do opportunities emerge for the observation of religious laws. To observe the basics of religion in one's own life is like presenting one's own back for flogging. Those who offer themselves up in this manner can be presented with the political authority to flog the backs of others. Those who flog others without having offered themselves up first are only causing corruption in the land; they are not contributing to the cause of justice. Such people are eager to flog the backs of others; but they are not able to tolerate even verbal criticism of themselves. Such people are wrong-doers in the sight of God. How was it – they will be asked on the Day of Judgement – that you were not ready to bear a whip of words yourselves, but were eager to flog others with real whips? What conceit made you act in this way?

One result of this faulty interpretation has been to make that which was important in the sight of God, unimportant, and that which was unimportant, important. In his commentary on the verse about observing the faith, the same author writes:

When Prophets were ordered to observe this faith, and make sure that others observe it, it did not only mean that they themselves should practice it; neither did it just mean that they preach this faith to others so that they should admit the truth of it. Once people had accepted it, the Prophets were expected to take one step forward and practically implement and enforce religion in its totality. Their aim was to make sure that it was practiced, and continued to be practiced. There is no doubt that preaching is an important first stage in this work, without which the second stage cannot be arrived at. But anyone with any sense can see that preaching is not the purpose of this commandment; the purpose of it is to see that the faith is observed and continues to be observed. Preaching is certainly a means towards the attainment of that purpose; it is not the purpose itself. How, then, can anyone say that it was the only purpose of the mission of the Prophets?

(Vol IV, p. 488.)

The Quran has stated explicitly that the sole mission of all the Prophets was communication of the faith. Once they had conveyed their message in full to their peoples, their personal responsibility ended. Seeing that the faith is observed, and continues to be observed, is something that depends entirely on the reaction of those who are being addressed. Nowhere has the Quran said that the Prophet's mission was to see that the faith is observed, and continues to be observed." In several places, however, their official duty has been specified as preaching of the faith. Here are a couple of examples:

Yet what should prophets do but give plain warning?

(Quran, 16:35)

We send forth Our apostles only to give good news to mankind and to warn them.

Quran, 6:48.

The lives of the Prophets have been devoted to preaching the faith. Every prophet communicated the faith in complete and total form. The accomplishment of this cause, then, is the task which is common to all the Prophets. Only that mission which is common to all the Prophets can be classified as their purpose. "Practical implementation and enforcement of religion in its totality" was not a mission common to all the Prophets. This is sufficient proof of the fact that the true purpose of the Islamic mission is communication of the message of Islam to the rest of mankind, rather than seeing that it is observed and continues to be observed.