



The Role of Ulama in **THE MODERN AGE**

Reforming Minds Towards Creative Thinking

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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PREFACE

In early March 1992, the Students' Islamic Welfare Society organised a seminar in Lucknow to discuss the leadership role of the Ulama. At the organisers' invitation, I presented a paper compiled in book form. This essay aims at presenting a critical appraisal of the role of Ulama, or Islamic scholars, in present times. As per the *Shariah* viewpoint, two things have to be kept separate for such an appraisal. One is the intention and the sincerity of the people involved, and the other is the methodology adopted by the people concerned.

From the perspective of *Shariah*, making someone's intention or sincerity the subject of discussion is impermissible, whereas making their methodology a subject of discussion is entirely permissible. This essay fully considers this distinction. I have reviewed the methodology employed by our Ulama in present

times without bringing their intentions or sincerity under discussion.

The methodology adopted by the Ulama was not in conformity with the requirements of the present age. Therefore, their efforts and sacrifices have not brought about the required results. However, this was an error of judgment on the part of the Ulama. As we learn from a tradition of the Prophet, if a believer makes right *ijtihad* (re-interpretation of religious teachings in changing situations), he will receive a double reward, while if he errs in his *ijtihad*, he will still earn a single reward.

This essay appears to be critical, but in reality, it is a proposal in the light of which we can determine the future course of action.

Wahiduddin Khan

September 2, 1992

New Delhi, India

THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THE ULAMA

Scholars should be held responsible for imparting education to people, while the politicians should carry out administrative duties. The Ulama should avail of the non-political opportunities and ignore political problems.

In this essay, we would like to elaborate on the leadership role of the Ulama in contemporary times. To understand the role of the Ulama, we need to know, first of all, what role Islam has assigned for them. It will provide us with a standard to evaluate their activities in present times.

The Role of the Ulama in Islam

The Quran provides us appropriate guidance concerning the role of the Ulama thus:

It is not right that all the believers should go out [in time of war] all together. Why, then, does not a party from every group come to [the Prophet] in order to acquire a deeper knowledge of religion and to warn their people, so that they can guard themselves against evil?
(9:122)

The word *tafaqquh* in this verse needs further clarification. First, we will do a lexical study of the word *tafaqquh*. After that, we will try to determine the role of the Ulama in the light of this verse.

Later, the word *fiqh* came to be used for formal Islamic jurisprudence. That is to say, the body of legal rules governing ritual and social activities, extracted from Islamic sources. However, this meaning of the word *fiqh* came in vogue long after the revelation of the Quran. The Quran does not use the word *fiqh* in a sense it is used today. Instead, the Quran uses this word in its literal sense.

Raghib al-Isfahani (d. 1108) was an 11th century scholar of Quranic exegesis and Arabic language. He writes that *fiqh* means reaching a deeper understanding of an issue. Therefore, the word *fiqh* conveys more than 'knowledge' does.

Ibn Manzur (1233-1312) was an Arab lexicographer of the Arabic language and author of *Lisan al-Arab*, the most comprehensive dictionary of the Arabic language. Ibn Manzur writes that the word *fiqh* originally connotes the sense of understanding.

The Prophet prayed for Abdullah ibn Abbas, "O God, grant him religious understanding and teach him the

interpretation.” *Lisan al-Arab* quotes this saying of al-Azhari, “A person from the tribe of Kilab explained something to me. When he had finished speaking, he asked, “Have you understood (*faqahata*)?” (*Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 13, p. 522)

However, another anecdote is mentioned in *Lisan al-Arab* to clarify the meaning of *fiqh* further. Salman says that he stayed as a guest at the house of a Nabati lady in Iraq. He asked her, “Is there a clean space where I can offer my prayers?” She replied, “Clean your heart and pray wherever you like.” Salman then said to himself: “She understood (*faqahat*) the truth.” (*Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 13, p. 522)

We learn from this elucidation of the lexicographers that the meaning of *fiqh* is understanding, comprehension and insight. That is, arriving at a deeper meaning of a matter.

A religious scholar is not someone who merely possesses technical or formal knowledge about religious issues. A religious scholar has expert knowledge of religious matters and a deep insight into religion.

Now let us discuss the above verse of the Quran (9:122). We learn from Quranic exegesis the background or

context of the revelation of this verse. Some Madinan Muslims could not participate in the Battle of Tabuk in the year 9 AH. The Quran reprimanded them for presenting excuses to show their inability to go out for battle. Subsequently, all of the Madinan believers began to leave together for the ensuing battles and not even a single Muslim remained behind in Madinah to gain knowledge from the Prophet. The commandment given in this verse stopped them from going altogether at once.

In this verse, the Muslim community received a guiding principle of a permanent nature. That is, the separation of defence-related activities from the sphere of knowledge. One section of the community was held responsible for engaging in political activities, while another section was entrusted with the responsibility of engaging in knowledge with total devotion.

Similarly, men have different divisions regarding their respective spheres of activity.

Islam differentiates between the arena of activity of scholars and political leaders. The task of the Ulama is to become the guardians of human consciousness. It is their responsibility to provide intellectual and

spiritual guidance to people. So far as practical politics are concerned, those who engage in this field must possess the necessary capability. Not everyone can shoulder this responsibility. Based on this difference in people's capabilities, the Prophet repeatedly suggested that the *ummah* appoint Abu Bakr as their leader after him. At the same time, he advised Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Abu Hurayrah and Hassan ibn Thabit never to accept any governmental post.

Owing to their inborn qualities, some people are more suitable for occupying official posts than others. Islam entrusts those who possess requisite political capability with administrative posts, whereas others should engage themselves in non-political fields as necessary as the political sphere.

Politicians should be charged with carrying out administrative duties, while scholars should be held responsible for imparting education to people.

The role of politicians and scholars is made clear in a tradition mentioned in chapter *Kitab al-Fitan* of the books of *Hadith*. Prophet Muhammad observed in no uncertain terms that in later times, owing to the general law of degeneration, perversion would set in in the rulers. They would become tyrannical and

unjust, yet the Ulama must continue to discharge their duties in non-political fields. They must do so even when they see corruption in political institutions. That is to say, the Ulama should avail of the non-political opportunities and ignore political problems.

It indicates that the believers must distinguish between the 'men of politics and the 'men of learning' even in extreme conditions. Also, it suggests that the Muslim scholars have to play the role of educators of the people under normal circumstances and engage in productive work even when degeneration has set in in the rulers. They must continue to play their constructive role even when they see the political rulers have fallen prey to corruption.

No matter how degenerate or corrupt the system of governance may appear, the Ulama should not under any circumstance deviate from the work under their trust.

FACTORS IN LEADERSHIP

THE SOCIAL AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The Ulama are eternal guardians of people's mental fabric, thinking, attitude and behaviour. Their task is to set right the mindset of people of every age, guiding them on to the right path, which is the foundation of society. The political governance is the superstructure that rests on this foundation.

In the chapter on leadership and justice in *Mishkat al-Masabih*, we find this saying of the Prophet: "As you are, so shall be those appointed to govern you." (*Shuabul Iman*, Hadith No. 7006)

From this tradition, we learn about two things: first, the issue of the individual human condition in terms of thought, attitude and behaviour; and second, the issue of organisation of collective human affairs. In other words, political leadership. The above tradition of the Prophet tells us that a given society's political structure will reflect or shape the condition of the people of that society.

The Ulama are eternal guardians of people's way of thinking. Their task is to set right the mindset of people in every age, guiding them on to the right path while leaving the task of governance to the politicians.

A healthy society must observe this distinction of roles, tasks and responsibilities. Ignoring this distinction is bound to lead to severe disruption. People need proper guidance to develop the right mindset because the proper system of government results from the right human mindset. Conversely, if people's mindset is corrupt or debased, the system of government will follow suit. This division of work resulted in a glorious history of scholarship and *dawah* work, which is the most precious legacy of the Muslim community.

Had all the people been engaged in *jihad* and other such defence-related activities, then certainly a vacuum would have been created in Islam, never to be filled again till Doomsday.

In the two generations that followed the Companions of the Prophet, this division of spheres of activity was maintained. People were engaged in various fields of knowledge, and there came to be the Quran reciters, *Hadith* scholars (*muhaddithin*), *fuqaha* (jurists), *Ulama*, *dayees* (those who conveyed God's message to people) and *Sufis*. All of them focused on their respective spheres of activity. This pattern continued for around a thousand years.

This guidance received at the very beginning of Islam set the course of future activities of the Muslim

community. During the first phase, one group of the Prophet's Companions engaged in activities such as defence. While the other group, for instance, Abdullah ibn Masud Abdullah ibn Umar, devoted themselves to academic and *dawah* (conveying God's message to people) fields.

In life, people's mental fabric in terms of thought, attitude and behaviour is far more important than societal or political leadership. The former's position is of base or foundation, while the latter's is of superstructure resting on this base. Those who judge by appearance often mistakenly perceive this upper structure as more important than the base. In reality, however, the base is much more important. That is why the position or status of the religious leaders is loftier than that of the political leaders.

Consequences of Breaching This Precedent

The tradition of maintaining a clear distinction between the spheres of activity of the Ulama and the political class was first breached in India in a significant way at the time of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707). Although Aurangzeb was born in a royal family, he was a religious scholar in the complete sense. His circumstances led him to become a religious

scholar rather than an emperor. However, he did not accept this role. In 1658, his father was dethroned and imprisoned in the Agra Fort. Subsequently, in 1659, he killed his elder brother, Dara Shikoh. Afterwards, he ruled for about half a century as the head of the Mughal Empire.

Even without possessing the “throne”, Aurangzeb had great resources at his disposal. Had he played the role of a religious scholar instead of an emperor, he could have effectively carried out this task of laying the foundation and become a model for the Islamic scholars to emulate for several centuries.

The foundations of modern science were being laid in Europe during Aurangzeb’s reign. The impact of this had reached India’s shores by Aurangzeb’s time. However, he remained blissfully unaware of this development. Instead, he remained engrossed in his political quest of a temporary nature. His father, emperor Shah Jahan, had built the enormous mausoleum, Taj Mahal. Aurangzeb had every opportunity to build a ‘palace’ of knowledge. By letting Dara Shikoh handle the governance of the Empire, he could have focused on establishing an ‘educational empire’ in India. Had he devoted himself to this task, he would have benefitted Islam and the

Muslims much more than what he unsuccessfully tried to do through politics and war.

Had Aurangzeb travelled to Europe, instead of spending years fighting wars in the Deccan, he would have realised that what he was doing was totally against the demands of his times. He sought to establish, to his way of thinking, the supremacy of Islam through the 'politics of the sword'. He was unaware of the new age which had already dawned—and which would soon arrive in India, too—when the 'politics of knowledge' would become a powerful means of establishing the dominance of a community.

It appears that Aurangzeb and other Ulama of his age were probably unaware of not only the intellectual and scientific developments that were taking place in Europe at that time, but strangely enough, they were also unaware of the progress that the Muslims had made in this regard during their rule in Spain from the early 8th to the late 15th century.

When the Muslim rule collapsed in Spain, many Spanish Muslim scholars and scientists left for other lands. At that time, an influential Muslim Caliphate (1300-1924) ruled over Turkey. Some Muslim scientists, fleeing Spain, headed for Turkey, but they received no support in the royal court. Not long after

the dissolution of Muslim power in Spain, the Mughals established their empire in India in 1526. However, the powerful Mughal Emperors never invited some great Spanish Muslim scientists to India to carry on their scientific work, which had come to a standstill in Spain. Such academic work based on research and investigation required governmental patronage. That is why, when the scientists of erstwhile Muslim Spain failed to find opportunities in the Muslim world, they shifted to Western Europe instead, where they received the patronage of the non-Muslim rulers. This is why the work in science that had begun in Muslim Spain reached its climax in Europe rather than in the Muslim world.

Because of his unawareness of all these developments and his inordinate interest in politics, Aurangzeb failed to take any action in this regard. Hence, modern science reached its culmination in Europe, and the entire credit for the progress and development of modern science went to Europe.

The conditions that gave rise to the 'modern age' and the earliest manifestations of this new age had already appeared when Aurangzeb ascended the Mughal throne. The first model of the spring-driven watch, which was to replace the old-fashioned clock,

was produced in Germany in 1500. Vasco Da Gama of Portugal landed on the Malabar Coast in southern India in 1499, inaugurating a sea route that connected Europe with Asia based on advances in geography and naval technology. In 1501, Portugal had captured Goa. A century later (in 1600), the British East India Company was set up, and a short while after, the French East India Company was founded in 1664. However, because of his political involvements, Aurangzeb was unaware of these developments or did not give them the importance they deserved, although they suggested the grave external challenges they would soon pose, not just to India but the entire Muslim world.

Long before Aurangzeb was born, in the 2nd century C.E., a rudimentary form of printing had been invented in China, which was later further refined by Willem J. Blaeu in 1620 in Amsterdam and came to be known as the Dutch Press. The first all-metal press was constructed in England in about 1795. Some hail Aurangzeb for making copies of the Quran in his hand. Strangely enough, he seems to be unaware that in 1455, Gutenberg had printed the first copy of the *Bible* in the printing press invented by him, thereby taking the Christian missionary enterprise from

the age of handicrafts to that of the machine. Had Aurangzeb known of this development, he could have set up printing press in India rather than engaging himself in making copies of the Quran by hand.

Cambridge University was established in 1571, while the University of Paris and the University of Oxford were established much before that—in the 12th century. Aurangzeb reigned in the 17th century. How much better it would have been had he focused on a much more important task—that of establishing a major university in India for all the various branches of knowledge! He could have set up centres to research in various contemporary disciplines. He could have established a centre in Delhi to translate essential works by European scholars. He could have formed an academy of religious scholars who could have acquired knowledge of modern subjects and engaged in research on them. However, he failed to engage in any such endeavour. Moreover, the simple reason for this was that he did not agree to observe the distinction in the spheres of activity mentioned above, that is, between the religious leaders, on the one hand, and the political leaders, on the other.

HUMANITY IN A NEW AGE

The intellectual revolution Islam ushered in, based on *Tawheed*, the unity of God, broke the mental block to open the doors to the investigation of nature, leading to scientific progress.

In the ancient past, human beings in large parts of the world worshipped various manifestations of Nature. This acted as a significant hurdle in the emergence of science or the study of Nature. For modern science to emerge, scholars needed to study Nature free of the belief that nature was something to be worshipped. However, because Nature had become an object of worship in most parts of the world for centuries, it was an insurmountable barrier. However, things changed with the advent of Islam. The intellectual revolution that Islam ushered in, based on *Tawheed*, the unity of God, opened the doors to the investigation of nature, leading to scientific progress.

There were three distinct periods in the progress of modern science or the study of Nature. Firstly, the breaking of the mental block that I have just referred to. This began with the advent of Islam in Makkah and continued after that, up to the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in the mid-13th century. The

second stage involved opening the doors of practical research and experimentation about Nature based on new ways of thinking. This stage extended over much of the period of Muslim rule in Spain till the 15th century. The third stage, centred in Western Europe and extending from the 16th century to the 19th century, saw the completion of this process which had its beginning in the Muslim world.

In this context, the question arises as to how and why the process had its origins in the Muslim world witnessed its culmination in Europe. One psychological reason for this is that there was keen rivalry between the Muslim Sultanates of Baghdad and Spain from the very beginning. That is why Baghdad never thought of seriously understanding the developments made in Spain. Moreover, it is perhaps because of this enmity that no well-known figures in Muslim-ruled India or other Muslim lands considered it essential to study Muslim Spain's achievements and carry them even further.

If this reality had been made clear to the contemporary Muslim rulers and had they taken positive steps in this sphere, the Muslim scholars who fled Spain in the wake of the collapse of Muslim rule and taken shelter in other parts of Western Europe would have

instead sought refuge in the Muslim world. And then, the intellectual revolution that Islam had ushered in would have witnessed its continuation in the Muslim world instead of in Europe. And then, just as the credit for the beginning of the modern scientific age goes to Islam, the credit for the culmination of that age would have accrued to Islam as well. Needless to say, if that had happened, human history would have taken a course very different from what it did.

SHAH WALIULLAH OF DELHI

It is sufficient to follow past precedents or traditional thinking when one engages in the work of preservation. However, to engage in intellectual leadership, one must possess a deeper understanding of the times and the capacity to engage in *ijtihad*, creative interpretation of Islamic sources and their application in changed circumstances.

Another phase in the role of the Ulama is symbolized by the figure of the well-known Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1762). Undoubtedly, Shah Waliullah did some valuable work—for instance, translating the Quran into Persian, establishing the Madrasa Rahimiya

in Delhi, promoting the study of *Hadith*, penning such important works as *Hujjatullah al-Balighah* ('*The Excellent Proof of God*'), and so on. However, his contributions were defensive. Scholarly contributions of the nature of preservation or safeguarding are, without doubt, valuable contributions. However, there is a fundamental difference between both these roles. The former has to do with the work relating to the preservation of the past, while the latter has to do with the creative intellectual leadership related to the building of the future.

His work, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, had been, as its name implies, the conclusive argument of God. This work could have contributed to the nature of creative leadership. However, in its style and presentation, this book is a traditional expression of the divine religion rather than a rational explanation or interpretation of religion.

When someone engages in a scholarly work of the nature of preservation, it is sufficient for him to have full knowledge of the legacy of the past. However, so far as playing the role of intellectual leadership is concerned, what is required is to possess the vision or foresight into the future. The leadership role is played in the present, but the result is produced in

the future. That is why for the former, it is sufficient to follow the past precedents or traditional thinking. However, for the latter, one must possess a more profound understanding or awareness of the times and the capacity of a high order to engage in *ijtihad*, that is, creative interpretation of Islamic sources and their application in changed circumstances.

Shah Waliullah writes about himself in his book *Fuyuz al-Haramayn*, "I saw myself in a dream as Qaimuzzaman or Master of the Age" (p. 89), which means that when God Almighty wanted to establish a system of goodness and benevolence, He made him a tool and a medium for the fulfilment of that noble cause.

I think Shah Waliullah's dream was true. However, it does not mean that he was *Qaimuzzaman*, but that he should become *Qaimuzzaman* or the pillar of the time.

The importance of Shah Waliullah is that he was born at the dawn of the modern age. He was indeed born at a historical juncture and understood the revolutionary changes that were taking place in the world. As such, he could have established a tradition of Islamic activism that could have continued for centuries after him. In that way, the "modern age" could have truly become an age of revival for Islam. He was indeed at the juncture

where he could have become the *Qaimuzzaman*, but sadly enough, he failed to play this historic role.

Shah Waliullah lived in the 18th century. Long before his times, in the 17th century, the seeds of a new age had already been sown in Europe, which was later to bring about a massive change across the world. That was the age of science, which replaced the age of *taqlid* or traditional thinking. In earlier times, when polytheism and idolatry were prevalent, natural phenomena were explained in terms of religious belief. However, for the first time in human history, these phenomena were explained purely in terms of material causes with the dawning of a new age. This was to lead to a fundamental transformation in human thought. However, Shah Waliullah was more concerned with local developments, in which he became deeply embroiled. He did not plan a course of action based on far-sightedness, which was what could have been expected of a *Qaimuzzaman*.

In ancient times various natural phenomena were explained in terms of faith, for it was believed that God was the doer behind all events. Before Islam, when polytheism was rife, people generally believed several gods were responsible for these various phenomena. With the advent of Islam or the dawning of the age

of *Tawheed*, these phenomena began to be explained in terms of the actions of a single God. In the age that followed, various natural phenomena began to be explained purely in terms of cause and effect for the first time.

In the 16th century, the phenomena of Nature were subjected to scientific investigation. Galileo (1564-1642) studied the moon, the planets and other celestial bodies. He realised that Nature works according to such firmly established laws that its movements could be explained with mathematical precision. According to him, the Book of Nature is written in mathematical form.

Despite opposition from the Church, this trend of thought gathered momentum. By the 17th century, numerous scholars in Europe were seeking to provide a mechanical or materialistic interpretation of natural phenomena. This mechanical philosophy came to be the dominant theme of 17th century science.

In the 18th century, Isaac Newton took this intellectual process to its culmination. His *Principia* was published in Latin in 1687, about 75 years before Shah Waliullah's death. The book appeared in English in 1729. While scholars had long discussed space, time, gravity and

force, Newton took these debates to new heights. In his book, *Principia*, Newton presented the law of universal gravitation with prodigious mathematical reasoning.

So, by Shah Waliullah's time, there was ample evidence of an intellectual revolution sweeping Europe. The scientific aspect of this revolution held great importance for Islam. It was tearing apart traditional ways of thinking about the world. It accepted only those explanations that measured up to modern scientific standards. However, Shah Waliullah seemed to have been entirely unaware of these enormous changes at the global level. He viewed things from the narrow prism of the Delhi of his times and tried to address them by employing simple strategies. Had he travelled about widely and viewed the developments that were taking place from a global perspective, he would have realised that the real challenge was that of a veritable global storm, and not, as he thought, that of saving the tottering Mughal Empire—which, in any case, was a futile effort. He did not realise that this Empire was already dying, with the authority of the Emperor restricted to just Delhi and its suburbs. The fact is that the Mughal Empire that Shah Waliullah was so concerned to revive had already become so

weak that there was no possibility of its survival for any significant length of time. Despite this, Shah Waliullah continued to have great expectations of it. In his *Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah*, he addressed the Muslim Sultans of his times, telling them that it is God's will that they must draw out their swords and not put them back in their sheaths until God 'establishes a distinction between Muslims and polytheists' and until 'unbelievers' had been so suppressed that they were rendered wholly powerless. He claimed that God had commanded that the Muslim Sultans wage war against non-Muslims until fitnah or strife was abolished and religion remained entirely for God. (*Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah*, 1936, Vol. 1, pp. 215-16)

In reality, the nominal Muslim powers that Shah Waliullah turned to had by his own time become so weakened as to be almost non-existent. The Mughal Empire was wracked with internecine strife, with rival claimants to the throne killing each other. To lecture about '*jihad* through the sword' to such a Sultanate was tantamount to singing a martial song to a corpse. Shah Waliullah is credited with saving the tottering Mughal Empire in the popular Muslim imagination. Through Nawab Najibud-Daulah, he invited Ahmad Shah Abdali, ruler of Kabul, to invade India. Abdali

defeated the Marathas, formidable enemies of the Mughals, at Panipat in 1761. However, if one looks at this development from the proper perspective, rather than being an outstanding achievement of Shah Waliullah, it reflects a lack of foresight and clarity of thought on his part. Shah Waliullah could have made a much better contribution had he studied the celebrated *Muqaddimah* of the noted Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). In it, Ibn Khaldun has perceptively noted that every Sultanate survives only for a limited period, just like an individual (p. 170) and that when it grows old, it cannot stand up again (p. 293).

Had Shah Waliullah been cognizant of this law, he would have known that the task before him was not to seek to protect the pillars of the tottering Mughal Empire that had, as it were almost wholly gnawed away by termites and that, in line with the laws of Nature, were bound sooner or later to collapse. Instead, he would have known that he needed to turn to understand the prevailing conditions and, accordingly, help the Muslim *ummah* to chart a new course in its history.

THE ULAMA IN THE AGE OF COLONIALISM

The Ulama have not been assigned to become involved in practical politics. Leaving political disputes to politicians, they must devote themselves entirely to what they have been charged with—scholarly work, social reform, constructive efforts and *dawah*.

With Shah Abdul Aziz of Delhi (1762-1823), a new phase in the activities of the Indian Ulama began. This was a period when Indian Muslim leaders were faced with the challenge posed to the Mughal political authority by internal forces, particularly the Marathas, Jats and Sikhs, with whom some of them directly or indirectly engaged in armed confrontation. They seem to have had little or no awareness that the real challenge they faced was from external forces—that of European colonial powers, armed with new weaponry and technology, who were rapidly conquering large parts of India, as well as much of the Muslim world.

A sign of how powerful these western forces coming to India via sea route had become by this time was that in 1803, the nominal Mughal Emperor of India came under the protection of the East India Company. Only

then did the Indian Ulama realise what was happening around them. Thus, in 1806, Shah Abdul Aziz issued a *fatwa* opining that India had turned into an 'Abode of war' or *Dar al-harb*, noting, as he put it, that he had witnessed that the British, 'masters of wealth', had been creating mischief across vast parts of the country, from Delhi to Kabul.

The Indian Ulama began a long political confrontation with the British. In Muslim-dominated parts of Africa, which now fell under French colonial rule, Ulama and other Muslim leaders similarly revolted against the French. However, from the very first day onwards, it was destined that these confrontations would fail because the Ulama viewed the issue of European colonialism simply as caused by people who were wedded to strife, that is, to make mischief in the land. The fact, however, was that European colonialism had succeeded because the Europeans were in command of new intellectual and technological power and resources, which gave them an enormous advantage over Eastern people.

This was something that the Ulama paid little or no attention to. To cite just one example, the British East India Company began laying a railway line in India in 1853, but the Ulama, who rose in *jihad* in 1857

against the British seemed to have not known about this significant development.

The confrontation that the Ulama of this time called for against the European colonialists was unwarranted from both practical and ideological points of view. From the former perspective, the confrontation supported by the Ulama resulted in nothing, but a one-sided slaughter of Muslims: in no way did it achieve the desired result that they thought it would. The Ulama possessed only traditional weaponry, while the western colonial powers were armed with technologically advanced weapons. It was not simply a question of a quantitative difference in power as far as two opposing parties were concerned, as used to be the case in the past. The difference was qualitative, and the hiatus between the two camps was enormous. Given this fact, this confrontation was in accordance neither with Islam nor with reason.

As a matter of principle, the Ulama have not been assigned to become involved in practical politics. If they assume this role, their other, much more essential responsibilities are bound to be neglected. The Ulama must always observe the division of the areas of activity that we have discussed earlier. In other words, they must leave political disputes to politicians

to handle and, instead, devote themselves entirely to scholarly work, social reform, constructive efforts and *dawah*. They are charged with the responsibility for these activities. They must, therefore, focus on the responsibility they are charged with.

The period extending from towards the end of the *Khilafat-e-Rashida*, the age of the 'Rightly-Guided Caliphs', through the Umayyad Caliphate and down to the end of the Abbasid Caliphate covers a span of some six centuries. This period witnessed numerous internal political confrontations. However, it was also formalised by various disciplines that came under the 'Islamic sciences'. How was this constructive work made possible amid enormous political strife? The sole reason is that the Ulama and the rest of the scholarly community kept aloof from political strife and focused on intellectual pursuits like compilation and classification of various sciences. This division of roles enabled these scholars to focus their energies on the enormously valuable task of crystallizing these various branches of Islamic knowledge while remaining unaffected by the political tumult around them.

Similarly, the Muslim empire of Spain (Andalusia), which spanned about eight hundred years, too was

marred by political clashes and uprisings throughout this period. Despite all this, the educational and scientific services rendered by the Ulama and the Muslim scholars during the same period are astonishingly remarkable. The reason was again the same; the Ulama and the Muslim scholars kept themselves aloof from the political strife, focusing, instead, on their intellectual and other related tasks.

Sadly, in the age of European colonialism, most of the Ulama abandoned their primary task—of the intellectual development of people along constructive lines. Instead, they became involved in useless political conflicts, which they termed '*jihad*'. However, in the same period, some Ulama realised that they could not waste their energies in such conflicts. Instead, they believed they must remain aloof from politics and focus on intellectual development and training along constrictive lines. However, these Ulama were in such a small minority that they proved ineffective in bringing any significant change in the state of affairs.

In 1857, many Indian Ulama declared what they regarded as '*jihad* through the sword' against the British. There was a noted *alim* in Deoband, Maulana Shaikh Muhammad, whose opinion opposed that of the Ulama who favoured *jihad*. He claimed that, far

from it being a duty binding on Muslims to wage armed *jihad* against the British, given the prevailing conditions, it was not even lawful according to the Islamic *Shariah*. Hence, a consultative meeting was held in Deoband, in which, among others, Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi (both of whom were soon to be closely involved in the establishment of the Darul Uloom at Deoband) also participated. Describing this discussion, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani writes in his autobiography titled, *Naqsh-e-Hayat*:

In this meeting, the issue of *jihad* was discussed. Very courteously, Hazrat Nanotvi asked Maulana Shaikh Muhammad, “*Hazrat*, what is the reason that you do not declare *jihad* to be a binding duty (*farz*), nor even permissible (*ja’iz*)?” He replied, “We do not have the weapons and instruments for *jihad*. We are lacking in resources.” Maulana Nanotvi then said, “Do [we] not have even that many resources as [the Muslims had] during the battle of Badr?” At this, Maulana Shaikh Muhammad remained silent. (*Naqsh-e-Hayat*, 1954, Vol. 2, p. 42)

This comparison made by Maulana Nanotvi with the Battle of Badr (in 624 CE, in which the Makkan

opponents of Islam fought the Muslims, led by the Prophet) was undoubtedly incorrect. In that battle, the difference between the two contending parties was quantitative. The Muslim force numbered three hundred thirteen, while their opponents were around one thousand. In contrast, the difference between the two forces in the confrontation of 1857 was qualitative. The Muslims had old-fashioned weapons used in face-to-face fighting, while the British had new weapons, modern scientific inventions that could shoot from afar. The former relied only on limited ground troops, while the latter had a powerful navy, too. The British forces were backed by a community that was fired by a new zeal and determination, while the Muslim army was backed by members of a community that had degenerated.

However, the Ulama who were leading the revolt at this time did not have any understanding of the fundamental qualitative difference between the two contending forces. Had they fully understood this difference, they would have advocated patience (*sabr*), not physical *jihad* for the Muslims. They would have realised that by remaining firm on the path of patience and steadfastness, the Muslims could begin to make the necessary plans for an appropriate response to the

prevailing conditions instead of plunging into armed conflict at an inappropriate time and thereby bringing about further destruction.

This is a chilling reminder of how unaware the Ulama at this time were of the conditions that prevailed around them. Although Europe had entered the age of modern communications by this time, the Ulama seemed to be unaware of this significant development. Modern means of communications played a vital role in the British victory in the revolt of 1857, but there is no mention of these in the literature produced by the Indian Ulama of that period.

In his book, *The Ifs of History*, the British writer F. J. C. Hearnshaw has given many examples that had so and so events or discoveries not taken place, history would have been different. The 19th chapter of this book is titled, 'If There Had Been No Electric Telegraph in the Fifties.' An extract from this chapter is:

“There were in India at the time only 45000 British troops as against more than 250,000 sepoy. Nothing could have saved the lives of any of the British residents, whether military or civilian, in the whole of the Ganges valley, nothing could have

prevented the extinction—at any rate temporarily, of the British dominion in Bengal and Oudh, if the mutiny had occurred before the installation of the telegraph. By means of wire (which the mutineers were not able to cut), the Governor-General, Lord Canning, sent for reinforcement from England. Again by telegrams, Lord Canning was able to get, and get quickly, invaluable contingents from Madras, from Bombay, London, and Burma. Further, he was in a position to recall a powerful force under General Outram sent on service into Persia. But most decisive of all was his ability to intercept, by an urgent and peremptory message sent by wire to Singapore, a completely equipped expeditionary army of 5000 men which was just on its way under Lord Elgin to deal with trouble in China. From Cape Colony, too, were brought, in response to a cabled appeal, two batteries of artillery, stores, horses and £ 60,000 in gold.” (pp. 156-157)

A TRUE VOICE

The task of inviting people to God is so very vital that if it is abandoned, the whole Muslim community will lose all value in God's eyes. When this task is left undone, all other tasks, if undertaken, will prove to be ultimately futile and can never result in Muslims gaining respect and honour.

The noted Arab reformer and scholar Sayyed Rashid Rida (1865-1935) visited India in 1912 at the invitation of the Nadwatul Ulama, a leading Islamic seminary in Lucknow. He also visited the Darul Uloom at Deoband, where he spoke at length to the students and teachers of the *madrassa*. In his address, he drew the attention of the Ulama to the task of preaching Islam. He pointed out that there were people who worshipped idols in India, others who worshipped trees and stones, and others who worshipped the moon, the sun, stars, and so on. If the Muslims had a good team of missionaries, he suggested, they could succeed in preaching Islam among such people. These missionaries could also strive to remove misunderstandings about Islam, but he added that they needed to be well-aware of the important issues of modern philosophy. (*Al-Jamiat Weekly*, Delhi, February 6, 1970)

Undoubtedly, what Sayyed Rashid Rida suggested was proper, but not a single Indian Muslim religious scholar appeared to consider this suggestion worthy of attention. Besides Sayyed Rashid Rida, there were other perceptive individuals who, at this time, sought to draw the attention of the Ulama to the fact of how necessary it was to abandon useless political involvement and to devote their energies instead to constructive, result-oriented work. However, the opinions of such people made no impact, so Ulama's caravan rushed headlong onto the path of destructive politics.

One reason for this was that the Ulama had begun to consider criticism abhorrent, almost as if it were a sin. They did not attempt to discuss the points raised by Sayyed Rashid Rida seriously. Most of the Ulama only knew what they deeply revered as the practice of their predecessors or 'elders'. Because the opinions of people like Sayyed Rashid Rida were construed as being a criticism of their predecessors, hence they were rejected. It was unthinkable for the Ulama to rethink the methods their predecessors had adopted, critique them, or adopt any other methods but the ones that their 'elders' had used.

An illustration of this is found in the life of Sayyed Ahmad Bareilvi (d. 1831), who is considered by his

admirers as a leading Muslim religious scholar of India of his times. Maulana Mir Mahbub Ali (1866-1911), his companion and disciple, later began to differ with Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi when Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi declared an armed *jihad* against the Sikh rulers of Punjab. Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi declared armed *jihad* based on divine illumination or inspiration (*kashf*). When Maulana Mir Mahbub Ali learned of this, he remarked, “Sayyed Sahab, the basis of *jihad* is consultation.” In other words, he suggested that the decision to launch armed *jihad* ought to be taken based on consultation among those responsible for such a serious decision, rather than based on someone’s *kashf* or dream.

After this, the men in Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi’s camp turned into inveterate opponents of Mir Mahbub Ali. Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi’s response to Mir Mahbub Ali’s comment was to say, “Your obedience ought to be [in the form of] silently listening—maintaining such silence as that of the mountain that stands before me.” Mir Mahbub Ali did not accept Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi’s orders, so he left him and decided to return to his homeland. At this, Sayyed Ahmad Barelvi declared, “He who leaves me and heads back to his homeland shall lose his faith (*iman*).” (*Maulana Ismail Dehlvi aur*

Taqwiatul Iman by Maulana Shah Abul Hasan Zayd Faruqi, pp. 86-87)

In Islam, decisions about collective affairs are based on mutual consultation, or *shura* (The Quran 42:38). Such consultation leads to healthy decision-making. A climate where criticism and differences of opinion are accepted is a must for proper consultation. However, because the present-day Ulama do not accept criticism and differences of opinion, there is no genuine *shura* in their circles.

When the British were ruling India, there were other communities besides the Muslims, and many of them indulged in various forms of *shirk*, associating others with God. Now, from the perspective of the *Shariah*, the first responsibility of the Ulama ought to have been to launch a movement based on the worship of God through kind words and gentle guidance and exhortation, infused by a genuine concern for the people's welfare. However, if you examine the history of the last three hundred years, you will find that there was not even a single Indian Muslim religious leader who was conscious of this urgent need and who drew the attention of the Muslims to it. This task of inviting people to God is so vital that if it is abandoned, the Muslim community will lose all

value in God's eyes. When this task is left undone, all other tasks, if undertaken, will prove to be ultimately futile and can never result in Muslims gaining respect and honour.

At the time of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, the Muslims were politically dominant, so it would have been relatively easy to call them to the worship and service of God. However, the Ulama were not able to use this opportunity. They made no genuine efforts to this effect.

British rule was formally established in India in the middle of the 18th century. In pursuit of their political interests, the British adopted a policy of maintaining a balance between the different religious communities in the country. Accordingly, the Muslims and other communities acquired an equal status. In this period, too, there were ample opportunities for the Muslims to engage in *dawah* work, conveying God's message to people, but here, the Ulama made no use of them.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR II

Ulama of Muslim-majority countries should stay aloof from politics, and focus on the reform of the Muslims, awakening the true spirit of Islam in them and producing Islamic literature according to modern standards that would promote an urge to discover Islam among people.

The unnecessary political and violent struggle of the Ulama failed to defeat the Western colonial powers who had established control over most Muslim-majority lands. However, internecine fighting among the Western countries themselves, culminating in the Second World War, drained their military strength to such an extent that it became exceedingly difficult for them to continue to exercise political control over foreign countries, including most Muslim-majority lands. That is why they granted political independence to these countries in the mid-20th century, although their cultural and economic control over them remained undiminished.

As a result of this development, around fifty Muslim-majority politically independent states emerged in Asia and Africa. At this time, too, it was the task of the Ulama in these countries to shoulder the very

same responsibility that Islam had given them—that is to say, to leave politics to the politicians and to focus their energies, instead, on the spread of education, *dawah* work and social reform. However, instead of doing this, the Ulama again rushed headlong into the field of politics in a completely unwarranted manner. Before this, in the period of European colonial rule, the aim of the politics of these Ulama had been ‘the struggle for independence’. Now their politics was conducted in the name of ‘the enforcement of Islamic Law’. In numerous countries, including Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Algeria, Indonesia, the Ulama set up parties to establish political rule according to their understanding of Islamic law. This politics once again turned the Muslim countries into a battlefield, the only difference now being that while earlier, in the colonial period, the Ulama had been pitted against the non-Muslim ruling powers, now they were up in arms against a section of fellow Muslims themselves. Thus, these Islamic parties found themselves playing the role of the Opposition in almost every Muslim country.

These efforts of the Ulama did not result in the establishment of purely *Shariah*-based rule in any Muslim country. However, what did result from all

of this was that everywhere the Muslims became divided into, broadly, two mutually opposed camps that were at war with each other. If the non-Muslim forces killed the Muslims in the colonial period, the Muslims began killing their co-religionists. Moreover, consequently, everywhere, Muslim societies fell prey to destructive activities.

Had the Ulama of the Muslim-majority countries stayed aloof from politics and focused, instead, on the reform of the Muslims, awakening the true spirit of Islam among them, producing Islamic literature according to modern standards that would promote an urge to discover Islam among people, and works of a similar kind, they would have been better enabled to play a role in establishing governance more truly in line with the teachings of Islam. If they had played their role in transforming Muslim societies into Islamic societies, the system of governance that would have naturally emerged from this process would undoubtedly have been more genuinely Islamic in spirit, as is suggested by a hadith that we had quoted earlier:

“Your leadership will be a reflection of you [the people].” (*Shuabul Iman*, Hadith No. 7006)

The real reason for the failure to govern the Muslim countries on truly Islamic lines is not the oppression of secular rulers or the conspiracies of the so-called enemies of Islam, as the Islamists always claim. The real reason for this is the blunder committed by the so-called flag-bearers of Islam, who, without adequately preparing the Muslim societies for such governance, set about launching campaigns for the enforcement of Islamic law. The example of Pakistan very well exemplifies this point.

In that country, what is called 'pro-Islamic' forces, have, on more than one occasion, won the chance of ruling the country, either partially (as in the case of Mufti Muhammad Mahmud's winning control of the Frontier Province in the 1970s) or completely (as in the case of the rule of General Zia ul-Haq, 1977-88). However, in no way have they succeeded in enforcing the *Shariah* in their respective countries.

The words of Hazrat Aisha, wife of the Prophet, recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4993, provide a very appropriate commentary on this matter. She had said that when the Quran began to be revealed, it talked about Heaven and Hell. Later, when people began turning to Islam, commandments declaring the forbidden (*haram*) and permissible

(*halal*) were revealed. If, as Hazrat Aisha noted, the Quran had outlawed the consumption of alcohol at the outset itself, people would have declared that they would never stop drinking. If the Quran had forbidden adultery at the very outset, they would have refused ever to stop indulging in it.

In Muslim lands, the Ulama involved in movements to enforce Islamic law assumed that because the majority of the inhabitants of these countries were Muslims, they were, by definition, in favour of Islamic law. This, however, was a complete misreading of reality. The fact is that the present-day generation of Muslims is a cultural entity, far from being a religious community. Hence, it is wrong to assume, even about people who pray and fast and go on the *Hajj* or *Umrah*, that they want political power to be in the hands of the Ulama, who would impose *Shariah* laws on them.

The unrealistic politics of the Ulama in the Muslim countries have produced a situation which we can adequately appreciate in the light of the *hadith* narrated by Hazrat Aisha, referred to above. Without preparing the populace to welcome and willingly accept Islamic laws, the Ulama have sought to impose these laws, including those related to the consumption of liquor

and adultery, ignoring the fact that large sections of the populace have developed an aversion to them.

In January 1827, Sayyed Ahmad Bareilvi and his companions had established what they called an Islamic government in the Peshawar region, near the Afghan border. Sayyed Ahmad was selected as the head of the state, the *Amir ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful). However, very soon, significant differences developed, to the point where the local Muslims set about killing the representatives that Sayyed Ahmad had appointed in their areas. Thus, this 'Islamic government' collapsed almost as soon as it had been established!

This failed attempt to establish Islamic rule without adequately preparing the Muslim society for it, was not, however, taken as an eye-opener by later generations. That is why efforts continue to be made even in our day to repeat this experiment which, some two hundred years ago, very clearly had shown how impossible it was for it to succeed.

By the middle of the 20th century, movements aiming for what their proponents called the 'Islamic Revolution' emerged almost all over the Muslim world. These were led by Ulama, as well as Islamist intellectuals. However, these people, both when they

were in the opposition and when, in some cases, they came to power, became a cause for giving Islam a bad name. Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Algeria, Indonesia, Bangladesh and many other countries serve as examples. It is a fact that these movements in the name of 'Divine Government' (*Hukumat-e Ilahiya*), the 'Islamic System' (*Islami Nizam*) and the 'Enforcement of the *Shariah*' (*Nifaz-e Shariah*) turned out to be completely counterproductive.

It is a sad reality that from the late 19th till the mid-20th century, numerous non-Muslim thinkers, for instance, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), declared Islam to be the solution to the problems besetting humanity in the present age. However, by the end of the 20th century, no influential non-Muslim thinker made any such comment. The cause for this was the wrong representation of Islam by the so-called revolutionary Muslim leaders. Before this, scholars learnt about Islam from the history of the early phase of Islam and were impressed by it; many had a very positive image of the religion. However, the meaningless movements in the name of Islam by the modern-day Ulama and other Muslim leaders have only added to human misery. Faced with the record of

these so-called representatives of Islam in our times, many people have become averse to Islam itself. Thus, intellectuals no longer believe that Islam can promote human welfare in the present age.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROPHET

A strong team of competent people, men of character, is required to form a good government. These can only emerge from a society whose members have become receptive to Islam and where the political factors necessary for the stability of such a regime are present.

Abdullah ibn Abbas narrates an incident from the early Makkan phase of the Prophet's time. One day, he relates, the leaders of the Quraysh gathered near the Kabah. They decided to send one of their men to the Prophet to call him to talk to him to settle matters. When he received this message, the Prophet went to meet them.

When the discussion started, the representative of the Quraysh told the Prophet that he had become a source of great trouble for their tribe and accused him of abusing their forefathers, defaming their religion,

calling them foolish and insulting their idols. After going on in this vein, they told the Prophet that he should desist from what he was doing, in return for which the Quraysh were ready to give him whatever he wanted. The Quraysh would even concede to making him their ruler if he wanted that. (*Sirah Ibn Ishaq*, Vol. 1, p. 207)

The Prophet did not accept this offer of the Quraysh and, instead, continued with his missionary efforts. Later, when he shifted to Madinah, he established a city-state. Now, the question arises as to why the Prophet did not accept the offer of heading the government earlier, in Makkah, which the Quraysh had made to him, while he established a city-state fifteen years later, in Madinah? Why didn't he establish this state in Makkah fifteen years earlier?

This is because establishing an Islamic government is not for any Islamic personality, using any means whatsoever, to occupy the seat of governance. The establishment of any regime is very closely linked to the prevailing external conditions. In the case of establishing an Islamic polity, there must already be a society whose members have become receptive to Islam and where the political factors necessary for the stability of such a regime are present.

During the stay of the Prophet in Makkah, these favourable factors had not come together. That is why the Prophet did not try to establish a state governed according to Islamic teachings there. However, later, in Madinah, these factors had crystallized, which is why the Prophet established a state governed according to Islam.

The difference in the two contexts is apparent from the fact that in Makkah, the wife of Abu Lahab could condemn the Prophet and even publicly sing verses criticising him and proclaim that she refused to accept the message he was propagating. On the other hand, when, in the 13th year of his prophethood, the Prophet, along with his companion, Abu Bakr, arrived in Madinah, he was greeted by the children of the town singing verses that celebrated his arrival and his message.

The life of Prophet Moses gives us a similar example. The Quran tells us that the Children of Israel, the people of Moses, had been destined to acquire political power once again. Thus, after the demise of Moses, the Children of Israel fought with the Amalekites and established their government over Syria and Palestine, under the leadership of Joshua, son of Nun.

Here, the question arises as to why, when the Israelites had every opportunity to establish a government half a century earlier, at the time of Moses, they had to wait for so many years before they finally did so?

At the time of Moses, the Pharaoh of Egypt and his entire army were drowned in the sea, which cleared the field for Moses. Moses could have returned to the Egyptian capital, Memphis, and the Children of Israel and occupied the vacant Egyptian throne. After the miraculous destruction of the Pharaoh and his army, the denizens of Egypt must have been so awestruck that they might have readily accepted Moses as their new ruler.

However, Moses did not do this. Instead, he left the vacant political field of Egypt and, along with his people, went into the Sinai desert. The Israelites faced forty years of harsh life there, with many older generations dying off. Only the new generation, reared in the desert, survived.

Now, the only reason for this delay was that the generation of Israelites who had earlier lived in Egypt had fallen prey to moral decline for specific reasons. This is why all the Israelites were kept in the Valley of Tih so that all the community's older people should

breathe their last and a new generation could be reared in the desert, develop a reliable character, and then gain political power and establish an Israelite government.

These two instances very clearly prove that a new regime can only be established when the necessary collective conditions favourable for it prevail. The example of Prophet Muhammad tells us that if a favourable environment does not prevail in public in the real sense, even a prophet cannot establish a government in such a context. Moreover, if he did establish a government despite the absence of such a favourable environment, it would soon collapse, and the result of this would be fruitless.

The example of Moses shows that a strong team of competent people, that is, men of character, is required to form a good government. In the absence of such a team, establishing an Islamic government is impossible if there is a political vacuum in the country and there are two prophets to fill this vacuum.

Keeping this prophetic example in mind, it will be apparent that the agitations that swept all across the Muslim world, driven by the slogan “Establish Islamic Government!” were simply naive. Their logical result

could only be—and it turned out to be precisely so—terrible self-destruction, with their goal remaining as distant as before.

TEMPORAL CHANGES

The true secret behind the dominance of the Western powers was that they had transformed the human mindset. To successfully meet the challenge of the Western nations, it was now necessary to counter them in the realm of ideas.

A fundamental mistake of the Ulama of modern times is that they have taken the dominance of Western nations to be simply a political phenomenon. However, this dominance is a reflection of a powerful civilisation. It indicates that the political aspect is secondary. Even if the dominant Western nations were politically defeated, their dominance would remain intact. It was very-well illustrated in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The dominance of the Tartars in the 13th century over large parts of the then Muslim world was simply by the rule of the sword—that is to say, it was mere political dominance. Suppose the Tartars had been

defeated politically by the sword, their dominance would have come to an end. However, the dominance of the Western powers in the modern age was much more deeply entrenched than this. Thus, the future of Western dominance could not be estimated simply on the battlefield.

The true secret behind the dominance of the Western powers was that they had transformed the human mindset. The intellectual revolution they had brought about compelled the entire world to think in the same way they did, to hold opinions of things just like they do.

This major transformation led to a shift in the arena of confrontation between the Western powers and the people they came to dominate, from the battlefield to the field of thought. To successfully meet the challenge of the Western nations, it was now necessary to counter them in the realm of ideas. To find a place in the modern world, it was necessary, once again, to transform the structures of human thought. However, because the Ulama became deeply involved in political conflicts, they failed to understand these imperatives, and they also failed to take the appropriate action on this score.

THE MINDSET OF INDIVIDUALS, SOCIETAL LEADERSHIP

It is precisely the task of understanding and reforming the modern mind, Ulama's most pressing task. Without reforming people's thinking, no sort of practical political effort can ever succeed.

As indicated above, the individual's condition is of the utmost importance, while political or societal leadership is that of the outer structure. If the state of the former (i.e., the individual) is good, then inevitably, that of the latter will also be so, and then no conspiracy can cause it to deviate from the right path.

The caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar provides this example. Moreover, when people's ways of thinking (mindset) become corrupted, even a just ruler cannot transform society into a perfect one, simply by wielding political power.

In the present day, we are confronted with the painful reality that all the efforts of the Ulama in practical politics have continuously proven to be ineffective. As we mentioned earlier, Sayyed Ahmad Bareilvi established an 'Islamic government' in the Peshawar

region, but, shortly after that, the entire structure collapsed. Later, when Pakistan came into being, Maulana Mufti Mahmud was given the opportunity, as the Chief Minister of the country's Frontier Province, to form a ministry consisting of 'pro-Islamic' forces, but this ministry was unable to complete its term in office, and so proved to be a failure. In Sudan, in the late 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood had the opportunity to play a vital role in the government of Jafar Nimeiri, but their participation made no positive difference to the conditions of the Sudanese society, and soon they went out of power. In Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq had the opportunity to rule the country as a dictator for more than a decade. He received the support of many Ulama. However, he failed in bringing about any truly Islamic change in Pakistan. And so on.

A primary cause for the continuous failure of the Ulama in the field of practical politics is that they are going against the divine plan. It can be better appreciated when we see their activities in the light of the statement made by Hazarat Aisha, as referred to earlier. They want to acquire leadership over people without reforming the latter's mindset. As Hazarat Aisha's statement tells us, such a course of action would not have succeeded even at the time of

the Prophet. So, how can it succeed today, fourteen hundred years later?

The Ulama are not aware of the vast transformations that have taken place in human thought in the modern age. They have no real idea of the modern mind. However, it is precisely the task of understanding and reforming the modern mind that is Ulama's most pressing task—one which they should have taken up at the very outset. Without reforming people's thinking, no sort of practical political effort can ever succeed.

THE ISSUE OF MINDSET

People act according to their bent of mind. If their way of thinking is right, their actions will also be right. The role of the Ulama is to direct the mindset of people towards right thinking.

People act according to their bent of mind. If their mentality is deviant or ungodly, naturally, their actions will reflect the same. Conversely, if their way of thinking is right, their actions will also be right.

Before the advent of Prophet Muhammad, the fundamental problem facing humanity was the dominance of a deviant, ungodly mindset. This

mentality stemmed from polytheistic beliefs. This is referred to by the term *fitnah* in the Quran (8:39). It was only by dint of the Prophet and his Companions' struggles that this mindset was destroyed. Subsequently, the age of the mindset based on divine guidance dawned. It was founded on *Tawheed*, the oneness of God. This mindset remained dominant for about a thousand years after that.

With the end of the 18th century, a new phase in human history began. This new age was, once again, based on deviation from the right path. It was based on atheistic ideologies. In the Islamic period, God was the centre of human thought, shaping human activities. However, in the new age, Nature took the place of God and became the new basis of human thought and actions. This fundamental transformation in people's mindset resulted in a complete change in all practical aspects of human life, so much so that even those people who still believed in God did not remain unaffected by this all-pervasive intellectual storm.

The development of this new mindset took place over a long period, and numerous people played a crucial role in it. The iconic figure of this new age was Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727). Newton studied

the solar system, including the revolution of the sun, the moon and the planets. He sought to explain these astronomical phenomena through the principles of Mathematics. He pointed out how the movement of these bodies was linked to the Law of Gravity.

In ancient times, it was believed that the movements of the sun and the moon and all other phenomena had supernatural causes. At that time, human beings were unaware that these developments could also be explained using materialistic terminology relating to the Law of Nature.

Newton's research shook the very foundations of this belief. Further research discovered that all developments on the Earth and in the skies were an expression of such laws of Nature as can be described in the language of Mathematics; the pillars of traditional faith systems were shaken. Modern thinkers declared that if events are due to natural causes; they are not due to supernatural causes.

After Newton, a new group of thinkers emerged who played a crucial role in changing people's thinking. Charles Darwin (1802-1882) represented this new group. Newton had seen the physical world as moving according to the laws of Nature. Darwin went further and declared that the biological world, too, moved

according to the laws of Nature. From the smallest germ to human beings, all forms of life on Earth, he contended, had emerged in a way consistent with the known laws of Nature.

An enormous amount of research was done on Darwin's thesis after his death. Although some modifications were later made to its original form, the Darwinian Theory of Evolution came to be accepted by almost all modern scientists as accepted fundamental truth. Consequently, whether consciously or unconsciously, it came to be widely believed across the world that the creation of human beings had nothing to do with God, their Creator. This was a vital implication of the Theory of Evolution.

The third group among modern thinkers was represented by Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx gave a materialistic explanation of human history, which he termed a 'scientific' interpretation. He claimed that a continuous class struggle governed history. He termed this as a fundamental law. Class struggle, he opined, determined the present and the future of humankind.

In ancient times, human beings considered history to be determined by fate. They believed in a supreme God who shaped human history. However, the philosophy

invented by Marx and later elaborated upon by many scholars in an enormous body of writings influenced the entire world. Thus, people began thinking of history as something that had nothing to do with God—in complete contrast to the past, when they looked at history through the prism of Divine action.

CHANGES IN THE CRITERION OF POWER

The caravan of the West was like a rapidly flowing river, while the East turned into a stagnant pond. Before the Ulama of the East, the task was to prepare its people to think creatively, imbibe the spirit of freedom of thought, critical thinking, and not fall prey to intellectual stagnation.

What we have just discussed relates to some philosophical aspects linked to the discovery of the laws of Nature. From a practical point of view, this discovery provided the West with a great advantage. It made it possible for the Western people to change the criterion of power. They developed a new understanding of power, which was hitherto unknown. The West replaced the old, traditional age with the scientific age. They replaced handicrafts

with machine-based production. They replaced hand-wielded weapons with weapons that could fire from a distance. They made it possible for humans to travel by air, and not only, as before, by land or sea. They replaced animal-drawn modes of transport with engine-driven vehicles.

Previously, the difference between contending powers was essentially quantitative. However, the West ushered in a new age, wherein the difference between the Western nations and others was a fundamentally qualitative one. This transformation gave the West a clear and decisive advantage over the rest of the world.

These developments also brought about significant changes at the human level. The Westerners imbibed a new mentality resulting from discoveries, which set them apart from people in the East, whose thought processes continued to be shaped by traditional beliefs. The former attached great importance to change and creative thinking, while the latter clung to the blind imitation of past precedent. The former hailed the spirit of freedom of thought and criticism, while the latter fell prey to intellectual stagnation.

The caravan of the West was like a rapidly flowing river, while the East turned into a stagnant pond. The West was energetic and active, driven by a cause, while

people had lost the very notion of a cause to live for in the East. Their bubbling energy united the Westerners, while the Easterners, who had now gone into decline, had lost those qualities that keep people together. The Westerners were now fired by a passionate zeal to spread the civilisation they had developed to the rest of the world, while the Easterners remained alive simply on the memories of what they had inherited from their ancestors. The Westerners were full of energy and excitement, while, at the very most, the Easterners were concerned simply to defend or protect whatever little remained with them.

These fundamental differences between the people in the West and the East were akin to the distinction between an alert and active army, on the one hand, and one that is tired and listless, on the other. In such a situation, the task before the East was to prepare its people once again, rather than stirring ill-prepared folks using emotional speeches to fight their opponents—but that is precisely what the Ulama of the present age did.

EASE IN DIFFICULTY

A Quranic principle is that with every problem, there are opportunities. Had the Ulama applied this to Western political dominance, they would have found the new and powerful opportunities of engaging in conveying God's message to people and avail of them.

The most significant damage caused by the unnecessary dominance of politics and the quest for political power on the thinking of the Ulama was that in the new age, the Ulama could only see oppression, conspiracies and problems all around. They were wholly unaware of the possibilities and opportunities that the new age provided. People who fail to see the positive possibilities that a situation offers naturally fail to tap the available opportunities. This is precisely the case of the Ulama in this period.

The Quran informs us that it is a fundamental law of God that ease is present with every difficulty in this world. With every problem, there are positive opportunities. The Quran (94:5-6) says:

So, surely with every hardship there is ease;
surely, with every hardship there is ease.

The classical Quranic commentators suggest that the Arabic مَعَ (*ma'a*) that appears in this verse indicates 'along with'. Thus, Ibn Kathir, in his commentary, says that through this verse, God tells us that ease is found along with difficulty. However, the Ulama of the modern period were so obsessed with the problems that they failed to understand this reality. Every disadvantage also brings along with it an advantage. This principle applied to Western culture and Western imperialism just as it did to other affairs. These developments struck the Muslim world as a major tragedy. However, at the same time and along with this, they possessed many favourable possibilities that the Muslims could have used. The most substantial such possibility was new and powerful opportunities to engage in conveying God's message to people. These opportunities were hitherto unavailable. Had the Ulama understood this point and availed of these opportunities in the right way, they could have transformed the tragic modern history of the *ummah* into a very positive one. However, due to the particular mentality that they had developed, they failed to do so.

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR INVITING PEOPLE TO GOD

The Ulama should have availed of the new possibilities to convey God's message to people that emerged in the modern age, such as religious freedom, rational support for religious truths and means of communication to take the word of God into every home.

New possibilities of conveying God's message to people have emerged in the modern age. I have written extensively on this issue in numerous books and articles. Here I will only briefly touch upon this matter.

1. The basis of the modern age is freedom of thought. Among the many results of the modern intellectual revolution is freedom of religion. Before this, human history was throughout characterised by religious persecution. For the first time, religious freedom, including the freedom to propagate religion, has been recognized as a legitimate human right in the modern age. Through the human rights charter of the United Nations, this has been accepted by all the world nations. This development has made it possible for the first time in history to engage in the task of conveying God's message to people without any obstruction whatsoever.

2. Among the several scholarly disciplines that the modern age gave birth to was Anthropology, whose subject matter is human societies. Anthropologists made objective studies and proved that belief in God and religion have been present in all societies, thus showing that such belief is natural to human beings and an answer to a universal human quest. This finding significantly boosted the possibilities for Muslims to convey God's message to people, for it indicated that such belief is as indispensable for human beings as food.

3. The findings of modern science amazingly fit into what the Quran has revealed. They were a confirmation of this prediction of the Quran:

We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves until it becomes clear that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is the witness of all things? (41: 53)

In this way, modern science became a powerful potential academic tool in the hands of those engaged in conveying God's message to people and sharing the message of Islam with them.

4. Among the many new inventions wrought by the modern age were new means of communication.

For the first time in history, these reduced distances to the barest minimum and made it possible for a preacher of Islam to make the entire world his arena for *dawah* work or conveying God's message to people. This was an expression of a tradition of the Prophet wherein he predicted that a time would come when the message of Islam would reach into every house in the world: "To every home, big or small, God will bring the message of Islam." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23814)

5. In the Introduction to my book *Aqliyat-e Islam*, first published in 1978, I wrote:

"In the Free World, extraordinary new possibilities for *dawah* have opened up. However, this exception is the Communist world because it is entirely under coercive rule. Free opportunities for *dawah* are unavailable there."

However, just thirteen years after I wrote these lines, conditions changed considerably. The end of 1991 was also accompanied by the end of the Communist Empire. Thus, the same opportunities to convey God's message to people were opened up in erstwhile communist countries as were previously available only in the non-communist world.

UNAWARENESS OF THE MODERN AGE

Rational investigation in the modern age is based on empirical realities that are very useful for Islam based on firmly established truths. Had the Ulama understood Western thought deeply, they would have welcomed it instead of becoming its enemy.

In November 1967, I wrote an article, titled *Daur-e Jadeed ko Jaanne ki Zarurat (Need for Understanding the Modern Age)*, was published in the Urdu weekly *al-Jamiat*. In it, I pointed out that:

The revolution in thought and action that has overtaken the world has produced many challenges for Islam. However, it is such a tragedy that while the *ummah* has been faced with this serious situation for a long time, no serious efforts have been made to understand the modern problems.

In 1894, the Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow, appointed a committee consisting of leading Indian Ulama whose task was to suggest sensible reforms in the *madrasa* curriculum. On this occasion, Maulana Shah Muhammad Husain noted:

One fault of the current curriculum [the *Dars-e-Nizami*] is that it does not give us any course of

action to counter modern philosophy that is today attacking Islam. Hence, I think it is appropriate that a book about modern philosophy should be prepared, and this can easily be done by requesting a Muslim who has received a good education in modern philosophy and English [to write this book]. He can scan the anti-Islamic issues of modern philosophy, translate them into Urdu, and present them to the Nadwatul Ulama. The Nadwatul Ulama can write a reply to them and introduce this in the [*madrasa*] syllabus, and students can study this during their holidays or in their free time.

Around a century has passed since this suggestion was made, but it has yet to become a reality. In this period, the Nadwatul Ulama claims to have made significant progress, but, surprisingly, this book suggested by Maulana Shah Muhammad Husain around a hundred years ago remains absent from its curriculum.

Ten years before the Partition of India, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi wrote a book titled, *Tajdid-o-Ihya-e-Din* (*The Renewal and Revival of Islam*). Surveying the failure of Islamic movements, from that of Shah Waliullah to that led by Shah Ismail in the early 19th century, he contended:

Sayyed Ahmad Shahid and Shah Ismail Shahid rose to launch an Islamic Revolution. However, they did not send a delegation of accomplished Ulama to Europe to study the secret of the power and progress of that community that was spreading as fast as a storm, using new instruments, new resources, new methods, and new sciences and arts. They never thought of finding what sort of institutions had been established in its homeland, what forms of knowledge it possessed, the pillars of its civilisation, and what, in contrast to it, we [Muslims] lacked. (*Tajdid-o-Ihya-e-Din*, 1999, Lahore, p. 128)

Sentiments of this sort have been repeatedly voiced for a long time now, yet not a single Muslim religious scholar of note has so far travelled to the West with the specific purpose of doing this sort of research. Nor has any such scholar studied Western literature in-depth with this goal in mind. In recent years, some Ulama has indeed got the opportunity to travel to Europe and America, but these visits had nothing to do with the sort of research we are talking about here. All the Ulama who go to Europe or America, do not go there in the true sense of the term. They simply travel to meet some Muslims living in Europe

or America. Once there, they do not establish any real connections with the Western world or study the conditions prevailing there.

Take the instance of two books to understand this point further. The Egyptian Islamist activist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) penned a work titled, *The America I Have Seen*, and the Indian Muslim religious scholar Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi (d. 1999) authored a travelogue in Urdu titled *Do Mahiney Amreeka Mein* (*Two Months in America*). Despite what their titles might suggest, both these books have nothing to do with any in-depth study of American life. If someone reads Maulana Nadvi's book, he will be stunned that the author spends two whole months in America, but he does not meet a single American in this long period, nor does he study any American institution to understand the American philosophy of life.

If someone were to read these books, he might well gain some superficial and negative impressions about America, but he will obtain absolutely no idea of the secret of American power or the heritage of thought on which America's ideological structure is based.

The bare fact is that the present-day Ulama have absolutely no understanding of Western thought. Our Ulama has a wrong picture of Westerners based on

incorrect information, just as the old Orientalists had a bad image of Islam. For instance, it is said that Westerners are ‘believers in Reason alone’, that they are advocates of unrestricted freedom of thought, and that, as a Muslim scholar once quipped, “The creed of the Western man is: ‘nothing exists except for Reason.’” However, this is a very wrong interpretation of Western rationality. The Westerners regard research-based thinking, rather than uncontrolled thinking, as the basis of Reason. In the olden days, people used to think and argue using religious arguments. However, in the modern age, the bases for philosophical investigations are not the preconceived hypotheses of any belief or ideological system but, instead, actual, empirical realities. This understanding of rationality is beneficial because Islam is based on firmly established truths. Had the Ulama understood Western thought deeply, they would have considered it worthwhile and welcomed it. However, they became its enemies based on very superficial knowledge, heaping scorn on it.

THE CRUX OF THIS DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ULAMA AND THE MODERN AGE

Completely dissociating from practical politics, the Ulama should develop the spirit of tolerance, accept open criticism, engage in scholarship after a deep understanding of modern thought, reform the minds of the Muslims and convey God's message to humanity.

1. The Ulama must first decide to dissociate from practical politics completely. Their real work is in knowledge, scholarship, *dawah* and reform. When it is necessary, they can express their views on political issues, but playing a practical role in politics is not proper under any circumstances.
2. Along with contemporary religious education, the Ulama must be aware of modern thought trends. Without this, they will not properly fulfil their responsibilities in the modern age.
3. The Ulama must permit open criticism of each other. Without this, it is impossible to overcome mental stagnation and promote wisdom and insight.
4. The Ulama must cultivate a spirit of tolerance and, despite their differences, must work towards

promoting unity. Without this, the Muslims can achieve no significant progress.

5. Besides engaging in the education and development of the Muslims, the Ulama have another vital task—*dawah*, conveying God's message to people and engaging in this work until its final limit.

MY ADVICE TO THE ULAMA

In various traditions, Prophet Muhammad observed that in later times due to the law of degeneration, rulers would become tyrannical and unjust. At such times he advised religious scholars to continue to discharge their duties peacefully in non-political fields without confronting rulers. While distinguishing between the roles of ‘men of politics’ and the ‘men of learning’, the politicians are charged with carrying out administrative duties, while the Ulama have been given the role of educators to people.

In the generations that followed the Companions of the Prophet, this division of spheres of activity was maintained. People were engaged in various fields of knowledge, and there came to be the *Quran* reciters, *Hadith* scholars (*muhaddithin*), *fuqaha* (jurists), *Ulama*, *dayees* (those who conveyed God’s message to people) and *Sufis*. All of them focused on their respective spheres of activity. No matter how corrupt the system of governance appeared, the Ulama never confronted them under any circumstance. As a result, the Ulama never deviated from the work they had been entrusted with. This division of work resulted in a glorious history of scholarship and *dawah* work, which is the most precious legacy of the Muslim community.

The Ulama are charged with being eternal guardians of people's mental fabric, way of thinking, attitude and behaviour. Being charged with this role, religious scholars should impart education to people. A tradition of the Prophet states:

“As you are, so shall be those appointed to govern you.” (*Shuabul Iman*, Hadith No. 7006)

This tradition explains that while the position of political or societal leadership is that of the outer structure, the condition of individuals in society is of the utmost importance. The role of the Ulama are to lay the foundation of society by developing right-thinking in individuals, and political governance is the superstructure that rests on this foundation.

It is a fact that people think and act according to their bent of mind. The role of Ulama is to direct the mindset of people towards the right thinking and guide them to the right path. Moreover, if the thinking of individuals in society is right, their actions will also be right; if the state of the individuals, a unit of society, is good, then inevitably, society will also be good.

The Ulama continued to discharge their duties on this pattern for around a thousand years. Sadly, with the coming of the age of European colonialism, most

of the Ulama abandoned their primary task—the intellectual development of people along constructive lines. Looking at colonialism simply from the point of view of Western nations usurping Muslim lands, the Ulama involved themselves in political conflicts in the name of ‘*jihad*’.

A fundamental mistake of the Ulama of modern times is that they have taken the dominance of Western nations to be simply a political phenomenon. However, this dominance is a reflection of a powerful civilisation. This indicates that the political aspect is secondary. The fact was that European colonialism had succeeded because the Europeans were in command of new intellectual and technological resources, which gave them an enormous advantage over Eastern people.

In the traditional age, the difference between contending powers was essentially quantitative. However, when the West ushered in a new age, the difference between Western nations and others fundamentally became qualitative. This transformation gave the West a clear and decisive advantage over the rest of the world. The Ulama were leading the revolt without understanding this fundamental qualitative difference.

Becoming involved in political conflicts, wrongly called ‘*jihad*’, was not the task assigned to the Ulama. As a result, their efforts were also not result-oriented. The political and violent struggles of the Ulama failed to defeat the Western colonial powers who had established control over most Muslim-majority lands. The internecine fighting among the Western countries themselves, culminating in the Second World War, drained their military strength to such an extent that they had no option but to grant political independence to these countries in the mid-20th century.

As a result, around fifty Muslim-majority politically independent states emerged in Asia and Africa. At this time, too, it was the task of the Ulama in these countries to shoulder the very same responsibility that Islam had given them—that is to say, to leave politics to the politicians and to focus their energies, instead, on the spread of education, *dawah* work and social reform. However, instead of doing this, the Ulama again rushed headlong into the field of politics. In the period of European colonial rule, the aim of the politics of these Ulama had been ‘the struggle for independence’. Now their politics was conducted in the name of ‘the enforcement of Islamic Law’. These

efforts of the Ulama did not result in the establishment of purely *Shariah*-based rule in any Muslim country. However, what did result was that everywhere the Muslims became divided into, broadly, two mutually opposed camps that were at war with each other. If the non-Muslim forces killed the Muslims in the colonial period, now the Muslims began killing their co-religionists.

Had the Ulama of the Muslim-majority countries stayed aloof from politics, and focused, instead, on the reform of the Muslims, awakening the true spirit of Islam among them, producing Islamic literature according to modern standards that would promote an urge to discover Islam among people, and works of a similar kind, they would have been better enabled to play a role in establishing governance more truly in line with the teachings of Islam. They would then have played the role of transforming Muslim societies into Islamic societies.

The true secret behind the dominance of the Western powers was that they had transformed the human mindset. To successfully meet the challenge of the Western nations, it was now necessary to counter them in the realm of ideas. My advice to the Ulama of both Muslim-majority and minority countries is

that they should stay aloof from politics and focus on the reform of the Muslims, awakening the true spirit of Islam in them and producing Islamic literature according to modern standards that would promote an urge to discover Islam among people.

To perform this role of intellectual leadership, they must possess a deeper understanding of the times and the capacity to engage in *ijtihad*, creative interpretation of Islamic sources and their application in changed circumstances. Then they will be able to engage in scholarship, reform the minds of the Muslim *ummah* towards right thinking and undertake *dawah* work, conveying God's message to people.

Another essential task is that of inviting people to God. This task is so vital that if it is abandoned, the whole Muslim community will lose all value in God's eyes. When this task is left undone, all other tasks, if undertaken, will prove to be ultimately futile and can never result in Muslims gaining respect and honour.

A Quranic principle is that with every problem, there are opportunities. Although Western political dominance appears as a problem, they bring new and powerful opportunities to convey God's message to people with them. Had the Ulama understood Western thought deeply, they would have welcomed

it instead of becoming its enemy. The Ulama should have availed of the new possibilities to convey God's message to people that emerged in the modern age. I have written extensively on this issue in numerous books and articles. Here I will only briefly touch upon this matter.

The basis of the modern age is freedom of thought. Among the many results of the modern intellectual revolution is freedom of religion, including propagating religion. Through the human rights charter of the United Nations, this has been accepted by all the nations of the world. This development has made it possible for the first time in history to engage in the task of conveying God's message to people without any obstruction whatsoever.

Rational investigation in the modern age is based on empirical realities that are very useful for Islam based on firmly established truths. The findings of modern science were a confirmation of this prediction of the Quran:

“We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves until it becomes clear that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is the witness of all things?” (41:53)

This prediction has become a reality in present times. From the ideological point of view, the scientific revolution has opened a new door for human beings to realise the Creator through direct study and observation of creation. Through this scientific revolution, the divine signs revealed to man have made possible the achievement of a high degree of divine realisation.

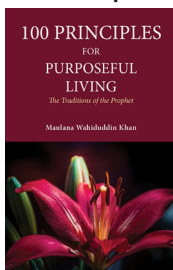
From the material point of view, the discoveries of the West have led to many inventions that can be used to convey God's message to all of humanity, especially the modern means of travel and communication. In this way, modern science became a robust academic and material tool in the hands of those who were engaged in conveying God's message to people and sharing the message of Islam with them.

I advise all the Ulama to completely dissociate from practical politics, develop the spirit of tolerance, accept open criticism, understand the positive contribution of the modern age, engage in scholarship after a deep understanding of modern thought, reform the minds of the Muslim *ummah* on positive lines and convey God's message to humanity using the opportunities presented by the modern age.

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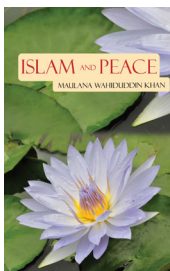
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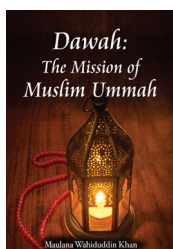


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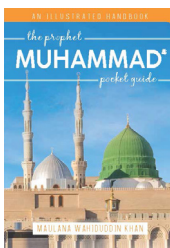
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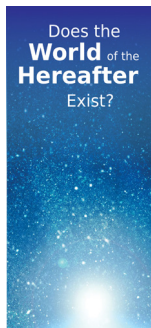
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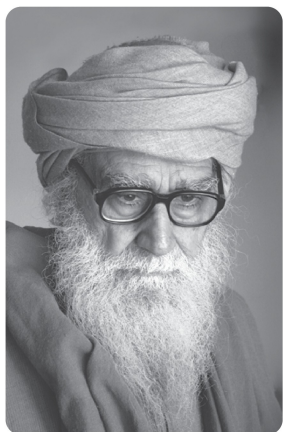
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In the book, the author explains that religious scholars are eternal guardians of people's mental fabric, way of thinking, attitude and behaviour. They should completely dissociate from practical politics, develop the spirit of tolerance, accept open criticism, understand the positive contribution of the modern age, engage in scholarship after a deep understanding of modern thought, reform the minds of the Muslim *ummah* on positive lines and convey God's message to humanity using the opportunities presented by the modern age. To perform this role of intellectual leadership, they must possess a deeper understanding of the times and the capacity to engage in *ijtihad*, creative interpretation of Islamic sources and their application in changed circumstances. Then they will be able to engage in scholarship, reform the minds of the Muslim *ummah* towards right thinking and undertake *dawah* work, conveying God's message to people.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual guide and an Ambassador of Peace. Having received international recognition for his work, the Maulana authored over 200 books and recorded thousands of lectures giving the rational interpretation of Islamic concepts, prophetic wisdom and the spiritual meaning of Quran and Islam in the contemporary style. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and in contemporary style. He founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International* in 2001 to re-engineer the minds of people towards God-oriented living and present Islam in the modern idiom based as it is on peace, non-violence and spirituality.

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