

Dr. Fazlur Rahman’s Understanding Of Seerah In The Context Of Modernity

Dr. Ghulam Shabbir¹, Muhammad Akhtar², Dr. Farhana Mehmood³, Dr. Abdul Qadir Abdul Wahid⁴, Dr. Muhammad Imran⁵, Dr. Sareer Khan⁶

¹Assistant Professor, Head Center, For Policy Studies, COMSATS University Islamabad. Paksitan.

²Doctoral Candidate, Department of Islamic Learning, Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

³Lecturer Islamic Studies, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

⁴Assistant Professor (v), Faculty of Sharia & Law, Department of Law (IIUI), Pakistan.

⁵Assistant Professor, Shaykh Zayed Islamic Center, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

⁶Theology Teacher. Govt High School Sheikho Sardheri Charsadda. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan.

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Abstract

The ultimate objective of the Quran and seerah is the establishment of a ‘just moral order’ founded on the principle of “One God, One Humanity” (3:64). The entire mission of Muhammad was geared to this final goal. All stages of the mission -- peaceful delivering of the message to passive resistance in Mecca, journey to Taif, migration to Abyssinia and Medina, armed resistance and aggressive politics in Medina, letters to the heads of Byzantine and Persian empires -- were milestones on the path. The paper explores factors behind failure of medieval-era scholars as well as orientalist to grasp this unique idea and finds Muslim scholars either failed to see it out of sheer ignorance or willful neglect committed in collusion with sultans and Sufis to camouflage this revolutionary idea with an apolitical and secular concept of religion that glorified pacifism and abhorred change and resistance to status quo; while orientalist’s rigged scholarship had rendered them incapable of perceiving universal import of this idea. On the other hand, most modern-educated scholars under colonial regimes adopted an apologetic attitude, rendering them incapable to bring out the original spirit of the religion, and rediscover the splendid idea of One God One Humanity. The paper explains Dr Fazlur Rahman’s understanding of seerah in contrast with ideas of his predecessors and peers, and his emphasis on politics and jihad as two pivots of Islam. He presents Quran and seerah as continuous and unbroken narrative galvanized towards its ultimate climax – the establishment of the global moral order. The paper concludes that time is ripe for Islam to unfold its programme provided Muslim community rids itself of its intoxication with past. Scholars can re-invoke 3:64 for the establishment of newer alliances with Chinese and other civilizations in a giant leap towards the realization of Islam’s ultimate goal of One God One Humanity.

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Dr. Ghulam Shabbir

Islam is the only religion in world history which started its career with politics and war¹. In fact, all Abrahamic religions -- Islam, Judaism and Christianity -- are essentially different from Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Zoroastrianism in that founders of the latter were directly or indirectly linked with royal court hence their religions can be called elitist faiths while prophets of the former were common goat herders who rose against the court for the rights of the downtrodden and the oppressed.

Zoroaster, Gautam Buddha, Tao and Confucius aligned with the court but the Abrahamic prophets chose to collide with it when they learnt that the few islands of luxury in the vast ocean of poverty were outcome of an unjust and exploitative system and not a natural phenomenon. Consequently, the religions of the former teach escape from historic processes while those of the latter instill revolt against the status quo. In Islam, which claims to be the last revealed religion, the call to resistance against established orders is more pronounced than it is in other monotheistic religions as its teachings contain a complete programme for how to snatch power from the corrupt elements and entrust it to the God-conscious people².

Dr Fazlur Rahman arrived at the conclusion after his lifelong study of Quran and seerah that in Islam politics and jihad are two pivots around which everything turns provided the politics is not taken to mean Machiavelli's politics of amoral pragmatism and Chanakya's grounded in cowardice and deceit, and jihad is not considered to be restricted only to armed struggle but is meant to be a relentless effort and consistent struggle -- governed by certain ethical principles -- for the propagation of Islam and establishment of a moral order on earth.

While it is a travesty of facts to claim, says Dr Rahman, that Islam was spread by the sword it is equally wrong to conclude that Islam spread only through peaceful proselytization on the pattern of Buddhism and Christianity -- although the two pacifist religions also resorted to war from time to time to help spread their message³. Given the fact that Islam did not spread by the sword only but Muslims always considered it inevitable to attain political power, without which claims for the establishment of divine moral order on earth are nothing but incoherent mumblings of mad men or dreams of the blind.

In this sense -- and this sense alone --, Islam can be equated only with communism for its emphasis on the attainment of political power as a prerequisite for the enforcement of its programme but unlike communism Islam does not coerce people into submitting to its ideology. It is hence, sheer injustice to Islam to be apologetic over the significant role political power has played in the spread of Islam.

The western critics of Islam -- save a few exceptions -- whom Edward Said calls hired gatekeepers of colonial interests and Dr Iqbal Ahmed names as western academic orthodoxy and their studies as "rigged scholarship" make a number of claims about the genesis of Islam. They see the faith either as a concoction of Jewish and Christian beliefs existing in its milieu or a manifestation of the deep and profound effect the seemingly limitless vastness and monotony of desert leaves on human psyche.

In their haste to declare Islam as an unoriginal religion, orientalist jumped at the existence of a few gentle souls in Mecca -- who had rejected polytheism after deep reflection on great questions of life and arrived at the concept of monotheism without the aid of any revealed message -- whom Quran refers to as hunafa (plural of hanif), and wove a theory in defiance of all historical evidence that the Prophet had allegedly concocted his religion by synthesizing the thoughts of hunafa and Jewish and Christian beliefs.

“It is true that some had arrived at monotheistic conception of religion but there is absolutely no reason to believe that their one God was exactly the one God of Muhammad. For Muhammad's one God, from the very beginning (was) linked up with humanism and a sense of social and economic justice whose intensity is no less than the intensity of the monotheistic idea so that whoever carefully reads the early revelations of the Prophet cannot escape the conclusion that the two must be regarded as expressions of the same experience⁴³”

Dr Rahman rejects the orientalist's theory claiming Islam to be a natural product of the monotonous life of the vast desert. He argues that on the one hand Islam did not develop in some dark corner of the desert or among nomadic Beduins with whom traversing the desert was a way of life but it developed amid commercially and religiously dynamic Meccan environment. On the other hand, Quran is bereft of any praise for the desert dwellers' lifestyle and culture, on the contrary the holy book heaps scathing criticism on Beduins, calling them miserly and obdurate, he contends.

Islamic monotheism and socio-economic justice have a symbiotic relationship and Maoon, the brief but intense Meccan sura, aptly brings out this point. Exegetes believe the first two verses of the sura -- “Hast thou ever considered [the kind of man] who gives the lie to all moral law? Behold, it is this [kind of man] that thrusts the orphan away” -- were revealed in Mecca and the rest came down in Medina since the Quran almost invariably mentions universal moral values in Meccan verses and pronounces commands that necessitate established political power for their enforcement in Medinan ones.

There is no convincing evidence to suggest that the nascent Islamic movement did not make any attempt to gain political ascendancy in Mecca in order to enforce its programme of socio-economic justice. The sheer scale and intensity of Meccan oligarchy's coercive measures -- the trials and tribulations Muslim community was subjected to in Mecca, their social boycott, over two-year long siege of Sheb Abi Talib where the Prophet, his tribe and followers lived, and the first migration to Abyssinia -- bear witness to the fact that Islam had indeed struck a serious blow to the deeply entrenched political, religious and commercial interests of the oligarchic order.

Given Mecca's central and unquestionable position, the Prophet must have harboured desire to assume its political control but since chances of a successful takeover appeared bleak in the short term, the Prophet opted for other options ie. journey to wealthy town of Taif to obtain a secure base for his movement and migration to Medina. It was crystal clear from the beginning that the migration to Medina was not an end in itself it was a means, part of a greater plan to gain a firm footing in one place and use it as a base for conquering Mecca after having attained enough strength. Like all the decisions the Prophet had taken since the advent of His messengership -- exercising patience in the face of adversity in Mecca, migration to Abyssinia, journey to Taif and migration to Medina -- His resolve to take over Mecca too was not an end in itself, it was a means to an end. He was to use the city's central position to speed up propagation of the message across Arabia and beyond its borders to the rest of the world, a fact which is evident from the letters the Prophet had written to Byzantine and Persian monarchs, inviting them to embrace Islam, immediately after the conquest of Mecca.

Being a double orphan himself, Muhammad had an acute sense of social injustice and firsthand experience of exploitative economic system in Mecca. He would often spend entire days and nights in the seclusion of cave of Hira, meditating and reflecting on the sorry conditions prevailing in his society and the possible ways and means to reform it and restore humanity to its high moral pedestal.

Even when he was busy in his commercial engagements Muhammad's mind was searching after spiritual and transcendental ends of life. His deep concern, as Quran bears witness, was not an outcome of his worldly ambition for the attainment of prophecy but was born of an inherent natural aptitude and acute sensitivity (28:86). Even his marriage, more than being a union of convenience between two business partners, was actuated by a deep concern Muhammad and Khadija shared for the downtrodden and the widening gulf between the rich and the poor in society.

When Khadija asked Maisara, her slave, about what Muhammad did with his share of the profit, he said that He kept barely enough for his needs and distributed the rest among widows, orphans, the needy and the hapless.

The deep concern over the exploitative and unjust economic system in Mecca, said Dr Rahman, and the hapless humanity sobbing under its crushing weight had metaphorically broken the back of the acutely sensitive Muhammad, and he would often take refuge in the cave of Hira to search for answers in prolonged meditations. Quran points out to his state of mind in 94:1-3. "Have we not opened up thy heart, and lifted from thee the burden that had weighed so heavily on thy back?"

But after this burden had been lifted, another weight had been placed on the Prophet's shoulders. "Behold, We shall bestow upon thee a weighty message," 73:5. This new weight was the grave responsibility of injecting the moral social order into the flesh and blood of history, and also ensuring to make it a success. Quran finally proclaims after the programme of social change had been revealed to the Prophet in the cave of Hira, "O Prophet wrapped in sleep, O lofty seeker after truth, your journey for truth has come to an end. Now, rise to proclaim and enforce the truth," 74:1-3.

Before the advent of his prophetic mission, Imam Razi*** says, Muhammad was often found deeply immersed in meditational moods and was naturally inclined to attaining the heady experience of union with God, hence Muhammad Asad translates *ياايها لمزمل* into "wrapped in sleep or even wrapped up in oneself". By *قم فانذر*, Imam Razi says, God commands His messenger to "rise and warn" i.e., "give now up thy solitude, and stand up before all the world as a preacher and warner".

Though it is generally believed that the first five verses of the Quran were revealed in the Hira but al- Ghazali and Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi rightly say "the entire Quran was first "brought down to the lowest heaven i.e. , the Prophet's heart and then relevant verbal passages produced when needed"⁶. The view seems more plausible since Quran speaks of the biological process of human creation and God's endowing man with the faculty of reason in the first five verses revealed to the Prophet after the advent of His ministry –not the fundamentals of faith like belief in oneness of God and His messenger -- while the Prophet appeared to have a complete appreciation of the idea of oneness of God and its corollary concepts of social, economic and political justice when he presented it before his family members and relatives from the hilltop of Faran. For the reaction which came from his first address was not against the biological facts of life but was against the challenge he flung against the forces of status quo i.e., religious, political and mercantile elites of Mecca. "Muhammad tried to strengthen and enfranchise the weaker segments of society as well as to divest the privileged of their prerogatives in the religious field (the clergy), in the political field (autocratic or oligarchic rule), and in the socio-economic field (undue economic or sex power)"⁷.

"The whole subsequent inner history of the Prophet is thus set between two limits i.e., the frustration caused by the attitude of the Meccans, which was outside his control, and the endeavor to succeed, for it is part of the Quranic doctrine that simply to deliver the message, to suffer frustration and not to succeed is immature spirituality."⁸

In fact, his spiritual and religious experience and objective knowledge derived from the Quran convinced him that his job was not only to communicate the divine message to humanity, but he was also bound to make it successful in the realm of history. His inexhaustible optimism for making a deep impact on history intensifies his internal tension to such an extent that God Himself has to caution him. "But wouldst thou, perhaps, torment thyself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?", 18:6, and "We did not bestow the Qur'an on thee from on high to make thee unhappy," 20:2.

Dr Rahman developed his thesis after lifelong study of Islam that the major thrust of Quran and seerah is directed to the establishment of a moral social order on earth. It is the *الامانة*, which the earth had refused to lift despite its extraordinary vastness, mountains cringed away from despite their strength and heavens backed off despite their

loftiness, but the weak human had agreed to carry, eliciting a mild rebuke from God انه كان ظلوما جهولا “unfair to himself and foolhardy”, 33:72.

The verse does not reject man’s potential to perform extraordinary feats but in fact it appreciates his temerity. God clarifies through *وما سواها* and *ونفس* that he has etched moral laws on human heart. *الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ* “who has created thee, and formed thee in accordance with what thou art meant to be,” 82:7. It is the same task for which the man had metaphorically made the primordial covenant with God (7:172).

Knowledge of this covenant has been kneaded into human instinct. Its imprint is blurred only temporarily under the influence of vanity, temptation and coercive circumstances. God issues a mild rebuke (82:6) when man deviates from this covenant but also appreciates his inherent weakness (84:6). However, God’s rebuke gradually changes into an appeal and reaches a crescendo in “Nay, but [man] has never yet fulfilled what He has enjoined upon him!” 80:23.

Dr Rahman expands the scope of *الامانة* – as against Muhammad Asad who restricts its meaning to man’s faculty of reason that enables him to distinguish right from wrong -- to include in it man’s potential to establish divine socio-economic, political, cultural and moral order on earth, thus elevating the status of *الامانة* from local to global. Dr Rahman’s explanation is more likely inspired by Shah Waliullah’s theory of *Irtifaqat* which contains this expanded concept of *الامانة* in an embryonic form.

Dr Rahman believes the divine caution *فلعلك باخع نفسك*, the calming solace *مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَى* and several other identical verses bear witness to the Prophet’s constant struggle “to be effective in history”. The Meccan oligarchy rightly understood implications of Muhammad’s message as they clearly saw it was directed against their idolatrous and deceitful system, which was based on exploitation of the poor and dishonest trade practices justified by a secular religious doctrine, hence the bitter and vitriolic response.

The writer believes that contrary to works of present day sectarian polemicists of Islam, Meccan oligarchs’ bitter reaction to the Prophet’s message can prove more instructive to appreciate the true spirit of Islam as they were able to see in the message what majority of traditional ulema cannot perceive even up till this day.

Despite their common vitriol and hatred towards the message and its bearers, Meccans failed to forge a consistent and multipronged strategy against the Prophet. Their actions betrayed a defeatist mentality because they had no answer to Quran which carried such force that it knocked down all rivals not only psychologically but physically. When they are confronted with truth they react “as if they were terrified asses, fleeing from a lion” 74:50-51. It proved but one thing that the Prophet’s movement never faced existential threat in Mecca. The oligarchs were more in awe of the truth of His message than the (meagre) resources at his disposal as indicated by the state and quality of Abu Talib’s security for the Prophet. And their awe only increased when influential members of the elite also began to join the ranks of the Prophet’s believers after having proclaimed their faith in public.

The Prophet’s conscience was convinced since the very first day of his ministry that the God who was unconcerned about whether his Prophet played an effective role in history or not could never be the God of Quran and his messenger. It is a unique awareness in the entire history of religious leaders and Islam’s western critics have grossly erred in understanding it because their history has taught them that religious leaders are destined to suffer frustration, crucifixion and utter defeat in their often botched missions. They find the idea of worldly success for religious leaders simply reprehensible. To them it is unimaginable for a religious leader to employ historic forces for the attainment of high moral objectives and become successful as well. Hence Shariati declares that Islam is the only faith in entire religious history of mankind which snatched religion from eschatological forces and handed it back to humanity.

Islam is indebted to orientalist researchers in many areas but their failure to grasp this point has led many to portray a self-contradictory picture of the Prophet. They “perceive” a sudden change in him and declare that the

pacifist, the strict moralist, the peace-loving preacher in Mecca turned into a warrior, a pragmatist and a statesman in Medina, and furthermore the preacher of universal spiritual values raised the standard of Arab nationalism in Medina.

They allege that the decision to change the direction of qibla from Jerusalem to Kaba was motivated by the Prophet's frustration over his failure to persuade Jews to accept Islam. When the orientalist could not digest the unprecedented success the Prophet had achieved in his mission they directed their energies to proving that the Prophet had an inborn gift of political and statesmanship genius which came to the fore when it found conducive conditions. They reiterate the allegation that the Prophet had invented his religion by mixing up hunafa's monotheism with major eschatological concepts of Jews and Christians.

This paper analyses all such allegations of orientalist and their rigged legacy about Islam, which has become an inseparable part of western scholarship but prior to that one needs to understand how the Prophet's mission gradually unfolded in history.

Western scholars snatched at some medieval era seerah writers' binary approach to the Prophet's life in Mecca and Medina -- portraying Mecca to be a vast wasteland with only thorns for plants and Medina the ultimate oasis -- to establish their thesis on disparate roles of the Prophet in Mecca and Medina. In fact, as corroborated by historical evidence, the Prophet was as intensely and equally concerned about bringing Jews and Christians of Medina to the fold of Islam as he was about persuading Meccan polytheists to accept his message. This Medinese verse 5:68 declares: "Say: O followers of the Bible! You have no valid ground for your beliefs -- unless you [truly] observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all that has been bestowed from on high upon you by your Sustainer! Yet all that has been bestowed from on high upon thee [O Prophet] by thy Sustainer is bound to make many of them yet more stubborn in their overweening arrogance and in their denial of the truth. But sorrow not over people who deny the truth".

The Prophet is so firmly focused on his objective "to be effective in history" that when he, in his haste for delivering the message, did desire to have miracles in spite of Quran's clear declaration that the divine narrative from then onwards would be founded on reason alone rather than miracles -- which were required in initial, formative days of humanity --, the Quran issued a warning to the Prophet early in Mecca (6:33-35).

"Well, do We know that what such people say grieves thee indeed: yet behold, it is not thee to whom they give the lie, but God's messages do these evildoers deny. (33) And, indeed, [even] before thy time have apostles been given the lie, and they endured with patience all those charges of falsehood, and all the hurt done to them, till succor came unto them from Us: for there is no power that could alter [the outcome of] God's promises. And some of the histories of those apostles have already come within thy ken. (34) And if it distress thee that those who deny the truth turn their backs on thee - why, then, if thou art able to go down deep into the earth or to ascend a ladder unto heaven in order to bring them a [yet more convincing] message, [do so;]".

The Prophet did not lose any opportunity that his vision pointed out or history made available to him to ensure success for his programme. In Mecca as well as in Medina, the opposition made him lucrative offers to try and bring him to settle for an agreement of mutual coexistence with one condition only that status quo would not be disturbed. But the Quran stopped the Prophet from relenting to any compromise and clearly set apart boundaries between compromise and strategy. "They would like thee to be soft [with them], so that they might be soft [with thee]" (68:9). It was cautioned with reference to the incident of Gharaniq referred to in 17:73-75. "And, behold, they [who have gone astray] endeavor to tempt thee away from all [the truth] with which We have inspired thee, [O Prophet,] with a view to making thee invent something else in Our name - in which case they would surely have made thee their friend! (73) And 'had We not made thee firm [in faith], thou might have inclined to them a little (74) in which case We would indeed have made thee taste double [chastisement] in life and double [chastisement] after death, and thou wouldst have found none to succor thee against Us! (75)."

In Mecca, the polytheists set a trap for him in the garb of “rapprochement” and in Medina as well the people of the book made a similar attempt to which Quran refers in 42:14,15. “... as it is, behold, they who have inherited their divine writ from those who preceded them are [now] in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it portends. (14) Because of this, then, summon [all mankind], and pursue the right course, as thou hast been bidden [by God]; and do not follow their likes and dislikes, but say: “I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high; and I am bidden to bring about equity in your mutual views. God is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer...”.

In addition to different offers, Ibne Ishaq says, when all stratagems failed, Meccans changed the tack and demanded: “If the Prophet separate Himself from the socially and economically disenfranchised people, they will accept His mission (18:28; 6:52)”. However, the Quran prohibited expulsion of the poor from the Islamic movement and reminded the community that a similar offer had been made to Noah but it did not help the cause either.

In its essence, Islam is standard-bearer of equality of all human beings. The spirit of equality is aptly encapsulated in the following incident recorded by all books of seerah and referred to in 80:1-10: The Prophet was earnestly engaged in talks with influential persons of Mecca to persuade them to accept Islam and thus enlist their help for the cause, when a commoner Ibe Umme Maktoom, who was also blind, intervened drawing an unpleasant reaction from the Prophet who grimaced and tried to ignore his questions.

The Quran was quick in pointing out that the Prophet’s reaction bordered on compromise and rejected it in toto in its initial stage. If the principle of equality is compromised during day to day engagements and activities of a movement, it is more likely to be ignored completely after the achievement of the cause that is the establishment of just socio-moral order.

Though history fails to provide any evidence about the size of Jewish and Christian communities living in the city yet the Quran points out that Meccans were not only aware of the fundamental beliefs of the two monotheistic religions but they had also a fair knowledge of the credal differences between the two religions. They might have acquired the knowledge through their long commercial trips or most probably from a few families of Jews and Christians living among them. The families might have visitors every now and then from other areas who must be engaging in debates with Meccans over important questions of faith, thus helping them accumulate enough information about the two Abrahamic faiths. However, the Quran also indicates that Meccans were not impressed in the least by the two religions though they did wish to have a prophet, a new religion and a divine writ from on high to which the verse 35:42 points. “As it is, they [who are averse to the truth often] swear by God with their most solemn oaths that if a warner should ever come to them, they would follow his guidance better than any of the communities [of old had followed the warner sent to them]: but now that a warner has come unto them, [his call] but increases their aversion.”

Although the Quran directly addresses Meccan pagans it is at the same time speaking to the people of the book. The collusion between the pagans and the people of the book came to the surface when pagans felt at a loss to come up with an adequate response to the divine revelation and sought help from the Jews in forming a sound answer to Muhammad’s narrative. The Quran provides another evidence for the collusion between the two disparate communities in 4:51 which points out Jews’ answer to Meccan pagans’ questions in the following words: “...those who are bent on denying the truth are more surely guided than those who have attained to faith?”. Jews termed pagans rightly guided against believers out of their animosity against Islam.

The Prophet formed one community with earlier prophets through his religious experience and became their direct witness (28:45). “Nay, but [between them and thee] We brought into being [many] generations, and long was their span of life. And neither didst thou dwell among the people of Madyan, conveying Our messages unto them: nay, but We have [always] been sending [Our message-bearers unto man].”

Thus, the Prophet was certainly not only invested with all-encompassing knowledge of major episodes of earlier prophets’ lives but also results of their ministries and contents of the books sent down to them. He affirmed all the

prophets after he was bestowed with the awareness that all the prophets from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and He himself, had brought essentially the same message of the unicity of God, and that the fountainhead of all revealed books was one and the same, which the Quran refers to as Ummul Kitab (mother of all books), Lauh e Mahfooz (the imperishable tablet) and Kitabul Maknun (the well-guarded divine writ). It was then declared through the Prophet's tongue: "...I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high..." 42:15.

In fact, the Quran does not specify the term Kitab (book) for a particular book but uses it to refer to all divine writs revealed in different ages and places. Hence, it was only natural for the Prophet to demand that people of other revealed books vouchsafe for him and the Quran in the same way as he and his followers do for all bygone prophets and their books. It also made the Prophet thinking that if God is one, His message sent down to Adam through Noah down to Muhammad is also one and indivisibly same, then humanity must also be one ummah. The idea took root in Muhammad's heart to bring together multi-religious world and shape it into one umma in accordance with the teachings and preconditions of the Quran. Henceforward, the full thrust of the Prophet's mission is directed to the objective of "One God, One Humanity".

The Quran makes no differentiation between Jews and Christians during the initial days of revelation, referring to both as people of the book. It mentions the Gospel only once throughout the Meccan period though it frequently quotes from Torah and uses the word Kitab specifically for Torah at many places. The Quran also divides the people of the book into two strands. One strand has bound themselves up with the straight line of the prophets and has also declared their faith in the Quran. When the Quran's verses are recited before them they fall down in prostration "and say, "Limitless in His glory is our Sustainer! Verily, our Sustainer's promise has been fulfilled!" 17:107.

The other strand consists of the people of the book who swerved off the straight line of the prophets and distorted the true message. One held firmly onto the truth and vouchsafed the Quran and the Prophet, and the other deviated from the right path for the sake of vested interests, pursuit of worldly pleasures or lack of understanding. The Quran calls this strand parties, sects and groups. Though the Quran was branding the people of the book as groups and sects who had deviated from the straight path, it was at the same time hoping that they would return now as the true giver of tidings had arrived. But when they remained obdurate and refused to change, the Quran began to delink Abraham from Jews and Christians in late Meccan period and mention him as the great messenger, arch-monotheist and hanif.

The Prophet's thesis of One God, One Humanity, which was aimed at forging one nation out of disparate communities by bringing the people of the book, who have recognised the truth, and those who have deviated from the straight path as well as the polytheists back to the true path and help make the dream of One God One Humanity come true.

When the Prophet sees his ultimate objective of One God One Humanity run into snags he goes through a grave theological dilemma. The fear of failure and hopelessness attain such proportions and intensity that the Prophet is assailed by confusion and uncertainty over the Islamic movement's prospects and starts to think whether he is to continue the march or bring it to a halt. "And so, [O man,] if thou art in doubt about [the truth of] what We have [now] bestowed upon thee from on high, ask those who read the divine writ [revealed] before thy time: [and thou wilt find that,] surely, the truth has now come unto thee from thy Sustainer. Be not, then, among the doubters." 10:94.

The Prophet learns during the course of his mission that the people of the book were not only opposed to the Quran but they were also opposed to each other. They are divided into different sects and groups and each one of them believes itself to be on the right path. The Quran sheds light on the reasons behind this sectionalization and argues that the divisive process has set in because history has covered divine messages of Moses and Jesus with a thick layer of dust. One of the reasons for sending down the divine writ is, says the Quran, lest these sects and groups complain before God on the day of judgment that if a warner had been sent to them they would surely have reformed themselves (35:42).

The more the Prophet struggles to actualize his idea of One God One Humanity the greater and the more intense becomes opposition and resistance by pagans and the people of the book. The pagans slap on him derogatory titles of “mad, poet, sorcerer and wizard” to which the Quran responds with knockdown arguments. They spread malicious propaganda, especially the type that appears to be a fact on the face of it. The Quran likens such propaganda to darkness and trial for the believer, which camouflage the truth so completely that “when one holds up his hand, he can hardly see it...” 24:40.

Some seerah writers like Tabari believe that the unending trials and tribulations orchestrated by the opponents and fears about the mission’s failure take such a hold on the Prophet’s heart and mind that he begins to see their allegations of lunacy and sorcery as true. “Muhammad came to himself in a state of terror and revulsion. The idea that he had, against his will, probably become a jinn-possessed kahin filled him with such despair, says the historian Tabari, that he no longer wanted to go on living. Rushing from the cave, he began to climb to the summit of mountain to fling himself to death. But on the mountainside, he had another vision of a being which, later, he identified with Gabriel⁹”. Hence, the Quran’s reassurances and soothing words for him in 36:1,2,3. “Ya Sin [O you human being]. Consider the Qur’an, full of wisdom (2) Lo! thou art indeed one of God’s message-bearers (3) On a straight path.” To Meccans, the Quran vouchsafes in 81:22. “For, this fellow-man of yours is not a madman”.

The Prophetic vision of One God One Humanity and the grave task of its materialization in his life on the one hand, and obstinacy and egotism of pagans and the people of the book on the other hand “sets forth to the Prophet a theological problem of the first order¹⁰”. The consequent uncertainty, tension and confusion led the Prophet to attempt several times to kill himself by flinging himself down a hilltop.¹¹ It was a grave spiritual dilemma the Prophet had to contend with and which the Quran started addressing in Mecca by way of catharsis and gradually resolved it towards the middle of Medinan period.

Hence, one may notice references to the people of the book by the terms of ahzab, sects and groups begin to disappear gradually towards late Meccan period and replace with “the people of the book” and “book of Moses and Christ”. Although Quran mentions Gospel only once in Meccan period it explains stories about the birth of Christ and his mission in greater detail. From here onwards the references to the book are usually meant for the book of Moses.

Thus the separate identity of the people of the book is gradually taking shape and steps towards their recognition are being taken, nudging the Prophet towards the forgone conclusion that multiplicity of religions is an essential part of the divine plan since religious diversity among nations helps infuse in them a spirit of positive competition and consequently they strive hard to outperform each other in good deeds. Perhaps, it was the reason that when the Quran recognises the people of the book as two distinct communities and declares Muslims as the median community it conditions this privilege with “Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works,” 2:148. “Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends! (4)” 92:4 also refers to the same reality that religious diversity is essential for the development and progression of human society; otherwise, it was not difficult for God to make men into one single community.

The Quran mentions Noah, Abraham and eighteen other biblical prophets and declares that God grants His revelation to whomsoever He wills. And if the prophets associated partners with God, He would have wasted their actions. If these people did not believe in it then “we have already commissioned it to a people [Muslims in general particularly those who already had an earlier revelation] who do not disbelieve in it [but] it was to them that We vouchsafed revelation, and sound judgment, and prophethood. And now, although the unbelievers may choose to deny these truths, [know that] We have entrusted them to people who will never refuse to acknowledge them- (89) to those whom God has guided. Follow, then, their guidance, [and] say: "No reward do I ask of you for this [truth]: behold, it is but an admonition unto all mankind!" (90) For, no true understanding of God have they when they say, "Never has God revealed anything unto man." Say: "Who has bestowed from on high the divine writ which Moses brought unto men as a light and a guidance, [and] which you treat as [mere] leaves of paper, making a show of them the while you conceal [so] much - although you have been taught [by it] what neither you nor your forefathers had ever known?"

Say: "God [has revealed that divine writ]!" - and then leave them to play at their vain talk. (91) And this, too, is a divine writ which We have bestowed from on high - blessed, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations] -and [this] in order that thou mayest warn the foremost of all cities and all who dwell around it." 6:89-91.

The verses simultaneously address Meccan polytheists and Jews and point out that the existing polytheists as well as their forefathers knew well through Jews about the divine book and the prophets. They could not feign ignorance of them or express surprise over God's appointing prophets from among humans while Jews are being reminded that the Quran is emanating from the same mother of all books which has been the fountainhead of Torah.

In Meccan period, the Quran discusses issues of divinity on a larger spectrum and explains outlines of relation between God, universe and man while in Medina it deals with social issues when Muslims had had a real encounter with Jews on ground. The people of the book begin to emerge in the Quran in late Meccan period as a distinct community and simultaneously Muslims start appearing as a people with a separate identity -- who have been entrusted with the grave responsibility of realizing high moral principles in the realm of economy, society, culture and politics -- while references to other biblical prophets begin to diminish and replace with Abraham.

When Jews and Christians refuse to return to the straight line of prophets ending with Muhammad, the Quran gradually separates them from their prophets and imperceptibly helps the Prophet emerge as heir to all the bygone prophets, and replace His community with theirs. Finally, the Quran proclaims that the Prophet is the true monotheist and messenger of God.

"And so, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition which God has instilled into man: [for,] not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created this is the [purpose of the one] ever-true faith; but most people know it not. (30) [Turn, then, away from all that is false,] turning unto Him [alone]; and remain conscious of Him, and be constant in prayer, and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, (31) [or] among those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects, each group delighting in but what they themselves hold [by way of tenets]." 30:30-32.

The Prophet was commanded to warn the dwellers of Mecca and its surroundings. The Islamic movement did suffer initial setbacks in the deaths of Abu Talib and Khadija but it was steadily gathering momentum. The more the trials and tribulations increased the more rapidly the message made inroads in Meccan society. As the Prophet started preaching openly after Abu Bakr and Abu Ubaida joined the fold of Islam, Quraish chieftains, says Ibne Ishaq, had twice tried in vain to convince Abu Talib to either stop his nephew from preaching his message or withdraw his protection from him¹². On Abu Talib's refusal, they launched a vicious campaign to repudiate the Prophet and his message during Hajj days, but it backfired. Contrary to their objectives, the campaign roused great curiosity among pilgrims about the Prophet and His message and contributed indirectly to introduction of Islam to all the people who had come from every nook and cranny of Arabia.

After Emir Hamza joined the movement, Quraish turned up heat on Muslim community, leading to the first migration of Muslims to Abyssinia. As many others were readying to leave Mecca, Umar embraced Islam and the two -- Hamza and Umar -- provided such strength to the fledgling movement that Muslims now felt they now could withstand the pressure or had come to a par with Quraish¹³, said Ibne Ishaq.

Amid all this tension, Quraish imposed social boycott on the Muslim community and launched a vicious campaign throughout the trials and tribulation born of the three-year boycott with active aid of Jews of Medina but it too failed to silence the Prophet or scuttle rapid spread of the divine message.

Besieged by trying circumstances the Prophet turns his attention to Taif to invite its wealthy residents to the cause of Islam. Early seerah writers describe the move as a desperate attempt by a distraught prophet to win over strong

supporters and obtain an impregnable refuge for his fledgling religion. Orientalists readily accepted this explanation and built large edifices upon it. They believe the journey to Taif was a direct result of the Prophet's utter disappointment in Mecca. But contrary to their conclusions, the Prophet embarked on the Taif journey merely to comply with the divine command "that thou warn mother of all towns and what lies around it" 6:92, 42:7.

In fact, by the time the journey to Taif was made, Islam had established so firm a footing in Mecca that Muslims could have easily taken over its political control with a little external support – and this appears to be the larger, unexplained objective of the journey. The takeover of Mecca was indeed the pivotal point in the Prophet's political strategy and both journey to Taif and migration to Medina were just a means to realise it. If the takeover were possible without the help of either, the journey or migration would never have taken place.

On the face of it, the journey to Taif failed to achieve its objectives but on his return the Prophet was comforted by a revelation (Sura Jinn) giving him good tidings about the fate of the movement, which rejuvenated his confidence in the success of the message. As he neared Mecca, he turned to Ukkaz fair where pilgrims from all over Arabia traditionally landed before entering the sanctuary to perform Hajj, and began preaching his message. Thanks to the vicious propaganda spread by Quraish which had reached peoples' ears before him, Muhammad found many a curious listener who paid undivided attention to what he had to say.

At this very fair, the Prophet met representatives of the rival tribes of Aus and Khazraj who had arrived from Medina. The tribes, having tired of warring with each other over the centuries, were looking for someone who could make peace between them and become their undisputed chief. They found none more suited to the job than the Prophet and invited him to migrate to their town with their mandate. It is hard to accept, considering familial, tribal and commercial associations between residents of the two towns, that Medinans may not have already known about the noble family line and exceptional leadership qualities of the Prophet. It was highly likely that they knew well the fact that the Prophet's maternal grandparents also belonged to Medina.

It also quashes thesis of the scholarship of late medieval period which has squandered away its energies on depiction of trials and tribulations, failures and disappointments the Prophet faced in Mecca portraying picture of a leader desperately in search of a safe haven after having been rejected by his own people. Nobody chooses a rejected, disappointed man as his religious and political leader out of pity. If Meccans had completely repudiated the Prophet's mission or if his movement had shown signs of failure, Medinans would never have invited him to be their leader. The fact that they did so leads to the forgone conclusion that the Prophet's message was indeed making deep inroads in Meccan society and beyond.

The undisputedly Meccan verse 16:126, which allows believers to give a befitting response to the adversary on battleground as well as in debates on public spheres -- though it declares patience at the same time to be the best policy – makes it clear that the Islamic movement had not hit the dead-end nor had it been at the mercy of the sweet will of its adversary, as some seerah writers struggled to portray, when the Prophet set out on journey to Taif and accepted the offer of the Aus and Khazraj to be their leader.

On the other hand, just when the tension had reached its breaking point the Prophet was bestowed with the divine grace of ascension (meraj), the unique religious experience, which laid bare before him some fundamental truths of the ultimate reality. How could then the Prophet, after having ascended to the highest horizon, relent and make compromises, how could he who had spurned all lucrative offers in past when he was apparently infirm show weakness when he had attained relatively strong position in terms of number of followers and outreach of his message? Could such a strong-willed Prophet have agreed to offer concessions to polytheists as Ibne Ishaq claims quoting some suspected narrators who had spun a story around the incident of Gharaneeq and, which orientalist like William Muir and his ilk relate in most jocular terms.

The author believes the Prophet may have paused just a fleeting moment in the most humanly fashion to consider viability of the offer of mutual acceptance of deities for the sake of larger interest of his persecuted followers but in reality he did not have to seek guidance from revelation to spurn the offer in its existing shape as it warranted a clear deviation from the mandate of his prophetic mission. The Quran succinctly describes his mental condition in 17:74. “And 'had We not made thee firm [in faith], thou might have inclined to them a little.”

However, the proponents of this lie base their argument for the reality of the incident on 22:52-53. “Yet whenever We sent forth any apostle or prophet before thee, and he was hoping [that his warnings would be heeded], Satan would cast an aspersion on his innermost aims: but God renders null and void whatever aspersion Satan may cast; and God makes His messages clear in and by themselves for God is all-knowing, wise. (52) [And He allows doubts to arise] so that He might cause whatever aspersion Satan may cast [against His prophets] to become a trial for all in whose hearts is disease and all whose hearts are hardened: for, verily, all who are [thus] sinning [against themselves] are most deeply in the wrong.” (53). Muhammad Asad explains the last part of 22:52 “God makes His messages clear in and by themselves” that God causes His messages to speak for themselves so that any insinuation as to the Prophet’s “hidden motives” is automatically disproved”.¹⁴

The Prophet had in fact presented before the Meccans “applied monotheism” which requires that if God is one, the humanity must be one and equal before God. Socio-economic justice is the necessary manifestation of belief in oneness of God and equality. The concept of oneness of God and social reformation are linked in a kind of symbiotic relationship, hence the idea of monotheism can become a living force only if “socio-economic and politico-religious imbalances” are smoothed out. The reason the elite of Mecca and Taif reacted violently to Islam had to do more with the applied monotheism and less with its dogmatic form.

The Meccan elite did not take long to apprehend that the new faith posed a direct and serious challenge to their religious, political and social hegemony. They raised objections to call for distributing wealth among the poor and the needy and asked why they were supposed to give out as charity the wealth that their forefathers had taken centuries to amass after unabated exploitation of the have-nots. They did believe in a secularised form of religion which dictated the robber as well as the robbed to put aside a prescribed share of their booty and belongings for Kaba, which in reality went directly into the coffers of Abu Lahab in his capacity as custodian of the sanctuary. Naturally, his was the most vitriolic reaction to Islam as he saw Muhammad’s message directly striking at his monopoly on religion. Likewise, Abu Jahl and the family of Umayya became jittery as they could clearly see the new faith was breaking into their political complex. The reaction of exploitative merchant class and beneficiaries of usurious economy was not much different.

Taifian elite had similar reasons for rejecting Islam. Since Taif had grown wealthy over the revenue collected from Meccan gentry who spent their hot summer days in the cool environs of the town and visited a temple dedicated to Laat deity the town hosted, the elite feared the town would lose its religious significance and hence hefty revenue if it embraced Islam. The tribe of Bani Aamir had agreed to embrace Islam on condition that the Prophet nominate them as religious and political leaders of the Muslim community after his death, but the Prophet declared emphatically that only God had this authority to decide who would lead his people after him. It can, therefore, be concluded with a high degree of certainty that most Arab tribes were reluctant to accept the new message more because of local and economic reasons than their emotional attachment to the forefather’s polytheistic religion.

Walid bin Mughira used to say that only he had right over leadership of Quraish and Abu Maooz Thaqafi had over Banu Thaqif. Why has Quran been sent down to Muhammad instead of us? “And they say, too, “Why was not this Qur’an bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?” (31) But is it they who distribute thy Sustainer’s grace?” 43:31-32.

The Prophet completely comprehended the reaction of Meccan and Taifian elites to his message in the light of their vested interests but he never faced repudiation of his thesis nor harboured any fears for its failure. As a human being,

he could not rid himself of natural impatience to complete the mission as soon as possible but God insisted that His help arrived on appointed time, not a moment sooner nor a second later. Banu Hashim and Banu Abdul Mutallib never forsook Muhammad, despite remaining idol worshippers, out of feelings of intense tribal solidarity and rivalry with Banu Umayya. They argued that Muhammad should also be allowed to propagate his message like Umayya bin Abi Salt, Warqa bin Naufil and several other people who were freely propagating their faith. If his mission proved a success it would add to the prestige of Banu Hashim, otherwise, the people who would gather round him would soon disperse like the devotees of the rest of the claimants to prophecy, they said.

Hence, the Prophet who entered Baiat Uqba Awwal with representatives of Aus and Khazraj tribes one year and signed Baiat Uqba Thani the next year did not appear in the least to be a person making frenetic attempts to ensure his and his followers' survival in Mecca, nor flee to a safe haven and leave Mecca for good. The ignorance of most seerah writers, either wilful or unconscious, of the spirit, perspective and fine details of Uqba Awwal and Uqba Thani has led many to deviate from the true message of seerah, and portray the Muslim community and its leadership as fugitive, mentally defeated and deserted in Meccan phase. The orientalist have readily accepted their conclusions and spun out of them some of the most sinister allegations on the Prophet.

When God permitted the persecuted Muslim community in late Meccan period to take revenge, equal to the measure of pain that had been inflicted on them, or exercise patience, the Prophet arrived at the conclusion that even if people of the two cities and other tribes entered the fold of Islam as a result of consistent proselytization they would never accept wholeheartedly the applied monotheism or the social, political and economic justice he was to enforce by peaceful preaching alone. History bears witness to the fact that the impact of peaceful proselytization for social and economic justice on ruling and elite class remains ineffective as they only understand the language of power. The Prophet resolved that preaching in soft words and patience in adversity did not prove much fruitful, it was therefore compulsory for Muslims to make mutual agreements for defending each other with force against Islam's foes.

The Prophet's uncle Abbas bin Abdul Mutallib, who also took part in the back to back agreements despite his adherence to Quraish's religion, addressed the representatives of Aus and Khazraj in the following words. "Muhammad and his cause were being entrusted to them for aid and were not being surrendered to them, since Muhammad had enough protection at Mecca¹⁵." After mutual vows of allegiance and fidelity, the accord was finalised in which the Medinan delegation pledged that they would stand by and obey the Prophet through thick and thin and declare the truth without fearing peoples' allegations wherever they were.

Hence, it can be concluded safely that Baiat Uqba Thani was a pact of war under all existing standards. Abbas's statement proves that Muhammad and his followers did not at all face any existential danger in Mecca. Muhammad's conduct was aggressively confident throughout the negotiations while Quraish's reaction to the pact that came out in their exchange with Khazrajis a day after the meeting appeared clearly defensive -- if one were to subject it to psycho-analysis. But perhaps, the western propaganda that "Islam was spread by the sword" has so firmly taken hold of Muslim scholars' minds that they have lost their capacity to appreciate the great significance of the agreement in Islamic history.

Another reason for wilful or otherwise neglect of the Uqba pacts might be the threat it posed to vested interests of the trio of Sultans, Ulema and Sufis who might fear lest this accord should infuse a new spirit in Ummah and remind it of its responsibility to undertake the prophetic mission of establishing the socio-moral order on earth. The agreement can also be seen as part of a war strategy. Since the two sides – Muslim community and Quraish – were in a state of war, both had right to formulate his strategy which might now be defensive and now aggressive according to changing circumstances, something which Muslim apologetics fail to grasp. They always look for some 'aggressive action' by the deniers of the truth to justify the Prophet's actions.

When Meccan refugees, including those who had earlier gone to Abyssinia, started arriving in Medina in the wake of the Uqba agreements, and grew into a sizable community, the Prophet also migrated to the city. Some scholars fail to

grasp the importance of Uqba agreements and declare the Prophet's migration was a "sudden flight" but Philip K. Hitti manifests deep insight into all the factors that led to the migration. He writes "Muhammad allowed 200 followers to elude the vigilance of the Quraish and slip quietly into Medina, his mother's native city; he himself followed and arrived there on September 24, 622. Such was a famous hegira -- not entirely a "flight" but a scheme of migration carefully considered for some two years.¹⁶"

In Medina, the Prophet signed a covenant with all communities, which recognised religious freedom for Jews and made it binding on Muslims and Jews to work together for internal and external security of the nascent city state. As for matters related to maintenance of law and order and resolution of day to day disputes, the agreement declared Muhammad's word to be final and invested with veto power.

The apologetics have left no stone unturned in their frenetic attempts to prove the Medina covenant to be a secular document. But if being secular only means recognition of others' religious freedom, then the covenant is undoubtedly the last word on the subject but if the term stands for expulsion of religion from the matters of legislation, constitution, state and politics -- as is clearly evident from the history of secularism and of which the apologetics feign ignorance -- then it is sheer dishonesty or complete lack of knowledge to apply this term to the Medina covenant.

Dr Rahman argues that calling Medina covenant a secular document is tantamount to saying that when Muhammad was putting his sign on it he was engaged in an irreligious action with an equally faithless attitude. How can it be possible that the Prophet gives up his mission and grave responsibility while signing such an important agreement? If he really did aspire for a secular state, he could have easily achieved that in Mecca. He and his followers did not have to leave their hometown to have their secular state.

Dr Nicholson contends: "No one can study it (Pact of Medina) without being impressed by the political genius of its author. Muhammad does not strike, openly at the independence of the tribes, but he destroyed it, in effect, by shifting the centre of power from the tribe to the community, and although the community included Jews and pagans as well as Muslims, he fully recognized, what his Opponents fail to foresee, that the Muslims were the active, and must soon be the predominant, partners in the newly founded state.¹⁷"

After having established himself and strengthened his grip on the nascent state by effecting fraternisation among the city's natives and the refugees -- a miracle in human history --, Muhammad turned his attention to the long term plan of the takeover of Mecca. "All his political actions after his arrival in Medina -- harassment and waylaying of the Meccan trade caravans -- are really intelligible only in the light of his over-riding concern to take Mecca -- if not through peaceful means, then through economic pressure or, if necessary, war.¹⁸"

The strategy for Mecca takeover was not made in Medina as Islam's western critics claim. It had remained central part and fulcrum of the Prophet's mission since the advent of his ministry. Mecca was important for Muhammad for two main reasons. The first was the city's central and undisputed position in Arabia, hence Muhammad believed, and rightly so, unless he took it over the possibility of Islam spreading out to the world would remain bleak. The other reason was support of Quraish, who were held in high esteem by all tribes because of being custodians of the sanctuary. If Quraish converted to Islam it would definitely speed up propagation of Islam.

The orientalist have failed to understand this point and fallen into pitfalls in their attempts to comprehend the life of Muhammad largely because of their erroneous belief that no unarmed prophet, saint or religious reformer had ever succeeded to leave his imprint on history. One is bound to commit such grave errors if one tries to see history of a foreign culture or religion through the lens of his own history and experiments.

The political and military struggle of Islam can be likened to Moses's mission for the liberation of Jews from Pharaoh's enslavement and establishment of God's order on earth, hence there are more references to Moses and his book in the Quran than other prophets. On the contrary, since Christianity had suffered great persecution under Roman Empire

and Christ and his apostles failed to leave any imprints on history, Christian scholarship accepts a priori that the fate of a religious struggle is restricted to tragic tales of persecution, failures, repudiation and incarceration. Therefore, the notion of a religious leader achieving success in his mission appears to Christian scholars to be nothing but a result of some repugnant moral compromise. It is hence not surprising that almost all orientalists concur that after his arrival in Medina, Muhammad went through a complete metamorphosis. “The seer in him now recedes into the background and the practical man of politics comes to fore. The Prophet is gradually overshadowed by the statesman.¹⁹”

This fundamental mistake has made the orientalists’ minds so lopsided that even when they sincerely try to resolve a riddle in seerah they get entangled inadvertently in another. After the pact of Medina and fraternization helped provide required power and stability, the Muslim community were directed to strive hard and launch armed struggle (22:38-40). Dr Rahman and Dr Kalim Siddiqui agree that soon after successful fraternization of refugees and natives in Medina and attaining economic stability, the Prophet began to dispatch reconnaissance missions and raiding parties to trade routes used by Meccan merchants for transcontinental trade. The policy, part of larger war strategy, was aimed at harassing Quraish and cutting off their economic lifeline to Syria to push them into a closed alley. Muhammad pursued single-mindedly his vision of taking over Mecca. If he could achieve it by peaceful means, it was better but if it required economic harassment and blockade he would not step back from it and if he had to go to war for the purpose he would not cringe from it.

Western scholars describe Muhammad’s desire for marshalling help of Quraish for the fulfilment of his mission as nationalism, which is factually wrong. It is in fact a pragmatist leader’s approach to make use of all available material, forces and matieux of history for his noble moral objective. “If history is the proper field for divine activity, historical forces must, by definition, be employed for the moral end as judiciously as possible.²⁰”

Ibne Khaldun fully grasps the fact as he argues “Arab asabiyya (solidarity) was inevitable for initial launch of Islam²¹”. Shah Waliullah writes on similar lines “ ‘Arabian conditioning’ was absolutely necessary if Islam was to develop as an effective religion in the world .²²”

The Muslim community had had to grapple with two grave issues since late Meccan period to initial days in Medina. The first was the establishment of a just moral order on earth and the second was creation of a single religious community. With the divine permission for armed struggle bestowed on Muslim community in Medina, the first step had been taken towards the establishment of the just moral order and subtle messaging had been started with some specific decisions to help create the single religious community in the long run. The Quran mounts stress on the two points in Medina perhaps because this land appears more suitable for and receptive to the idea of establishment of moral order and single religious community.

The idea of One God One Humanity was not a figment of the Prophet’s imagination it was the very intent and purpose of God. Because, unlike Moses -- who had a local mandate of liberating his people from the bondage of Pharaoh --, and Christ -- who declared in Gospel that he had been sent only to guide lost sheep of the children of Israel – Muhammad’s message and mandate is universal. He was asked to proclaim “Say [O Muhammad]: "O mankind! Verily, I am an apostle of God to all of you,” (7:158). This had convinced Muhammad to strive for the establishment of single religious community but the idea met stiff resistance and wholesale repudiation not only by polytheists in Mecca but also by Jewish and Christian communities in Medina.

Perhaps, by that time the humankind had not evolved the type of mental and moral condition that was a prerequisite for the acceptance and implementation of the idea of single religious community. Dr Iqbal asserts while discussing the humanity’s collective evolution, potentialities of the idea of monotheism and his idea of “composite monotheism” that “human integration on grand ethical idea of Oneness of God is the final and ultimate destiny of mankind²³”.

The realisation of the grand idea had been put on hold during the lifetime of the Prophet due to collective immaturity of humanity at that time. Thereafter, the Quran declared multi-religious world to be part of divine scheme and said it

was the wont of God that different communities compete with each other in spreading good in the world. God decreed that the community which performed better on the world stage would be handed over the steering wheel of history. The good will rule the world and it keep changing its capitals. The only constant in this equation will be the larger good of humanity. It is the Quranic principle which has unfolded gradually over the centuries.

After the Quran declared Muslims to be a separate people it called it the median, the middle community (ummat e wast) (2:143) and the best among people (3:110, 3:104) whose major characteristics were explained in 22:41, “those who, [even] if We firmly establish them on earth, remain constant in prayer, and give in charity, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong..”

The Quranic command for the establishment of a system of prayer and zakat means in reality the just socio-economic moral order. One may notice that Quran lays stress on the establishment of the system of prayer and zakat together with “commanding good and prohibiting evil” at several places across the holy book, which makes it clear that the Quran is in fact urging the believers to establish a political system that ensures the enforcement of an egalitarian and just moral social order. Such a system will essentially have a mandate for eliminating corruption from the earth.

The spirit of the message makes it evident that poverty should be one of the forms of الفساد في الارض since it is anathema to human dignity and prestige and so are equally الفساد في الارض the social, political and economic imbalances, which put locks on man’s latent powers and potentialities. Such a social order cannot be brought about by preaching alone, it requires political power to make it happen, and power does not come to one only through wishes and prayers. It is obtained by great personal courage, wisdom and trust in one’s potential. Hence, Jihad which stands for exerting one’s utmost potential, energies and capabilities to achieve something, and armed struggle, have been declared to be one of Islam’s fundamental beliefs. In fact, the Muslims have earned their most singular title of middle and the best community because of the struggle for the establishment of the moral order on earth they are supposed to wage. Lest the Muslim community forget its duty like Jews and start believing itself to be God’s chosen and darling people, the Quran warns that you are not indispensable. “... and if you turn away [from Him], He will cause other people to take your place, and they will not be the likes of you!” (47:38).

Simultaneously, Quran explains divine wisdom behind the multi-religious world and states that every community has its own separate moral law though it is not difficult for God to make them into one single community.

The author believes the moral pessimism that has crept into political systems of Muslim society is either a direct consequence of monarchy-sponsored scholars’ erroneous worldview that they might have mistakenly gleaned from the Quran and seerah, or they might have purposely designed this sterile worldview on the dictation of monarchy so as to safeguard their illegal system – which is essentially un-Islamic – against possible resistance by Muslim society.

Perhaps it is the reason that despite having seemingly unbridgeable differences, practitioners of tasawwuf and orthodoxy -- with a few exceptions --, converge on single point that the Quran and sunnah lack the spirit that inspires social change and spurs believers to undertake the original prophetic mission of establishing a just socio-economic, moral system on earth. Hence, precedents of the back-breaking, massive and “tremendous initiative” for establishing a moral system on earth, which was a unique characteristic of the Prophet and His companions, are not to be found throughout entire Muslim history.

On the one hand, Sufis and ulema helped design the sterile concept of the Quran and sunnah in medieval ages while on the other hand, western nations’ onslaught on Muslim lands and their systematic campaign against Islam produced a large body of Muslim apologetics -- spearheaded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Syed Amir Ali in the subcontinent --, who expended all their energies on defending Islam or proving it to be compatible with the new western sciences in classical modern age. The unabated propaganda kept them on the defensive and made them so preoccupied that they found little time left to use critical and creative thinking and view Islam as it originally is.

Muslim scholars managed to shake off this apologetic and defensive attitude in the wake of rise of revisionist school in the west which advocated viewing east and west through the same lens without discrimination of colour and creed. Cantwell Smith, Maxim Rodinson, Jacques Berque represent this school and Iqbal, Shibli Nomani, Dr Fazlur Rahman and Tariq Ramadan spearhead Muslim scholars of this school who tried to present Islam as it originally is.

However, this school proved short-lived and disappeared soon after colonialism was replaced by economic neo-colonialism when western powers chained the recently liberated Muslim lands once again in heavy debts – for which they had generated funds from the huge investment siphoned off into their banks by oil-rich Arab monarchies – and with it returned the Frankenstein of white man’s supremacy. Moreover, dictatorial regimes installed by western powers in Muslim countries silenced all voices for the establishment of truly independent and autonomous states that could deal with the west on an equal keel. This state of affairs allowed once again development and acceptance of the sterile, pacifist version of Islam.

The latter day seerah writers, historians and exegetes made a fundamental mistake in understanding the Quran, sunnah and nature of resistance in Meccan period and erroneously believed -- despite abundant evidence against such belief in the Quran and conduct of Muslims in the first century -- that Islam was merely a set of dogmas which were to be repeated verbally in order to be a Muslim. It was enough to declare ones’ Islam orally and it does not require action to prove one’s faith. There are some special circumstances which have led to the development of this belief though Quran declares God will treat deniers of truth and non-practicing Muslims -- whose faith failed to translate into the establishment of the social moral order on earth -- equally on the day of judgment (6:158).

Orientalists’ allegations

Orientalists claim that Muhammad’s military incursions, raids, reconnaissance and patrolling missions sent to coastal strip were unilateral aggressive actions by an unprovoked person. But the fact remains that the Prophet’s actions were calculated to achieve only one objective, takeover of Mecca, and complete the process of spreading the divine message to all people in Arabia and beyond. Karen Armstrong says that battle of Badr and pact of Hudaibiya were two sides of the same coin, which means the Prophet’s first and foremost objective was peace. If it necessitated war he waged war and if the objective could be achieved through truce he would go for it even at the cost of earning wrath of his own people.

The fact that the Prophet had issued instructions in his will before his demise on Rabiul Awwal 13, 11 Hejira (June 8, 630 AD) to dispatch an army to the South to pre-empt threat from Byzantine empire, proves that Islam was never meant to be restricted within Arabia while orientalists claim the Prophet’s last order as head of state was motivated by nationalistic sentiments as he wanted to liberate Christian Arab tribes of the South from the bondage of Byzantine and Persian empires and bring them to the fold of Islam.

The so-called Islamologists, who have devoted their services to safeguarding corporate interests of western colonial powers, have left no stone unturned in their attempts to distort the original message of Islam and sow seeds of doubt in peoples’ minds about the originality of Islam. They acted as major contributors to the two pronged policy of the colonial powers. The policy’s first part dealt with use of military means to subjugate Muslim nations from Morocco to Malaysia and Indonesia, and the second part involved attempts to prove cultural and academic superiority of the west. These scholars went to unimaginable lengths to prove that indigenous academic tradition and religious and cultural heritage were worthless and unreliable because the colonial powers knew well that they could not maintain geographical dominance until they deprived the subjugated nations of their distinct identity and history. Hence, they carried out epistemicide of colonised nations as a state policy.

Edward Said laid bare epistemicide as an intellectual tool of colonialism in his seminal work Orientalism. Jacques Berque, Cantwell Smith and a number of other scholars have also confessed to this insidious crime committed by western colonial powers. Dr Ali Shariati points to this intellectual hegemony as he concludes that the knowledge

whose basic objective should have been search after truth was turned into an instrument of power and was used to serve international capitalists' interests. They (the pseudo intellectuals on the payroll of capitalists) distorted facts wherever they could or portrayed truth in a dishonest manner to draw pre-conceived conclusions as it was easier to play with academic and cultural traditions of their opponents or the nations deemed less cultured, in the name of research.

The work of well-known Dutch orientalist Snouk Hurgronje on Islam is a case in point. He heaps criticism on the Prophet's life and says: "In the beginning Muhammad was convinced of bringing to the Arabs the same [message] which the Christians had received from Jesus and the Jews from Moses, etc., And against the [Arab] pagans, he confidently appealed "to the people of knowledge", whom one has simply to ask in order to obtain a confirmation of the truth of his teaching [But] in Medina came the disillusionment; the people of the book will not recognise him. He must, therefore, seek an authority for himself beyond their control, which at the same time does not contradict his own earlier revelations. He, therefore, seizes upon the ancient prophets whose communities cannot offer him opposition [i.e., whose communities are not there or no longer there: like Abraham, Noah etc.²⁴"]

Hurgronje's conclusion is unavoidable if one accepts a priori dichotomy in the Prophet's roles in Mecca and Medina. But as discussed in the foregoing pages, the Meccan period is organically connected with Medinan, it is in fact a continuation without break as it should be in natural order of things. No human issue can be viewed in isolation after delinking it from context and pretext but it has become western scholarship's paternal legacy to view the two periods as separate and disparate. Iqbal Ahmed brands such work as "rigged scholarship of western academic orthodoxy²⁵" and Dr Rahman contends that this "rigged orientalist narrative" has been at the root of orientalists' utter failure to understand the ultimate unifying fabric which the Quran spins to expound some of its major and central ideas -- something which Dr Rahman has achieved in his seminal work Major Themes of Quran.

The other reason, argues Dr Rahman, has to do with western scholars' obstinate habit of dividing the Prophet's enterprise in two distinct parts of Mecca and Medinese periods. "The basic trouble lies with viewing the career of the Prophet and the Quran in two neatly discrete and separate periods -- the Medinan and the Meccan -- to which most modern scholars have become addicted. A closer study of the Quran reveals, rather, a gradual development, a smooth transition where the later Meccan phase has basic affinities with the earlier Madinan phase; indeed one can "see" the latter in the former.²⁶"

Dr Rahman deplores that it is very unfortunate that both western and Muslim scholarship treat the Quran as a treatise or monologue about God and nature of divinity instead of a functional guide for believers. Muslims have tried to understand the Quran with the help of the rigid and manmade rules of hadith instead of the principle of dynamism intrinsic in the Prophet's life. If different parts of the Quran and seerah are excised out of their organic whole and seen as disparate pieces without natural order and cohesion, their meaning is bound to become knotted even when one tries ones' utmost to understand them.

Admittedly, orientalists have done a commendable job in discovering looms behind individual verses, their social perspective, occasions of revelation and chronological development of the Quran and seerah and made a worthwhile attempt to view Islam as an organised belief system. However, it is yet to be seen whether the story of Islam has been deliberately tampered with or it has entangled itself without intervention of an external agent. The question will settle the day the west rises above its narrow colonial interests and enables itself to view Islam objectively and dispassionately.

Majority of western scholars harp on the same tune that the Quran is a patchwork of Judaeo-Christian traditions. They can be divided into two schools of thought, one headed by Richard Bell which calls Quran a combination of Christian ideas and the other is spearheaded by C.C. Torrey who believes the Quran is made up entirely of Jewish traditions. The claim is reductive and fails to answer the question supposing the Quran is merely a patchwork of Jewish and Christian traditions then why does it point out to distortions in stories about many prophets and about other

metaphysical concepts in Torah and Gospel and present more legible and rational content? Contrary to what the two schools claim, the Quran asserts it is a book -- along with all its historical content -- revealed directly by God. Quran itself argues for its originality in the following words. "For, [O Muhammad,] thou hast never been able to recite any divine writ ere this one [was revealed], nor didst thou ever transcribe one with your own hand or else, they who try to disprove the truth [of thy revelation] might indeed have had cause to doubt [it]." (29:48).

Western Islamologists do violence with historical facts and go to unimaginable lengths to prove their thesis on the basis of an unrealistic theory of complete separation of Meccan and Medinan periods that Islam was just a vehicle for Arab nationalism. Hitti claims: "In Madenese period the Arabianization, the nationalization of Islam was effected. The new Prophet broke off with both Judaism and Christianity, Friday was substituted for Sabbath, the adhan (call from minaret) was decreed in place of trumpets and gongs, Ramadhan was fixed as a month of fasting, the qibla was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca, the pilgrimage to al-Kaba was authorized and the kissing of the Black stone -- a pre-Islamic fetish -- sanctioned."²⁷

As for the claim of Arab nationalism, the most obvious reply lies in Islam's being standard bearer of universal values of brotherhood, equality and justice. One may ask, does the divine mandate for the establishment of a socio-economic, political and moral order on earth require universal values or narrow nationalism? How could Muhammad's universal message for all humanity have been helped by the ideas of nationalism? Aren't the two ideas mutually exclusive?

The assertion about break with Jews and Christians made by Hitti and Hurgronje who believed the messenger Muhammad in Mecca turned into a practical statesman in Medina does not hold water as the Quran never closes doors on them after having recognised them as separate communities, never tires of criticising their attitude and never stops inviting them to embrace Islam.

The western critics of Islam unquestioningly accept the claim that change of qibla was a direct result of break with the Jews. Their claim would have been justified if the Prophet had declared Baitul Maqdis as qibla to appease Jews after arriving in Medina but it is an undeniable historical fact that Muslims had adopted Baitul Maqdis as their qibla while they were still in Mecca. It appears the decision was actuated by Quraish's ban on Muslims to enter Kaba, otherwise, Kaba was the pivot of all religious activities for both Meccans and Medinans and the rest of the Arab tribes. According to another theory, Muslims adopted Jerusalem as their qibla in Mecca to draw a clear line of differentiation between idol worshippers and adherents of Islam.

Ibne Ishaq says that in Mecca, the Prophet used to stand in prayer in a way that he faced both Kaba and the bait al-maqdas at the same time. "And it is only to the end that We might make a clear distinction between those who follow the Apostle and those who turn about on their heels that We have appointed [for this community] the direction of prayer which thou [O Prophet] hast formerly observed." 2:143. If it had been divine will to adopt Baitul Maqdis as qibla, the Quran could have achieved the purpose by delinking it from Jews and declaring it a permanent qibla like it did in the case of biblical prophets.

There is no link between the permission for hajj and change of qibla because the two decisions were separated by a gap of six months. The enjoining of hajj had more to do with declaration of distinct and separate identity of Muslim community and less to do with Jews. After functioning as a separate, sovereign entity for 18 months after hegira, it was only natural for the community to develop its unique and individual characteristics and symbols.

Similarly and quite naturally, Jewish animosity and hypocrisy towards Muslim community did not develop suddenly. It unfolded gradually during battles of Badr, Uhud, Ahzab and Khyber. Moreover, if Islam recognises separate identities of other communities and faiths with local mandates and traditions, it is quite justified that Islam, which has global mandate, should have right to develop its separate symbols, characteristics and parameters of right and wrong and identity called asabiyya by Ibne Khaldun. If Muslim community's distinct symbols and rituals that give it separate identity are "visible forms of nationalism" as Hitti asserts, then one may wonder what type of nationalism is it which

has imbued in one hue all Muslim nations with different races, cultures, colours of skin and languages from South Pole to North Pole and from Morocco to Malaysia.

Hitti paves the ground for his thesis by subtle subversion of facts and argues that although Quraish exacted revenge for Badr in the battle of Uhud and the Prophet also suffered injuries in the war, "Islam recovered and passed on gradually from the defensive to the offensive, and its propagation seemed always ensured. Hitherto it had been a religion within a state; in al-Madina, after Badr, it passed into something more than a religion – it became a state. Then and there Islam came to be what the world has ever since recognised it to be – a militant polity."²⁸

Though it has always remained one of the fundamental motifs of the western narrative about Islam -- and it will remain so for several political and economic factors -- Muslim scholarship under quasi-caliphates and kingdoms, who believed Meccan period was devoted to proselytization alone and the Medinan period to war, has provided ample material to the west to build its lopsided narrative about the Prophet.

The first 11 verses of al-Ankaboot term Quraish's atrocities and propaganda as fitna, Muslims' passive resistance and tolerance as jihad and some weak believers' doubts and confusion about the faith and inconsistency in practice as hypocrisy. Much in the same way as the tolerant and passive resistance in Mecca turns into active and armed resistance in Medina, so does the Meccan atrocities grow into fully fledged battles of Badr, Uhud, and Ahzab and the budding hypocrisy in Mecca grows into fifth column in Medina. It begs the question if proselytization had been carried out on monastic pattern in Mecca would it have led to blockade of the community in Sheb Abi Talib, exiles and migration to Medina, or would Bilal, Sameea, Khabbab Bin al-Art have had to undergo inhuman atrocities?

The concept of religion as purely spiritual movement is a direct outcome of separation of church and state under secularism. William Montgomery Watt says: "The recent occidental conception of a purely spiritual movement is exceptional. Throughout most of human history religion has been intimately involved in the whole life of man in a society, and not least his politics. Even the purely religious teaching of Jesus -- as it is commonly regarded -- is not without political relevance."²⁹

It seems the Christian secular tradition has completely secularised Christ's declaration that he has been raised with sword in his hand, and fabricated the concept of religion as a purely spiritual movement. With this lopsided vision the modern western secular scholarship sees only a distorted picture of Islam and the Prophet. Is it possible that the Prophet, who had set the establishment of a just socio-economic, political, cultural and moral order on earth as his prime mission from the very outset of his career, had this sudden illumination in Medina that he needed jihad and politics to actualise his objectives? Obviously, the two had been part of a continuous process that had begun in Mecca. Karen points out: "Instead of wandering in unworldly fashion round the hills of Galilee, preaching and healing, like the Jesus of Gospels, Muhammad had had to engage in a grim political effort to reform his society and his followers were pledged to continue this struggle. Instead of devoting all their efforts to restructuring their own personal lives within the context of the pax Romana, like the early Christians, Muhammad and his companions had undertaken the redemption of their society, without which there could be no moral or spiritual advance."³⁰

It is difficult if not impossible for modern scholarship, which sees religion through the lens of secularism as purely spiritual movement, to appreciate the life of the Prophet as a beautiful synthesis of intense spirituality and hard realism. In stark contrast to the prophet who preached "give to the tsar what is tsar's and give to God what is God's", Muhammad's God is not a lifeless principle, nor an intellectual construct with no concern for being effective or ineffective in history. Muhammad's God "is a full-blooded God, living reality who responded to prayers, guided humans individually and collectively and intervened in history: "He speaks and acts", as Ibne Taimiyya so poignantly put it."³¹

Only a Marxist intellectual Marxist scholar like Maxime Rodinson can fully appreciate how great an achievement it was to gradually pry loose the tight clasp of slavery from the minds of the weak and strengthen them, and gradually

eliminate exclusive rights of religious monopolists (orthodoxy, clergy, Mullahism), political overlords (autocrats, dictators, Quraish oligarchy) and exploitative capitalist elite (Meccan or Medinan moneylenders) to whom Quran refers to as *مترفين* who live on and consume from the work and labour of others. Mr. Maxime Rodinson has aptly characterized Muhammad as a combination of Charlemagne, who spread Christianity among the Saxon tribes of Germans primarily so as to establish and consolidate an empire, and Jesus, whose kingdom “was not of this world”.³²

Dr Rahman says while explaining the combination of messenger and reformer in the person of the Prophet: “The Prophet was not an impractical visionary who simply made high-sounding moral pronouncements. It was a central function of the Prophet and his mission, after having made these moral pronouncements, to be effective in society and to move it in a certain direction. In other words, the Prophet was a seer cum-reformer. But at any given time a reformer, however zealous, cannot change society beyond a certain point. The Prophet, therefore, had to act both on the moral plane and the legal plane.”³³

The Prophet’s pragmatist mind knew to what extent reform was possible in a society at a particular evolutionary stage, he therefore made laws for certain issues and pointed out ultimate direction of moral principles to which the society was to keep moving. Both western and Muslim scholars have equally erred in grasping subtle differences in social and moral issues on separate planes of ethics and law. For example, when the Quran treats murder on legal plane, it declares the crime as individual in concession to specific conditions of its addresses and their particular evolutionary stage, and settles it with “a life for a life, pardon by heirs after acceptance of blood money, or unconditional pardon by the heirs”, but when it treats the crime on moral plane the Quran declares murder of one human to be equal to the murder of entire humanity. It raises the gravity of the crime from being individual to social and thus opens door to uncountable possibilities of legislation in future.

Similarly, the Quran’s declaration of Jews and Christians as enemies of Muslims was subject to specific conditions in Medina and particular attitude of the people of the book towards Islam at that certain stage in history, but when the Quran treated the issue on the plane of eternal moral principles it announced: “Say: “O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our lords beside God.” 3:64. The common ground between them and Muslims is the establishment of a just socio-economic world moral order.

History of Muslim Spain and Ottoman caliphate bear witness to Muslim rulers as well as common man never looked upon Jews and Christians as eternal enemies and made it a state policy to work in concert with them for the establishment of a monotheistic society. In a spirit of egalitarianism Muslims also extended the status of “the people of the book” to Zoroastrians in the light of a tradition of the Prophet, in which he was reported to have said that they (Zoroastrians) too were like the people of the book. Following this shining tradition, Muslim scholars in the subcontinent, Malaysia and Indonesia are invoking this tradition to declare their Hindu compatriots as equal to the people of the book, an unfinished agenda to which Al-Biruni had drawn their attention centuries ago.

Islam’s concept of inter-faith harmony is quite different from ecumenism, which is restricted to creation of harmony among all denominations of Christianity. Montgomery Watt argued that since contemporary occidental mindset had come to accept religion as a purely spiritual movement, its role had been curtailed under secular ecumenism and the idea could never rise from inter-denominational solidarity and prayers for mutual salvation to develop into one of universal brotherhood and single human community.

Muslim scholars can invoke the tradition for Zoroastrians in favour of Confucian China as Muslim countries are fast coming closer to the rising Asian giant over the past decade through new regional alliances. Dr Hamidullah had advised Muslims to study Confucianism and Taoism at a time when America, the sole superpower of the world, was announcing “end of history”. Indeed, Dr Hamidullah’s advice was inspired by 3:64 which proposed the establishment of the world moral order. Shah Waliullah had made it (3:64) the fourth and the last stage in his theory of *Irtifaqat*. Karen Armstrong had admitted to hitherto untapped potential of 3:64 during her speech at Dr Rahman memorial

seminar at Oxford University that the Quran did advocate a global alliance between Muslims, Jews and Christians for the establishment of a global moral order but the chequered history of crusades and western nations' onslaught on Muslim lands came in the way of this ambitious proposal³⁴.

The author feels that the idea of a global alliance of humans is abhorrent to today's rigged and lopsided scholarship. The roots of this abhorrence can be traced to the engaged intellectualism that had developed in the coercive environment of medieval age. The engaged intellectualism generates in Muslims feelings of "intoxication with the past" and makes him hold tightly onto conservatism.

If a people start living in the past even though it contains the sweetest of memories and gives up facing up to challenges in the present even though they are the most unpleasant and bitter, they turn into fossils which cannot preserve warmth of life for long. The Quran actually refers to such people when it says "for, no wrong did We do to them, but it was they who wronged themselves..." 11:101. "...it was not God who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves." When they met consequences of their actions, "neither sky nor earth shed tears over them." 44:29.

The author believes the medieval conservatism is temporary fallout of western onslaught and when Muslim community regains its economic and political autonomy it will cause the conservatism to disappear. Modern Marxist theory says that change in means of production brings about change in social values. It is but partly right as change in realities of time and space does not change values but it changes the mode of performance, pattern and methodologies. The reforms introduced by Islam's first independent mujtahid Umar bin Khattab prove this point.

The extraordinary corpus of jurisprudential work, treatises on divinity and reams and reams of Quranic exegesis address an agricultural mindset and problems of an agrarian society which has evolved over the centuries through industrial revolution and made a stopover in cyber age where it is ready to embrace changes of the present and coming ages. Is it then justified to stick to the handicapped scholarship of medieval ages, which creates the false impression that the Quran and the life of Muhammad can no longer provide answers to issues of the new age.

The Quran decrees that life has begun from one single soul and calls progeny of Adam one single body on the basis of the common origin from which they have sprouted. (4:1, 6:98, 7:189). Hence, if the Prophet's idea of One God One Humanity could not materialise due to historical and evolutionary constraints in his age, it did not mean that the Quran and the Prophet had given up on the idea.

Iqbal calls this idea a unique and original concept of Islamic culture and contends that western scholar Flint admits that although Christianity did preach human equality but it had on the whole failed to see humanity as one single soul. No Christian scholar, historian, religious leader or philosopher under Roman empire could be expected to comprehend this idea as they could not evolve the existing vague idea of unity of mankind into single human community while the development of nationalism in Europe and its emphasis on unique national identity, habits and characteristics has pushed back into the closet even this vague idea of oneness of humanity. In Islam the idea of oneness of humanity is neither a philosopher's theory nor a poet's dream, it is the very objective of the faith which a Muslim has to live in his daily life and present as a living and throbbing reality³⁵. Hence, Iqbal's prediction that oneness of humanity was the final destination of mankind.

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan declared that the idea of oneness of humanity was a hard fact rather than a dream. "The human race is one. This oneness of humanity is more than a phrase, it is not a mere dream. It is becoming a historic fact. With the speeding up of communications, ideas and tools now belong to man as man. The necessities of the historical processes are making the world into one. We stand on the threshold of a new society, a single society. Those who are awake to the problems of future adopt the ideal of the oneness of mankind as the guiding principle of their thought and action."³⁶

The time is ripe for Islam after the failure of two competing ideologies, capitalism and communism, which equally boasted of lofty ideas of man's freedom and prestige but in reality reduced him to a mere cog in the great wheel of production and led to concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, creating small islands of luxury in the vast sea of poverty.

Islam affords the only effective prescription for today's global issues and grave problems caused by hegemonic western nationalism, which has torn apart humanity into different camps. George Barnard Shaw is reported to have said that Islam and the life of Muhammad provide the only remedy against all social ills because it has belief in united children of Adam instead of united nations. If rightly understood and applied with the same degree of sincerity, only two aspects of the seerah -- the pact of Medina and fraternisation of Meccan refugees and Medinan natives --, are suffice to provide answers to today's complex and grave issues. Today global north (developed world, haves) and global south (underdeveloped, not-haves) need an agreement like Madinan Brotherhood and world order on the pattern of Pact of Madina.

Dr Rahman stresses that the responsibility for the establishment of the global moral order rests with Muslim community alone and it is its duty to comprehend the challenges, needs and requirements of modern age and cut itself free of the chains of the past to achieve that lofty goal. "Muslims have, by and large, become prisoners of their own historic creations, whether laws or institutions. In order to set mankind on the right path and provide a positive orientation in the present morass, we must transcend much of historic Islam and rediscover real Islam, which is concretely ever-present in the Quran and its ethical principles. This is the challenge Muslims must face, for the benefit of all mankind.³⁷"

Dr Rahman removes all doubts and objections over the life of Muhammad and advises the west to seek guidance from the eternal moral principles inherent in seerah. "But the real achievements of Muhammad are to be judged, in the long run, not on the basis of how many times he married, nor even on the basis of his personal achievements in a most brilliant career – he himself was so self-effacing that he referred every bit of it to God – but on the basis of what he bequeathed to mankind: both a set of ideals and a concrete way of achieving those ideals, which still constitute the best solution for mankind's ills.³⁸"

Dr Rahman had a rock solid faith in the success of Islam on the realm of history and believed the remedy for the humanity groaning under the crushing weight of materialism, hedonism, self-indulgence and selfishness, could only be found in the Quran and the life of Muhammad. "Islam at present stands radically polarized and is in unmistakable ferment and transition. Mediaeval conservatism cannot however supply genuine and effective answers to today's problems. It appears largely to be a reaction against Western colonialism. I am therefore confident of the eventual success of the pure Islam of the Quran, which is fresh promising and progressive.³⁹"

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