

ISLAM MY FASCINATION

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INTRODUCTION

'Islam My Fascination' is a compilation of a series of articles written by Mr Adiyar in Tamil daily *Neerottam*.

Mr Adiyar is a famous Tamil playwright, journalist and orator. Once he was a popular film dialogue writer. But his foremost preoccupation has been journalism. Since school days he kept himself engaged in literary activities. In college he was literary secretary of the Tamil section.

He joined Bhoodan movement led by late Vinoba Bhave and took active part in its programmes. He served as editor of the movement's organ *Gramdan*. He also worked as correspondent and assistant editor of the popular Tamil dailies *Tanaral* and *Marsoli*.

He was arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during emergency. The days in prison proved fruitful as he managed to study different religious books. The teachings of Islam and the Quran influenced him deeply. He penned down those indelible impressions in a series of articles. Presently he is editor of Tamil daily *Neerottam*.

It is my pleasure to render this popular book into English. The translation is from the Urdu

version of it. It was translated into Urdu from Tamil by Mr. Jameel Ahmad. Markazi Maktaba Islami which has published its Urdu and Hindi translations is now publishing the English translation.

S.M. IQBAL

Gaya.

4-11-90.

THE BEST MODEL

I do have extraordinary reverence for Islam and I want to pen down my impressions about this great religion, with a hope that readers too would ponder over them.

These days the pioneers of religions are, generally, taken as conservative and dogmatic, but my own study led me to the conclusion that they were revolutionary leaders of their times. They voiced their dislike for the evil customs of their age.

The Shankaracharya who took up the task of reforming the Hindu or the Vedic religion was a revolutionary. In the world where one meaning of 'Veda' was 'to conceal', Ramanujan, who gave the call 'Veda for all' was also a revolutionary. Christ was also a revolutionary who raised his voice against the heathen customs and belief of the age. Thus, the history of religion provides ample proof that the leading religious personalities were no conservatives but revolutionaries in their own right.

I can fearlessly proclaim that the greatest of all of these revolutionaries was Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The revolutionaries, other than Muhammad (PBUH), acquired knowledge and

wisdom in someone's company, through their parents or in family environment, but in the case of Muhammad (PBUH) we come across a totally different situation. His father, Abdullah, died before his birth. He lost his mother when he was only six. She died while on a journey, along with her only son, to the tomb of her dead husband. The young boy, who did not see the face of his father, lost his mother at such an early age. As if it was not enough, two years later he lost his guardian grandfather too, when only eight. Deprivations followed him. Father, mother and grandfather passed away in quick succession. Muhammad (PBUH) stood alone.

The man who was going to bring humanity close to the benignity of Allah stood alone bereft of all mundane support. At this stage his only supporter was his uncle, Abu Talib, who was himself a man of modest means. The deprivations of such a child can be truly gauged only by those who have experienced the misfortune of losing their parents at such an early stage.

And it was through this deprived orphan that the world was to receive the bonanza of Islam. It is an astonishing reality that the message of that orphan spread like wild-fire, from Spain to China — from one corner of the earth to the other.

The only driving force behind it was the personality of the Prophet, pious to the extreme and free of all blemishes.

We can, then, justly conclude that Muhammad (PBUH) is the finest model for humanity.

THE GOAT-HERD EMPEROR

Muhammad's life (PBUH) is the finest example for the entire humankind from beginning to end. The early life of many leaders and clerics was blemished but the life of the Prophet remained clean and spotless from the very beginning.

After the death of his grandfather he was under the guardianship of his uncle, Abu Talib. Financially, Abu Talib was not sound. So, to ease his uncle's financial strain he worked as a goat-herd to earn some wages.

Muhammad (PBUH)

- My Prophet, my guide.
- The man sent by Allah to show mankind the right path.
- The man who brought wisdom and good sense to the Arabs.
- The man who defeated the super power of Rūm.
- The great leader who sacrificed his all for Islam and its followers.
- The king of kings

worked as a goat-herd! What hardships he faced! Our eyes brim with tears when we think of the sufferings he underwent.

Muslims are definitely fortunate to have as their leader such a man of immense qualities. He who in his childhood worked as a goat-herd to earn his livelihood. He who accompanied his uncle on distant trade tours at the tender age of twelve.

His family was not the only beneficiary of his trade tours. He took with himself goods of other poor and weak women also to earn some profit for them. He was always mindful of and helpful to the weak and the oppressed. "I am going to market, can I bring anything for you," he was in the habit of saying this to his needy neighbours. He brought for them their requirements from the market.

He actively participated in the treaty of Hilful Fazole meant for the help of the oppressed people.

His life was an example of truth. He always kept his promises. Once a person asked him to wait at a certain place and went with the promise to return shortly. He forgot what he said, but Muhammad stayed there for three consecutive days. The man, by chance, passed that way and found him waiting there. Fully ashamed he asked: "Are you waiting here for the last three days?"

Muhammad softly said: "You told me to wait here."

That is how he was nicknamed *Sadiq* and *Ameen* (Truthful and Trustworthy).

And this man of highest human qualities Lady Khadeeja selected as her life partner. Khadeeja was surely very fortunate. She had twice borne the burden of widowhood before marrying Muhammad (PBUH). She was fifteen years older to him. Khadeeja gave birth to Qasim, Abdullah (Tahir), Zainab, Roqaiya, Umme Kulsum and Fatima. The two sons Qasim and Abdullah died in infancy.

As he gained economic self sufficiency after marriage, Muhammad's (PBUH) only concern was reformation of the humanity.

He discharged his household responsibilities and simultaneously called upon the people to Islam and virtuous life and was the only Prophet who fulfilled all his responsibilities so competently.

- Gautam Buddha turned ascetic.
- Shankaracharya did not marry.
- Christ was also unmarried.
- a lot of other religious leaders were unmarried, ascetic and Brahmacharya.

But we see the last Prophet accomplishing his duties with amazing success; at home and in the society, carrying all the burden of his movement for the establishment of Islam. His family and social life was equally exemplary.

The people of Makka called him truthful and trustworthy but vehemently opposed him when he called them towards Islam.

No one in the history of religion was so vehemently opposed for disseminating his message. This raises a question: What was in his message?

NON-ICONIC WORSHIP

What Muhammad (PBUH) said was not spoken by any other revolutionary ever. He prohibited idols, statues and pictures. This was his teaching fourteen hundreds years ago. He did not do just verbal service, but actually eliminated idol-worship in the true iconoclastic manner.

Here in Tamil Nadu we consider EVR (E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker) a true revolutionary because he not only condemned idol-worship but he really broke idols. Muhammad (PBUH) did it centuries ago. Reciting the Quranic verse:

Truth has arrived and

Falsehood perished; for Falsehood

Is (by its nature) bound to perish (17:81),

he removed the idols from Ka'aba.

Id-ul Azha is one of the two biggest festivals of Muslims all over the world. What is the significance of this festival? It is celebrated in memory of the sacrifice of Ismail by his father Abraham, in the way of Allah. Idols of Abraham and Ismail were also in Ka'aba. Muhammad (PBUH) ordered to celebrate the occasion of that great sacrifice and thus immortalised it, but along with other idols he removed the idols of Abraham and Ismail also. Can we imagine of a greater revolutionary step? Moreover, such a step was taken in a country which

was sunk in ignorance and indulged heavily in idol-worship. Communism rules over Russia and atheism officially prevails, but no one dares to remove the idols of gods and goddesses there.

Here in Tamil Nadu poets have hoped for the dawn when all idols would be demolished. But we see that all the nooks and corners are full of idols and statues. A courageous step to remove the idols from Ka'aba was taken fourteen hundred years ago.

To stand up in one's own land against the idols worshipped by one's own people and their forefathers was an exceptionally daring step. Such a revolutionary task, in history, was performed by Muhammad (PBUH). Today people make tall claims about their progressive thinking and present atheism in support of their progressivism, but are still captivated by portraits, statues, and sculptures. It is sheer irony that these progressive people negate idols of gods and goddesses but make statues and portraits of their leaders and bow their heads before them. They remove pictures and idols of gods but replace them by statues and busts of persons of their own choice. Be it a statue, bust or portrait, all symbolise man's weakness. The only man who warned and saved human beings from this weakness was Muhammad

(PBUH); who performed this feat fourteen hundred years ago.

Today, the only movement without pictures and statues is the movement of Islam which, in fact, is based on knowledge, and faith and conviction.

Some people argue that sculpture-making promotes man's aesthetic sense and without which aesthetic sense would die. But Muslims who practically negated idol-worship gave the world the gift of the most beautiful building. Here are the details of the grand performance of Muslims after they freed the imagination from the shackles of pictures and sculptures.

1. The present digits in arithmetic.
2. Algebra formulated and developed.
3. Architectural excellence achieved in constructing beautiful mosques and buildings.
4. Un-matched calligraphy
5. Producing silver nitrate and Sulphuric acid in the field of chemistry.
6. In medical science:
 - (i) Book on surgery by Farabi.
 - (ii) Al-Qanun by Ibn-e-Sina (Avicenna).
 - (iii) Kitab-al-Maalki by Ali ibn Abbas.
7. In poetry flows an ocean of rare lofty and beautiful ideas from Mutabanna (an Arab poet)

to Iqbal. And in literature we have a lasting treasure of stories like Alaf-Laila and Laila Majnoon.

Had any other nation performed such a grand task?

'Not to that extent' is the only answer.

Moreover, one distinguishing feature is that the followers of these revolutionary teachings rose from a barren desert and still gave to the world such a sublime aesthetic taste.

Yes, all this was done by the teachings of an unlettered man who took humanity to the heights of greatness.

ISLAM WHICH I LOVE

Without Miracle: The Prophet accomplished the greatest miracle without demonstration of the miracle. People do not trust the religious leaders easily unless they demonstrate something unusual or work some wonder. The weakness of common people to be impressed by such demonstrations evoke their trust in the demonstrators.

In some religions, even belief in God is the result of this weakness.

In reality a man cannot move on the path of virtue and modesty with determination unless he believes that a righteous person would get a successful eternal life while a wicked person is fated to be an eternal loser. For the attainment of this objective and to imbibe this idea in people's mind many supernatural ways and methods have been adopted in the Vedas, in the Puranas and in the New and the Old Testament.

The only great personality which kept itself away from such a method was that of Muhammad (PBUH). He lived in the sincerest and simplest manner. When he was asked to show a miracle he simply put forth the Quran. Keeping himself unconcerned with the demonstration of miracles, to influence people, the revolutionary figure of the

last Prophet called upon the people towards knowledge and wisdom.

Look at his comprehensive personality. His life was not only that of a religious figure but he was the commander in the battlefields as well. He not only delivered sermons and acted as a warner to people but was also the thinker, ruler, and leader and judge. All these qualities were handsomely blended in him.

In all the battles, from Badr to Khaibar and Tabuk, he was in the forefront as a brave and intelligent general.

He was at the same time a religious leader and a military commander. Such a combination of qualities was found only in his personality. He was very much an expert in wars and weaponry. And by generating in his Companions an extraordinary courage and strength of virtuous character and conduct based on faith he left in history a glittering example.

Why did he fight? He fought neither with an expansionist motive nor to humiliate and humble his opponents. Victory and triumph of Truth was the only objective. That is why the battle was called 'Jihad', and the warriors laying down their lives in this 'Jihad' were called *Shaheed* (martyrs). A *Shaheed* is one who becomes the witness of Truth by laying down his life for Truth. To run

away from the battlefield and fear death leads to hell. That is what the Prophet taught about 'Jihad'. The result of the teaching was that his Companions went fearlessly from Spain to China carrying with them the message of Islam.

Muslims faced defeat only when they deviated from the path shown by the Prophet. They never faced defeat till they followed his teachings. Rūm and Iran were the super powers of the period, but could not stand before the fearlessness and unshakeable faith instilled in his followers by Muhammad (PBUH).

Yes — Muhammad. The poor man born in the desert became the greatest leader and saviour of humanity. While the enemy was equipped with huge quantities of all types of weapons, and its army was far larger, arms on the side of Muslims were scanty. Even horses were not available to all. There was no comparison in arms and numerical strength. Still the Prophet and his Companions with strong faith and reliance on Allah fought and won every battle.

On the one side the Prophet's life was simpler and more selfless than any ascetic, on the other he was a successful ruler of Arab and its surrounding areas. His life was simple and he lived in a modest house, scantily furnished. He never experienced affluence. He took a very simple

diet, went on half belly-ful at times —even starved sometimes.

Tears fill our eyes when we think of it. This, in fact, is the contribution of Islam of which he was the preacher as well as the foremost follower. That is why I love Islam.

IS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD?

In earlier pages I have pointed out the great revolutionary work of eradicating idol-worship done by the Prophet. But that was not all. Yet another great revolution in human history was brought by him.

The triangle of Father, Son and Holy Ghost is part of the basic faith of Christians. The Christians believe that for the salvation of the sinners Christ took on the punishment on their behalf and got himself crucified. On the third day of his death he resurrected and sat on the left of Father.

- Christ was son of God.
- He resurrected (after his death).

Those who do not accept the above two facts cannot be Christian. This Christian faith was prevalent at the time of Muhammad (PBUH). He repudiated both the beliefs. He told the people the fact that Christ was not the son of God but His Prophet. He was not crucified as Christians believe. When a group of people entered his room one among them resembled Christ and they crucified him, instead of Christ. The Quran says:

*But they killed him not;
Nor crucified him,
But so it was made
To appear to them.*

(4:157)

We find in the Quran the name of Christ along with other Prophets like Adām, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Haroon, David, Solomon, Yunus, Elias and others. The Quran clearly declare that Christ was a Prophet and did not have elements of godliness in him.

This is not a suitable place to discuss the differences between Muslims and Christians but I want to highlight the fact that at a time when Christianity was world-power, Muhammad (PBUH) unhesitatingly challenged the wrong notions about Christ.

Christ was helped by the holy angel. Through him the Bible was bestowed upon Christ. The Quran clearly states these realities without the slightest disrespect. Likewise the Quran refutes other wrong beliefs but teaches to respect the religious personalities of other religions.

1. Refutation of falsehood.
2. Respect of all religious personalities.

Islam did not allow any mix-up in these two.

During Emergency when I was in detention under MISA I had the opportunity to go through the books of different religions, provided to me by my friends. And the book that influenced me most and which I liked the most was the Holy Quran.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE QURAN

Every religious book has its own singularity. The Vedas is the most respected book for the Hindus.

The Old and the New Testaments are, in fact, man-written biographies of two Prophets—Moses and Christ. The religious books are mostly either hymns in praise of God sung by religious persons or a tale of the circumstances in which the Prophet spent their days.

Quite contrary, the Quran was neither written by the Prophet nor is it just a collection of hymns in praise of God. It is not a book of history. It is the revered book inscribed by Allah in a 'tablet-preserve'. The Archangel Gabriel revealed it on Muhammad (PBUH). That is why Muslims believe that it is not a book written rather a book revealed.

The book has a number of distinguishing qualities. Its diction and rhythm has been a source of delight to me. Have words got any sacrosanctity? Yes, they have. Sound is the basis of the word.

The Vedas says that the world was created with the word 'Om'. The Bible says that first of all there

was the word of God, the world was created thereafter. The Quran combines the tenor of the finest prose with that of the poetic qualities. The Quran represents the sound of the musical word of the best prose and the best poetry in Arabic – in any language in fact.

Is its literary beauty unparalleled? This question may be raised today as it was raised at the time of revelation. The Quran answered by throwing a challenge on its critics to bring a book or even a verse like that of Quran. The Arabs of the time, so boastful of their literary prowess, failed to produce a single verse like that of the Quran. The challenge remains un-met to this day. None has succeeded in this effort. The Quran tells the Prophet:

*To thee have We granted the
Fountain (of blessings in abundance).
Therefore to thy Lord turn in prayer
And offer sacrifice in His name. For he who hates
thee
Shall himself be cut off (from future hope).*

(108:1-3)

Each and every verse of this book is full of beauty and wisdom. At the time of revelation, some noted Arabic poets tried their best to match its grandeur but failed miserably and later accepted their failure. "This cannot be human word," they had to admit.

*“Say if the whole of mankind and
Jinns were to gather together to produce
The like of the Quran they could not produce
The like thereof, even if they backed up each
Other with help and support. (17:88).*

We find in Quran different names for this revelation, which reveal great meanings and deep realities. The Quran calls itself The Only Book, the Rope of Allah, The Light, The Guidance, The Cure, The Judge, The Wisdom, The Message, The Spirit, The Boon, The Truth, The Glorious, The Insight, The Warner, The Clear Evidence, The Wonderful, The Bearer of Glad Tidings etc. These and other names in Arabic are *Al-Kitab, Al-Bayan, Al-Noor, Al-Huda, Al-Shifa, Al-Zikra, Al-Haqq, Al-Furqan, Al-Azeez, Al-Rooh, Al-Hakim, Al-Majeed, Al-Kareem, Al-Ajeeb* etc.

Moreover, the Quran means the most recited book. Yes, in fact it is the most recited book on earth.

THE UNLETTERED PROPHET

The man who first recited from this God-revealed book was unlettered (*Ummi* as in the Qur'an). He had no formal education.

Unlettered persons are not unwise nor do they necessarily lack the power of understanding. The unlettered Arabs possessed amazingly strong memory.

Persons who memorise a verse after hearing it once or twice or thrice are variously praised in Tamil literature. But the unlettered Arabs were capable of memorising hundreds of verses and reproducing them without a pause.

Not restricted to poetry, we come across people having wonderful mathematical brain. There are some who can multiply, for example, 214×314 in a fraction of a minute. Many Arabs used to memorise long genealogical tables, though they were unlettered.

Muhammad (PBUH), though unlettered had a very strong memory and an exceptionally intelligent mind. That is how he correctly preserved in his memory the revealed verses. He was helped by God in this task. His Companions memorised (and wrote) the revelation for posterity. Today we wonder when we hear the Quran memorised by persons who are totally illiterate and blind even.

To commit the whole of the Quran to memory is just a miracle—possible only with the help of God.

The Arabs of those days are generally called ignorant, illiterate, unwise, uncultured and those who revelled in murder and destruction. But, in fact, this is not the whole truth. The Arabs had exactly the same vices and virtues as had the people of other countries more than a thousand years ago. Though unlettered the Arabs had an edge over the people of other countries because of their exceptional memory. Only formal education does not make a man enlightened.

Demonstration of ignorance has been frequent in the literate world.

- Men were beheaded inside the forts and their heads were hanged.
- Men were trampled under the heavy feet of elephants.
- Men were crucified, buried alive, drowned in lime, thrown before hungry lions.

The pages of history are full of such scenes from Rome to Tamil Nadu. Were the Arabs really more ignorant? In fact, they are falsely alleged to be so. It is said that the Prophet was tortured by the Arabs. But were the people of Madina not Arabs. They staked their lives for him and fought on war-fronts under his command.

The revolutionary task of removing the idols from K'aba and eliminating idol-worship was accomplished by the Arabs under Muhammad's (PBUH) leadership.

Had such a great revolution taken place in India, China or any other part of the world fourteen centuries ago? Can we think of the same loyalty and support from the public as the Arabs demonstrated? When we judge Arabs from this angle we are convinced of their greatness.

The greater part of Arab peninsula comprises desert. When I think of the Arabs and their revolution an ocean of respect flows in my heart and I salute them.

A LIVING BOOK IN A LIVING LANGUAGE

There lies a great difference between the Vedas, the Bible, other religious books and the Quran.

The four Vedas are in Sanskrit. Literally, Sanskrit means a new language. But if we accept the theory that the Vedas were given to man since the dawn of the world then these must have been in some other languages and the Sanskrit version can be nothing more than a translation. On the other hand the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language which is a living language to this day and is available to us without the minutest change.

Look at the Torah. It was compiled by the Israelis many hundred years after its revelation. In fact, it was revealed upon Prophet Moses in Hebrew. It was compiled much later and then lost. Only the Latin and the Greek translations were available. It was then translated into the Hebrew language from the Latin and Greek copies of it. The result of such repeated translations can be easily imagined.

Recent researches bear out that the scrolls found in some cave near Dead Sea are only a few disjointed parts of the Bible.

The only Book that remained fully free from any mutilation by translation is the Quran.

The original book revealed to Christ was in a dialect of the semitic language. But it was first compiled much later in Greek, then translated into Latin and rendered into other languages afterward. So the Bible too is not available to us in its original language but in translation. The Quran is preserved in the language of its revelation.

There is one more point of distinction.

- The Vedas were written in Sanskrit and not in its original language. Sanskrit is not a *lingua franca* anywhere.

- The language of the Torah — Hebrew — was not the *lingua franca* for centuries. (It is only now that the state of Israel is compelling its people to learn Hebrew.)

- Likewise, the language of Christ or the language of Buddha is no more language of the people today.

Almost all the languages in which the religious books were originally revealed are today nearly dead languages. The Quran alone is in a living language. Furthermore, the four Vedas, the Torah, the Bible, and the book of Buddha were compiled years after the death of the persons to whom those were revealed. The Quran on the

other hand was handwritten and arranged simultaneously according to the instruction of the Prophet on whom it was revealed. He was very meticulous about it. He personally supervised the work. After his passing away the first Caliph, Hazrat Abu Bakr, collected the different scrolls and gave it the form of a book. The Companions of the Prophet were specially sensitive in the matter of its preservance and were extremely scrupulous in this task. They wrote down the revealed portion on some pieces of animal skin or on some other objects and recited them before the Prophet. The Quran thus is the only book compiled carefully and meticulously in the living presence of the Prophet himself on whom it was revealed.

THE NEVER-HIDDEN BOOK

The Quran is the only book which has all along remained intact and accessible, never concealed or contaminated. It contains the revealed verses only.

Hymns from the mortal men are now part of the Vedas. The history of the sons of Israel and the stories of the greatness of the Prophets have been interpolated in the Torah.

The Bible now includes the history as well as the sermon of the Prophet and those of the other reformers. The Quran alone bears the revelation from God. We find in it historical episodes to awaken man from slumber, to warn and admonish him, to reform him; and also the sermon and parables full of wisdom and thought, but all from God. Nothing was added to it even by the Prophet.

The sayings, deeds and sermons of the Prophet were compiled separately. It never mingled with the Quran. So the Quran remains exclusively the word of God.

In India the religious books have generally been the exclusive preserve of an exclusive class of Brahmins, Acharyas and Bhikshus etc. One of the meanings of the word Vedas is 'to conceal' — one that should be concealed from the people. In fact, the word of God should be for everyone, for

everyone to read and memorise—without any discrimination. The Quran is the only book easily accessible to everyone, the only book ordained to be read and disseminated in every society without any discrimination, the only book memorised by hundreds and thousands of *Hafiz* in the four corners of the world.

History tells us that some people were punished for reading or even hearing the Vedas, while the Quran directs the people to read it and declares that even hearing it being recited is rewarding. History tells us that Ramanuja was tortured near the Temple of Throkottiyu (Tamil Nadu) for the crime of reading the Vedas.

The Quran, on the other hand, teaches to carry its message to each and everyone so that people may seek guidance from it.

Adishankar, the commentator of the Vedas, was subjected to social boycott at the time of his mother's death. On the other hand Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph, was bestowed with the honorific of 'Babul-ilm,' (the gateway of knowledge), for reciting the Quran loudly. The Quran stresses that the Book of Allah is for the whole mankind and everyone should go through it to obtain guidance. Thus the Quran has been saved from being lost. Arabic, the language of Quran, is spoken by over 200 million people from Morocco

to Iraq. The Quran has immortalised the language.

Some religious books contain unnecessary details which ultimately create more complexities, while other religious books do not discuss man and its real problems, but present just a philosophical quagmire. While the former bind men into shackles the latter make them licentious.

The Quran has got a unique place among the religious books. Along with the basic faith and views enshrined in it, it carries the laws and limitations prescribed by God, and prohibits to cross them. After defining the limitations and explaining the faith it leaves human thought and action free to work in harmony with Quran.

Thus the Quran is the only book that grants us freedom of thought and action. Paying tribute to the Prophet, his Companions proclaimed that they never found a better person than him to seek advice from when they most needed it.

We see that the religious books are helping the hands of rulers, landlords and those who are strong suppressing the poor and the weak. But the Quran is the only book that helps the poor. It asks to restrict and hold the tyrants. So without a bit of exaggeration it can well be said that the Quran is the charter of freedom, a Magna Carta of human liberty.

THE MAGNA CARTA OF MANKIND

Generally the religious books claim that they take men closer to God, but what we see in practice is that they take them closer to kings, landlords and priests, and compel them to bow before them. Those are such books that handcuff them and make them helpless. Rulers were honoured with titles of *Avtar*, representatives and shade of God. Some books carry the message of liberty, but in words only. They failed to emancipate man from slavery of man. On the other hand, the Quran repeatedly asks man to refrain from obeying and worshipping 'man'. It prohibits to invoke other men. The Quran reiterated it so forcefully that the idea spread like blood in the veins of its followers. The Quran has, thus, centred all obedience, supplication and worship to One Allah. This teaching and its practice in real life brought a sea change. It ended man's rule over man as well as the excesses and oppressions. It removed all barriers from human thought and development. Man got real and full freedom. Human ego awakened. Darkness disappeared and a new light dazzled the surrounding.

A freshening spring descended on the valley of human thought and man began to breathe freely. The book that earned the exemplary success in

removing man's subjugation to man was none other than the Quran.

Mankind never came across a better manifesto for itself. A manifesto, greater than the Magna Carta, is the Quran. This manifesto helped in breaking the shackles of the slaves. It helped in demolishing the cult of discrimination and bringing mankind into an array of equality. This manifesto addresses man as human beings and tells them:

*O mankind! We created
You from a single (pair) of a male
And a female, and made you into
Nations and tribes, that
Ye may know each other
(Not that you may despise
Each other). Verily
The most honoured of you
In the sight of Allah
Is (he who is) the most
Righteous of you.*

(Quran 49:13).

The Book declared that the mankind is a family. All racial and tribal discriminations were uprooted.

Man is born free. All men deserve equal treatment and equal rights. The Quran granted them all that man deserves, but it never allowed them to turn irresponsible after getting their rights. It

asked them to fear Allah and only Allah. Creating in them the fear of Allah alone it asked them to bow only before the divine law.

The Quran turned men into a brave, respectable and honourable being by teaching and training them to stand steadfastly and fearlessly against oppressive rulers, exploiters; and in the face of death, poverty, disease and loss of life and property.

The Arabs of the desert were engaged in infighting and tribal wars. The air of culture had not touched them. This Book taught them manners, civilised them, gave them the wisdom and insight and courage to rule the world. This Book turned them into heroes. I can proclaim unhesitatingly that this tremendous transformation was the outcome of the revolutionary teaching of the Quran.

At every step this Book has enthused its followers to hold strongly the scale of justice and to never waver from righteousness. To those who leave the path of justice it warns of the punishment in the Hereafter. It asks its followers to stand firmly on the side of justice even if it goes against their own relatives. The result of these teachings is spread over the pages of human history in the form of shining examples of dispensation of justice during Islamic rule. The Quranic

society is firmly based on the foundation of freedom, equality and justice.

There are many more unique features of this Book. Many religious books call man's life a sin and therefore encourages to escape from it and live an ascetic life. The Quran, on the other hand, calls that 'man' is the finest creation of God. It highlights man's obligations and gives respect to man's deeds. It exhorts man to fully discharge all human obligations which will beautify life. The Quran looks at human life with respect and never advocates escape from it. It tells that struggle is the essence of life.

- A book with such distinguishing characters is definitely *Al-Kitab* (the Only Book).
- A book loaded with such blessings is definitely the Holy Book.
- A book leading man to such heights is beyond doubt the Great Book.

PROPHETS WERE HUMAN BEINGS

Prophet Muhammad was sent by God to inculcate in man lofty qualities like truth, high moral conduct and modesty etc. He conveyed these great teachings — full of wisdom — to man in the most simple and direct way.

We see that some religions declared someone as incarnation of god or part of god, and people accepted him and followed him. But the followers of Islam neither worship Muhammad nor call him son of God or incarnation of God. Muhammad's life was very simple. He was modest and an embodiment of morality. The Quran tells Muhammad:

Say, I am but a man

Like yourselves. (but)

The inspiration has come

To me that your Allah is

Only one Allah.

(18:110)

At many places the Quran says that Muhammad (PBUH) is a man, a modest man. The last Prophet established the religion of Allah with the following claims:

- I do not demonstrate a miracle out of my own power;
- I do not possess the treasures of the earth and skies;

- I do not know the unseen (*Ghaib*);
- I am a man like you.

Thus he performed a unique feat.

The Quran says:

*Truly thou canst not cause
The Dead to listen, nor canst thou cause
The Deaf to hear the call,
(Especially) when they
Turn their back in rejection.
Nor canst thou be a guide
To the Blind, (to prevent them)
From straying; only those
Wilt thou get to listen
Who believe in Our Signs,
And they will bow to Islam. (27:80-81)*

So, it is quite clear that the Prophet never intended to show miracles. He never claimed to be part of god. (His claim that he was a human being was approved in words of God). Born in Makka he guided mankind towards the simple straight path of Islam.

The Quran goes further to warn the Prophet of the possible consequences of deviation from the path of Allah. The Quran says:

*Were thou to follow their (Jews'
And Christians') desires
Disregarding the knowledge
Which has come to you,*

*You shall find no protector or
Helper against Allah. (2:120)*

and

*Even if thou wert to bring
To the People of the Book
All the Signs (together),
They would not follow
Thy Qibla; nor art thou
Going to follow their Qibla;
Nor indeed will they follow
Each other's Qibla. If thou,
After the knowledge hath reached thee,
Wert to follow their (vain)
Desires, — then wert thou indeed (clearly)
In the wrong. (2:145)*

Our hearts tremble when we go through these verses. Can one who was proclaimed as the model for mankind, ever leave the path of Allah, follow his own desire and thus invoke punishment! No, never. Yet the Quran very clearly warns that if the Prophet ever errs no one can save him from the grip of Allah. No other book so clearly warns the person on whom it was revealed.

Muhammad (PBUH) was the only Prophet who went to the people with his message and told them: 'I am a man like you, if I err I shall be accountable to Allah.' He, even though a Prophet, was not above accountability.

Such was the Prophet of Islam.

One more astonishing reality, untraceable in the history of other religions, is that the last Prophet was known as a man in his life-time, he is a man to us today and he would be known as a man till doomsday. We know that many religious personalities were born as men, lived as men, worked in their societies as men but after their death they became deities. Take Buddha for example. He was born as man. He followed the right path, did good deeds and preached for virtue and goodness. His death turned him into a god for his followers.

But in Islam Muhammad (PBUH) was never put in the place of God. He is just a man — virtue personified and the best model for humanity.

For the last fourteen hundred years all praise are conferred upon him, but he is never placed in the position of God, not even by his followers.

ANNADURAI'S VIEW ON ISLAM

Late Annadurai, former chief minister, of Tamil Nadu, made a speech on the life of Prophet Muhammad on 7th October 1957. It will be useful to reproduce parts of his speech here. He said:

“The world today which is faltering in search of a true ideology is more in need of Islam than it was in the sixth century A.D. Our world which today is groping in search of ideologies and has failed to find peace anywhere, is more in need of Islam today than it was in the sixth century A.D. Islam is not merely a religion, rather an ideology; the best way of life. A few countries have adopted it as an ideology and a system of life.

“There is no contradiction between my own religious views and my presence here. I have come to participate in today's celebration knowing and acknowledging Islam as a way of life. Why do we so much admire the Islamic way of life? Only because the Islamic principles free us from all doubts and uncertainties. The first teaching of the Prophet was ‘associate none with God in His Godhood’. I value it a lot and respect it from the core of my heart. I value it because it is so full of meaning and is so thought-provoking. ‘Associate none with God.’ Why? Who is God? What are

His attributes? All these questions lead us to think. A Tamil poet has said:

He who saw did not get;
He who got did not see;
He who saw did not tell;
He who told did not see.

“The attributes of God are countless. To be lost in those and yet move forward is truly laudable.

“To equate some one with Him is to declare him His equal. And who can be His equal? That is why Muhammad (PBUH) forbade it.

“The provision for polytheism, in other religions, has caused a lot of harm to people like us. By sealing the path of polytheism Islam bestows upon man greatness and grandeur and saves him from possible degeneration and its other unsavoury effects.

“Islam makes a man perfect. Islam generates in man the necessary abilities and strength that take him to the height for which he was created.

‘Accept me’, God might have come and ordered man so. But in that case man could not have got the chance to use his own judgement. This might have withered man’s thinking abilities and kept him away from mental development. When man got this message through His Prophet, he was bound to think over it. Has God really sent him? Did he possess the qualities of a prophet? It

was upto man to ponder and decide for himself. A Tamil poet has equalled God with knowledge. Real knowledge leads man to God. People who neglect God remain deprived of real knowledge, notwithstanding that they boast of knowledge.

“Moreover, one who embraces Islam frees himself from the discrimination of caste and creed. When people of Madaktur, who were engaged in killing each other, embraced Islam they turned into real brothers. All discriminations ended. The discriminations of caste disappeared and all became equal and respectable. Equality bound them in bonds of brotherhood. This side of Islam has impressed me immensely. Bernard Shaw having a very analytical mind gave his well considered opinion by calling Islam the only everlasting religion.

“Why do we praise the last Prophet so much and recognise him as the greatest man?

“Today, in 1957, we face so much opposition when we try to arouse consciousness and awakening among men. Fourteen hundred years ago Muhammad asked people to obey only one God. Standing among the idolators he told them that idols were not God; so do not bow before them. Pray the only God who is the Creator of all.

* A village in Tamil Nadu, which witnessed bloody riots between the high caste and the low caste people.

“Can we imagine the amount of courage required for such bold proclamation, and the opposition the messenger of God must have and did face in his home town? His biography tells us that he disseminated his revolutionary message very steadfastly even amidst highly adverse circumstances and despite the strongest opposition. There lies his greatness. The example of his steadfastness is followed by the true followers of Islam.

“The Islamic way of life unites mankind. It sharpens man’s intellect. It creates the bonds of brotherhood and awakens the human mind. Religions other than Islam create prejudice and make people fight each other until the police force intervenes. While the Islamic way of life and the Islamic ideology bind all in the bonds of love.

“There cannot be any contradiction between religion and true way of life. Any difference is possible only when the conception of religion is narrow and incomplete—limited to the extent that it is supposed to have nothing to do with the everyday problems of life.

“A true religion—which is a way of life also—if adopted would be useful for mankind. A congenial climate will have to be created for this way of life to work, and thus provide justice, respect, peace and all that man needs.

“Circumstances shape a man and generally man adapts to the circumstances. Common people do not bother whether circumstances allow for the healthy working of a way of life or not. They march on blindly. But the great men give a direction to the social movement. When they see that the society is moving in the wrong direction they move against it. They never bother about any possible harm to them. For the healthy working of the correct way of life they move in the opposite direction unless the situation is changed into the right one. Those are the real people who have the courage and determination to move on the path of truth defying all the hurdles and obstructions. Only such courageous people succeed in creating the atmosphere where a true way of life may work.

“Muhammad (PBUH) was one of such rarely courageous and great men. Teachings of such a great man should be widely spread in the country. Good atmosphere is a must for spreading such teachings, and for that a noble system of education is inevitable. A noble government is impossible without noble rulers and noble rulers can be had from noble individuals. The importance of noble persons can thus be estimated. These people are the real treasure of the society, and on them the future of society rests. Their loss is the greatest loss of mankind.

“Islam is like a diamond. People use it differently. While some put it in his finger ring some use it in jewellery and some sell it to make money and squander in lustful pursuits. It all depends on the use to which it is put. So we should think of our attitude towards this way of life which is more valuable than diamond.

“Will this religion side with the tyrants and oppressors? Will it exploit the weak? Or will it help the oppressed and the downtrodden? If the result in the real world is the former, all our praise for Islam is in vain; but in case the result is the latter one can believe that Islam will be a boon for the world.

“Islam, even to this day, is present with all its virtues and diamond-like glitter. It is the duty of the followers of Islam to adhere to it earnestly and sincerely. In this way they can please God as well as solve the problems of the poor and oppressed people, and thus humanity can march towards material and spiritual development.”

ISLAM IN THE EYES OF GREAT MEN

We have just gone through Annadurai's reverential remarks about Islam. It is not restricted to Annadurai, many more thinkers and intellectuals of the world have admitted the greatness of the Prophet of Arabia. From Napoleon to this day hundreds of intellectuals have paid rich tributes to Muhammad (PBUH) and talked of the supremacy of Islam and the Quran.

Napoleon said: "The day is not far off when all the thinkers of the world would jointly adopt a system of governance based on the Quran. The principles and teachings of the Quran are based on truth and are capable of bestowing happiness and prosperity. I am proud of God's Prophet Muhammad and the Book revealed unto him and pay my reverential tribute to him."

Gandhiji said that he read the Quran several times and was impressed by its teachings and the truth it contains.

Freedom fighter and poet Sarojini Naidu once said: "Sense of justice is one of the most wonderful ideals of Islam, because as I read in the Quran I find those dynamic principles of life, not mystic but practical ethics for the daily conduct of life suited to the whole world."

Famous Orientalist H.A. R. Gibb says:

“But Islam has a still further service to render to the cause of humanity. It stands, after all, nearer to the real East than Europe does, and it possesses a magnificent tradition of inter-racial understanding and cooperation. No other society has such a record of success in uniting in an equality of status, of opportunity, and of endeavours so many and so various — Islam has still the power to reconcile apparently irreconcilable elements or race and tradition. If ever the opposition of the great societies of East and West is to be replaced by cooperation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition.”

Goethe, the great German poet, said:

“However often we turn to it (Quran), at first disgusting us each time afresh, it soon attracts, astounds, and in the end enforces our reverence — its style, in accordance with its contents and aim, is stern, grand, terrible, ever and anon truly sublime. Thus this book will go on exercising through all ages a most potent influence.”

Michael H. Hart, American scientist, in his famous book “The Hundred” said:

“My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world’s most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was

supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.”

George Bernard Shaw, a great British dramatist and thinker has this to say:

“I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make its appeal to every age. I have studied him—the wonderful man, and in my opinion far from being anti-Christ, he must be called the saviour of humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that could bring it the much needed peace and happiness.”

La Martine, a French writer asks:

“If greatness of purpose, smallness of means and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?”

VEDIC FORECAST ABOUT MUHAMMAD

Muhammad was born in Arabia in the sixth century A.D. His coming was forecast in the Vedas much earlier. I was surprised to learn of it from an elderly person. This led me to make research. I found it to be true. *Bhavishya Puran* is one of the eighteen Puranas by Maharishi Veyas. One *shloka* in it says:

“An Acharya will descend in another country, along with his companions. His name will be Mohamad. He will come in desert.” (chapter 2, *shloka 3 sutra 5-8*).

It further explains,

“He will be circumcised. He will not have the *jata* (long hair tied on the above). He will have beard and be a meat-eater. He will present his message most clearly and forcefully. He will call his followers *Muslai*.” (chapter 2, *shloka 25; sutra 3*).

This is very meaningful. There was no tradition of circumcision among Hindus. Long hairs were religious symbol. The personality in forecast bears uncommon qualities and his followers are named *Muslai*. The word *Muslai* indicates Muslim and Musalman.

In *Athar Veda* chapter 20 we come across these *shlokas* :

“O followers! Hear. Praised and would be praised the great *Rishi* Mahamahe who will come among sixty thousand ninety people.” Muhammad in Arabic means the praised one. The population of Makka at that time was around sixty thousand.

“He will ride over twenty camels. He will be praised in heaven. That *maharishi* (great saint) will have hundred golden ornaments.” We do not know of any/camel-riding *maharishi* in India. It points towards Muhammad (PBUH) of Arabia. Hundred golden ornaments mean Prophet’s hundred loyal followers migrating to Ethiopia.

“He will possess ten pearl necklaces, three hundred Arabic horses and ten thousand cows.”

Ten pearl necklaces are Prophet’s ten Companions – widely known as ten who were given good news of their assured place in heaven. Three hundred horses indicate his 313 Companions who participated in the battle of Badr, the first battle fought by Muslims. Ten thousand cows indicate his multitudinous followers.

The Quran calls him (Muhammad) the blessing for the universe. The *Rigveda* says, “Getting the title of Blessing, he, the praised one, will come

with ten thousand companions.” (*Mantra 5 sutra* 28).

Similarly, his coming had been referred in the *Veda* with names of Mohamad and Mahamahe.

THE INCOMPARABLE

“Muslims are illiterate, stubborn and short-tempered. They are proud and oppressive”. Such views are very common among non-Muslims. But if investigated and looked into closely, a different reality — clear and candid — emerges.

Literally, Islam means peace. To the best of my knowledge Muhammad (PBUH) is the best model of self control. All reformers do possess virtues and high qualities but my heart tells me that none of them was as coherent a personality as Muhammad (PBUH). He became the ruler of Arabia but always did his work himself. He fed his cattle and milked them. He stitched his sandle and sewed his clothes himself. The world has heard of rulers bathing in milk, but, perhaps, has not heard of a ruler milking his cattle. A south Indian story tells of a *Rishi* who worked as a labourer to earn his livelihood and carried soil on his head. When the king knew of it he punished the man who had employed him. But the biography of Muhammad (PBUH) tells a different story. He worked with other workers when the mosque at Madina was being constructed.

His bed was simple and austere. He used to lie down on mat or animal skin and sometimes on the

bare floor itself. His abode was made of mud and covered with date-palm leaves.

His simplicity and humility leave an indelible imprint on our hearts particularly when we think that he was not an ascetic but a ruler.

He was neither short-tempered nor irritating, but always appeared with a smiling face and never laughed loudly. Every one got a helping hand from him. When he walked, he walked in a dignified manner. He was always the first in making salutation, not only to elders but to the younger. Milk of human kindness flowed from his self to every one, particularly for the oppressed and deprived. Such was his exemplary character.

He never ill-treated or abused anyone. We know of some eminent people who behaved kindly and amicably outside, but among the members of their family and subordinates they were unkind and severe. But the great Prophet was altogether different. He was as kind and soft spoken to his family members and subordinates as he was to the people outside.

When anyone shook hand with him and talked to him he never withdrew his hand first. He used to walk hand in hand with his friends. He addressed everyone with love and respect and tolerated patiently if anyone talked rudely. He

was more modest than a young girl of a noble family.

Muslims are fortunate enough to have such a great man as their leader. The imprint of good qualities found in his followers is the result of his lasting influence.

SOFTNESS WITH STEADFASTNESS

Even many religious leaders turn pessimistic during certain difficult moments of life. They lose hope of God's support and speak in utter desperation. Despite softness in their life they lack the required steadfastness during tough times.

The individuality of the Arabian Prophet is remarkable. He was extremely soft with his friends and equally active in his endeavours. In difficulties he stood like a rock.

A group of people angered by his message of monotheism came to his uncle and guardian and threatened him that he should either restrain his nephew or allow them to deal with him. Deeply disturbed with the seriousness of the situation he called Muhammad (PBUH) and informed him of what those people asked for. He affectionately advised him to adopt flexibility under the circumstances. Muhammad's (PBUH) reply added a new page in the chapter of human determination. He said, "I cannot forgo my mission even if they bring down and place sun in my right hand and moon in the left. Till the last moment of my life I would not desist from my mission".

He was tortured by the people of Makka in more ways than one. Rubbish and camel-intestines were thrown on him on his way; was hit by

stones and survived murder attempts. Adverse situation instead of shaking his footsteps added to his determination and steadfastness. In the battlefield the same polite man moved fearlessly. He was followed by 313 loyalists when he fought and won against an army far greater in size. He was wounded in the battlefield once and lost his tooth and fell in a pit but never lost determination.

His Companions were equally steadfast and were his true followers. They were victimized, humiliated, laughed at, beaten, tortured, undressed and made to lie down on hot sand. But they stood firmly and supported the Prophet. Their belief in one God found expression in their steadfastness. Till the last breath of life they firmly upheld their principle. They upheld it even at the cost of their lives. Their character was the reflection of the teachings they received from their leader, who taught them both politeness and firmness.

Muhammad (PBUH) and his Companions experienced extreme sufferings and hardships at the hands of Makkans but when they entered Makka as victors they were not carried away by the pride of triumph. They took no vengeance and settled no score. On the contrary, the Prophet was humble and kind as ever. The people of Quraish were trembling with fear while the

Emblem of mercy was saying: "No revenge would be taken. May Allah— the Kind and Merciful forgive you. All of you are free today."

He forgave the man who treacherously killed his dear and valiant uncle, Hamza (in the battle of Uhud) and the lady who chewed the lever of his dead uncle.

Oh! the height of human greatness.

CLEANLINESS

One of the many misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims is that cleanliness has got no place in their lives. I must tell that the only religion stressing so much on cleanliness is Islam. If followed truly it can turn the whole Islamic world into a cradle of cleanliness.

Praying five times a day is obligatory for a Muslim. Prayer (*Namaz*) is not allowed without cleanliness. Cleanliness in Islamic terminology means cleanliness of body, dress and place. It demands utmost cleanliness after visiting toilets and urinals. Roads, ponds, rivers, banks of rivers, shades of trees, mosques, graveyards, and public places are forbidden for the purpose of easing nature. The intention behind preventing to attend the call of nature in a standing position or while riding cannot be other than cleanliness. One can further understand the Islamic viewpoint from the instruction that if animals like dogs and pigs touch utensils it should be thoroughly washed. Likewise clothes of blood or urine of even suckling infants should be washed for cleanliness.

For prayer (*Namaz*) the place, body and the dress all should be clean. Ablution before *Namaz* is a must, and if necessary a bath. During bath

cleaning of mouth, throat, nose and all parts of the body thrice is obligatory. Brushing of teeth during ablutions has been stressed. Minimum of five ablutions everyday give a picture of the Islamic viewpoint in this regard.

The Prophet himself was particularly scrupulous about cleanliness. He always kept his tooth brush under his pillow. He disliked people spitting here and there. His residence was always neat and clean. "Cleanliness is part (half) of *Iman* (faith)", the Prophet declared.

WOMEN IN ISLAM

Status of women in Islam is yet another misunderstood subject outside the Islamic world. Women, before Islam, were subject to torture and humiliation. In ancient societies they were abused and degraded.

- In India a woman had to kill herself on the burning pyre of her dead husband.
- In China a woman had to wear tight iron shoes.
- In Arabia girls were buried alive.

It was only in the recent past that reformers raised slogans against the crimes perpetrated on woman. In the distant past we find in Muhammad (PBUH) the only benefactor of woman, emancipating them from all kinds of excesses. In a society unaware of the rights of women he gave them status equal to men. Women had no right of inheritance which they got. The Quran further explained their rights.

She acquired the right of inheritance in the property of her parents and some other relatives. Today, while we hear tall claims of cultural advancements in many countries women still had neither the right to property nor vote. But to our surprise, we notice that these rights were granted to her fourteen hundred years ago. Muhammad

(PBUH) was beyond doubt the benefactor of women. A great part of his teachings are about the rights of women. Stressing upon their rights he warned people to be alert and judicious about their rights.

Here are some of his teachings:

1. One who beats his wife is not of good morals.
2. The best among you are those who behave with their wives in the best way.
3. God commands you to treat women in the best way because they are your mothers, sisters and daughters.
4. Paradise is under the feet of your mother.
5. No Muslim should hate his wife. One of her habits may be displeasing but he may be pleased to find many other fine habits in her.
6. Never treat your wives as slaves.
7. Eat with your wife and provide clothes to her.
8. Never hurt her feelings. Never desert her. Never cause pain to her heart.
9. Wives have all the rights equal to their husbands.

Women, too, have been given some commands.

1. A woman should please her husband with her appearance.
2. She must obey her husband and safeguard his property as well as her own modesty in his absence.

3. A good wife is an incomparable treasure.
4. A woman who offers her prayers five times a day, observes fast in the month of Ramazan, and safeguards her modesty can enter heaven by any door she wishes.
5. A bashful wife is worth more than all the treasure of the world.

So, the Prophet apprised women with both their rights and duties.

POLYGAMY

Polygamy is another issue raised most often to denigrate Islam. Is polygamy a type of exploitation? If yes, then how is it that Islam allows it?

We will have to look into history, nature of man and the practical problems of life to find an answer to this question.

The Indian king Dasrath had a number of wives. Similarly we see Krishna amidst many *gopis* in addition to Rukmini, Satyaba and Radha. A god like Mirgin is reported to have enjoyed many many women. Not only in ancient times but the history of later period informs about kings having a number of wives. King Kattabiman of Tamil Nadu had many wives. Many political leaders of our time have more than one wife.

Pre-Islamic Arabia did not know of any limitation on the number of wives one could have.

The Prophet of Islam restricted it to four taking into account the psychology of man and his practical necessities. Similarly there were no defined rules of marriage. They were in the habit of keeping a number of wives and slave-girls for their pleasure. They did not have rules of divorce. It was at their will. God sent His Commandments to correct this tradition. Number of wives was fixed and laws of divorce were defined. The Quran says;

*If ye fear that ye will not
Deal fairly with the orphans,
Marry of the women, who seem good to you,
Two or three or four;
And if ye fear that ye cannot do
Justice (to so many)
Then one (only) or (a captive)
That your right hands possess.
Thus it is more likely that ye will
Not do injustice. (4:3)*

Ponder over the wisdom of this instruction. Treat your wife with truth and justice. Polygamy is allowed conditioned with justice. By nature man can develop sexual urge any time and is capable of doing the sexual act, while the case of woman in this regard is altogether different. During menstruation for about a week every month, during advanced stage of pregnancy and

during few weeks of post natal period she cannot share sexual activities. Every man cannot be expected to refrain from sexual activities for long periods waiting for his wife to be available for it. Polygamy opens the right door and closes the wrong ones. To restrict man to one wife and leave him to have illicit relations with other women is tantamount to ruining the morality of the society. It is difficult to imagine the moral degeneration thus created.

By disallowing extra-marital relation and allowing polygamy Islam has demonstrated its wisdom. By making polygamy permissible with certain conditions Islam has given due consideration to man's physical urges, psychology and practical needs. That is how Islam emerges as a scientific religion.

SWORD IN PROPAGATION OF ISLAM

There seems to be not a bit of truth in the statement that Islam spread by sword. It is a wholly wrong notion resulting from misgivings about Islam. Let us find out the truth.

In the beginning both Islam and Christianity spread through silent preaching. The companions of Christ spread Christianity after he left the world. The silent preaching of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was for a very short period followed by open preaching.

'There is no compulsion in Islam'. This message is clear and unambiguous. The Quran itself categorically says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." (2:256)

A question arises here. If the statement is true then why the Prophet fought so many battles. The answer is simple and historic; none of the battles he had to fight was offensive, they were purely defensive in nature. The Prophet and his Companions were left with no choice when the people of Makka attacked the newly formed Islamic state of Medina with the sole intention of eliminating it.

Islam has nothing to do with the battles fought by Muslim rulers. Hindu king Rajendran invaded Jawa and Sumatra (Indonesia). Traces of Hindu culture are still found there. But it will be unjustified to claim that his invasion was for preaching Hinduism. European Christian rulers established their imperialism in almost all parts of the eastern world. Christianity flourished under their rule but can anyone claim that Christianity has spread through sword. Invasions are for winning countries, after which subjects imitate the culture of their rulers.

When Sammars, a Hindu sect, were the rulers, their customs and belief flourished. Buddhism grew stronger during the Buddhist rulers. So was the case with Vaishnav and Sumar sects, which grew during the reign of their rulers. The rulers neither fought for religion nor were they interested in its propagation through sword. These were simply the acceptance of ruler's culture and belief by the subject people, as we know the people follow their rulers.

There is not a single incident recorded in history when anyone was killed for refusing to embrace Islam.

But history has recorded the mass killing during Catholic-Protestant fight in Europe. Even in our Tamil Nadu eight thousand people of Sam-

nar sect were killed during the rule of Gyan Samandr, history tells us.

But the Prophet compelled neither the Christians nor the Jews to embrace Islam when he was the ruler of Arabia.

There was complete freedom of accepting and following Hindu religion during Muslim rule in India. History bears proof of the fact that Muslim rulers protected temples.

If Muslim rule was needed to propagate Islam Babur need not have to attack another Muslim ruler of Delhi. Expansionism was the political motive and it has nothing to do with the propagation of religion. The propagation in fact was done by Muslim scholars and sufis, and who most of the time kept themselves at a distance from the court of the rulers. Among them were Shah al Hameed (of Nagur) and Shah Moinuddin (of Ajmer). People get spontaneously attracted towards the principles and teachings of Islam. Such a religion need not take up sword for its propagation.

ISLAM SUPERIOR TO COMMUNISM

Islam and Communism have been two strongest ideologies against capitalism.

Karl Marx propounded his theory of superfluous value in his famous book *Das Kapital*. But very few Communists might have read this book.

Communism claims that though the capitalists do provide and invest their capital, it is the workers' labour that earns profit for them. With the income earned through the labour of poor workers the capitalists expand their industries and exploit more workers. Communism vows to end this exploitation and for that purpose it nationalises the resources of income.

The million dollar question is whether nationalisation can be the panacea for all the ills. The workers do not get equal share of profit out of the income earned by the nationalised units. For all practical purposes there is no significant improvement in their economic condition. Moreover, the benefit of share, if any, goes to the workers of that particular industry and not to other needy persons of the society. Thus, nationalisation serves a limited purpose. The surplus income should have gone to every citizen of the country.

A comparative study of Islam and Communism shows that they apply diametrically opposed methods. A Communist regime acquires by force the resources of production of wealth and spends the wealth at will, while Islam urges and stresses to spend surplus wealth voluntarily. The stimulus behind is not force or coercion but faith. There is no arrangement or perhaps no conception in a Communist state of the distribution of the surplus income among individuals. But Islam urges to spend on individuals. *Zakat* (poor-due) is a certain percentage of the annual surplus which individuals have to compulsarily spend on individuals. *Zakat* is an Arabic word which means purity and cleanliness. It means that a man purifies himself and his wealth by spending his income on needy persons. The whole income becomes unholy if *Zakat* is not taken out from it.

A question may be raised here. Islam's preaching for spending on charities is recommendatory in nature, then how can it stop a capitalist if he is bent upon cheating? History gives us its answer. The first Caliph Abu Bakr declared war on those who refused to give *Zakat*, although they were Muslims and followers of Islam and the Prophet, because the sin was a grave one. *Zakat* is next to faith in God, this has been repeatedly stressed.

We know that Communism does not insist upon individual spending, while Islam strongly recommends its followers to spend from the surplus income, and its non-observance becomes a cognizable offence in an Islamic state. Islam is certainly superior to Communism.

A capitalist harbours the notion that his capital is for his personal comfort and is always apprehensive of spending lest it becomes calamities for him. The Qur'an relieves men from all such apprehensions:

The evil one threatens

You with poverty

And bids you to conduct

Unseemly (miserliness).

Allah promiseth you

His forgiveness.

And bounties.

Allah careth for all

And He knoweth all things. (2:268)

What is parsimony? To go pennywise. To accumulate and keep away from spending on the needs of self and dependants.

A famous film singer from Tamil Nadu was parsimonious to the extent that he avoided expenditure on the treatment of his son who ultimately died of negligence. Islam strongly disapproves such behaviour and urges for generosity. It not

only asks to spend generously but provides the ethics of spending. Some people spend for their personal gain, fame and respect. Islam disapproves it and condemns such motives. It says that spending (alms-giving) is a religious obligation and is part of the substantial teachings of Islam. The intention behind this generosity should only be the seeking of the pleasure of Allah, insists Islam.

I have come across tubelights donated to some institutions by an individual whose name was so boldly written over it that it obstructed the light coming out of it. Not only that such spending is worthless in the eyes of Islam, it becomes a negation of virtue. Some persons while extending a helping hand to a needy hurt his feelings and make him demonstrate his indebtedness. Such spending is absolutely prohibited. The Quran says:

*Kind words
And the covering of faults
Are better than charity
Followed by injury.* (2: 263)

There are many 'generous' people in our society who donate ragged clothes, used goods, days-old food and counterfeit coins. Islam asks to donate in the path of Allah one's best belongings, clothes and food that one uses himself. Best of

one's earning should be spent in the way of Allah.
The Quran says:

*O ye who believe!
Give of the good things
Which ye have (honourably) earned,
And of the fruits of the earth
Which we have produced .
For you, and do not set apart things of poor
quality to
Give in the name of Allah,
When ye yourselves
Would not receive those
Except with closed eyes.* (2: 267)

Islam exhorts one to donate one's contribution secretly, though at times it may be given openly too. The Quran says;

*If ye disclose (acts of)
Charity even so it is well,
But if you conceal them,
And make them reach
Those (really) in need,
That is best for you.* (2: 271)

Should those extravagants and drunkards be helped who come to seek help? Islam which excludes no corner of practical life from its purview asks not to help the undeserving and wrongdoers. Food and clothing may, however, be provided to them. The Quran says:

*To those weak of understanding
 Make not over your property
 Which Allah hath made
 A means of support for you,
 But feed and clothe them
 Therewith and speak to them
 Words of kindness and justice. (4:5)*

Let us look at more Islamic instructions in this regard. The Quran enjoins:

1. Spend in the way of Allah all that is left after spending on yourself and your dependents.
2. Never spend more than what you can afford, nor be parsimonious, strike balance between the two.
3. Neither withdraw your hands from spending nor open it in a way that you become needy yourself.
4. Your poor relatives, beggars, orphans, travellers and deprived persons deserve your succour.

Zakat is obligatory and those showing negligence have been sternly warned of grave consequences. Once the Prophet saw a woman wearing a golden bracelet. He enquired, had she paid *Zakat* for it? She replied in the negative. The Prophet told her that then she would be asked to wear bracelet of fire in the hereafter. The woman later donated her bracelet.

Where to spend the *Zakat* money? The Quran describes it in detail:

*Alms are for the poor
And the needy, and those
Employed to administer the (funds);
For those whose hearts
Have been (recently) reconciled
(To Truth); for those in bondage
And in debt; in the cause
Of God; and for the wayfarer:
(Thus is it) ordained by God,
And God is full of knowledge
And wisdom.* (9 : 60)

One cannot spend Zakat money on one's dependents like parents, wives, offsprings etc. It is meant for others.

Another thing is noteworthy in this context: Islam dislikes begging and discourages it.

One should prefer to be a donor and not a receiver. It is preferable to earn by chopping wood than to extend a begging bowl before anyone is the teaching of the Prophet. Islam encourages generosity but discourages begging and in this way strikes the golden mean.

SOME CLARIFICATIONS

After going through Mr. Adiyar's book a few questions were raised. Here we reproduce his replies to the same.

ISLAM AND INFIGHTING AMONG MUSLIM COUNTRIES: What is the meaning of love of Islam, when Muslim countries are always at loggerheads among themselves, asked a non-Muslim.

Mr. Adiyar: Love is love. It has not much to do with what Muslims do. How the weaknesses and shortcomings of Muslims can stop me from praising Islam.

Question: Does the news of an Arab country fighting another Arab country shake our faith?

Mr. Adiyar: Apparently it looks like a pertinent question but the reality is quite different. There must be strong argument to shake a faith. We see that Vietnam and China both are upholders of red flag, then why did they fight. Does any Indian Communist feels his faith shaken due to this war? No. Churchill and Hitler both were Christians yet Germany and England fought a gory battle under their leadership. Did this shake the faith of the Christians in Christianity and they gave it up? No, certainly not. In India there had been regular in-

fightings in temples. Did the priests then discard their faith? No.

If the above historical realities are undeniable then the fact of war between two Muslim countries should not cause dissatisfaction with Islam. There are differences and disputes between governments which have nothing to do with faith or religion. But faith is faith. It is un-changeable, unshakable. It is alive and shall continue to be a live force.

Next to capitalism and communism Islam is the other force* in the reckoning. The first two forces will knuckle under Islam one day. The study of history leads to this conclusion and the factors around us support it.

The Arab countries were poor. The Prophet foretold of a bright future for the desert of Arabia. Today we see how the wealth of petrol is gushing out of the desert and rocks. God will bestow upon them more bounties if the Arabs demonstrate more faith in and practise Islam zealously.

Muhammad's life was spotless. So were those of his Companions. A few king and *nawabs* did commit mistakes and fulfilled their base wishes but the Muslim *Ummah* always showed its unflinching faith in Islam.

* Communism no more remains a force now. Out of capitalism it grew and to the same grave it is being laid to rest now. Islam is today the only growing force. (Translator)

Once the followers were in thousands, today they are in millions. It shows that mistakes of rulers never shook the faith of common Muslims nor it can. Principles are not defeated by mistakes of a few individuals.

As a matter of fact Islam provides solution to our most complex problems. From where can one get light if the sun loses its luminosity? Where can one find salt if the sea loses its salinity. Where can one find stream of water if its source dries up? Where can the world and mankind find solution of its problems if Islam is lost?

ISLAMIC PENAL SYSTEM: Through deliberate propaganda the non-Muslims are being made to believe that Muslims are cruel and Islam prescribes merciless punishments; such as cutting the hands of thieves, or stoning to death for sexual crimes. It is alleged that Muslim invaders demolished temples and coerced people. Based on these it is concluded that Muslims are tyrants and cruel.

Those who come out with such allegations can better understand the coercive methods from their own history. Here are a few examples.

- In accordance with the teachings of Manusmriti king Cholan put his son to gallows for killing a calf.

- King Nannen sentenced a girl to death who ate a fruit of the king's garden floating in the river.
- When a goldsmith stole feet-bracelets of the famous poet Kangi, all the goldsmiths of the city were put to the sword.
- Gyan Samandri was staying in a monastery. A member of Samnar sect tried to set it on fire. Eight thousand people of that sect were hung on the gallows.
- A person named Appan was tied to a stone and thrown into the sea for changing his religion. When he managed to come back to the shore he was thrown into a lime furnace.
- Among the stories of Tanali Raman it is reported that those refusing to obey the royal order were buried alive or trampled under the foot of elephants.
- During a war the Tamilians cut noses of Mysore men. They in retaliation cut noses and lips of their enemy. Again the Tamils invaded Mysore and repeated the brutality.
- The sacrifice of children before a deity and presentation of human organs before them is still practised in this country.
- In the West crucifixion had been a very common thing. Christ was, allegedly, crucified. St. Peter was also crucified.

- Joan of Arc was burnt alive.
- Protestants were either burnt alive or their skulls were smashed.
- People were captivated in Africa and sold as slaves in European markets.

This has been the Western civilization of which the Westerners boast so much.

We also know well about the mass killing in Hitler's gas chambers. We also hear news about burning of people alive during communal riots. Jamshedpur, Vallipuram, Bhelsa and many other places in our own country stand testimony.

So the tales of brutalities and oppressions come from all sides of the globe. Men have justified it on the basis of many philosophies. On the other hand history preserves in its pages numerous instances of compassion and mercy too. Islam stands out as the only religion which strikes at the roots of cruelty and oppression and strongly advocates compassion and mercy and shows respect for human beings.

In some religions each attribute of God has been given the status of a distinct god, while in some religion God is supposed to be without any attribute. In Islam God is All-Mercy. His attributes of *Rahman* and *Raheem*, compassionate and merciful, have been oft-repeated in the

Quran. God wishes that His creatures should also reflect His qualities of compassion.

Islam teaches to start every act with reciting His attributes of *Rahman and Raheem*. Muslims offer salam to each other when they meet. They, thus, pray for mercifulness on each other. This is in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the practice of the Prophet.

Turkish ruler Sultan Saleem was hotheaded. He planned to have one language and one religion in his kingdom and to banish all other languages and religions. But he had to give up the idea after strong opposition by Shaikhul Islam of that time.

Entertainment through bull-fighting and bird-fighting etc. is pronounced as undesirable acts. Islamic teachings ask for compassion to animals, too. One of the three persons should get down from the back of the camel if the camel feels overburdened, says, Islam. It was under the influence of these teachings that people like Adi bin Hatim used to feed ants.

It is true that the same Islam which teaches such compassion recommends severest punishments for heinous and shameful crimes. We should assess the result of these punishments. Theft is rarely committed in those countries where the thieves have to lose their hands for that crime.

In some Arab countries a murderer is slain by sword. Methods of capital punishments in some other countries are by electric shock or electric chair or hanging. All these methods are more painful than slaying by sword.

HAVE MUSLIMS DEMOLISHED TEMPLES?

Among the baseless allegations is that Muslims have demolished Indian temples. It is here that we should not miss to count the crimes committed by Indians themselves. Why do we forget that the temples of Samnar sect were demolished. Why to forget that idols of Nagattenum were looted and the gold in the temple was taken away by the Ashwars of Tirumangai. Those who allege that Muslims demolished temples forget that the Muslim rulers donated lands for building and maintaining temples. There might have been some other reasons behind a particular demolition, but Islam does not permit to dismantle others' places of worship.

Another question was raised here. The Indian history tells that Muslims demolished temples and broke idols, how would you comment?

Mr. Adiyar: The version of Indian history that we generally come across is, in fact, the result of prejudiced historiography, and not based on facts.

This version was primarily compiled by western mischief-makers with the sole purpose of creating hatred between Hindus and Muslims. In case it is proved beyond doubt that a few temples were demolished, my answer would be that Islam never permits it. Mahmud of Ghazni or any other ruler who committed such acts were certainly not following any Islamic injunction. An Islamic state is responsible for protecting all places of worship. Islam rejects idol-worship; calls it unwise, gives strong arguments against it and creates a consciousness against the same. There is no compulsion in Islam. It cleans our hearts and minds from polytheism and disobedience and fills it with the light of truth. Its methods are that of preaching and education and not of coercion and compulsion.

It is a historical fact that the Prophet cleared the Kaaba of all idols. Kaaba known as the House of Allah (*Baitullah*) had been the symbol of monotheism. It was people's ignorance and transgression which turned it into an idol-house. Ironically, Arabs of that time, themselves as well as the Jews and Christians agreed that the Kaaba was originally built for the worship of the Almighty. Originally it was a monotheistic centre, later people brought idols there, which was unjust and contrary to its purpose. Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH) by removing idols simply restored it to its original position.

There is not a single incident reported, even by the enemies of Islam, that the Prophet ever demolished others' places of worship.

USE OF SWORD IN PROPAGATION OF ISLAM

Q. Islam spread through sword and not on the strength of its qualities:

Mr. Adiyar: It is a claim without proof. Islamic viewpoint in this respect is quite unambiguous. Use of force in propagation of Islam is disallowed. Those who raise such objections forget the world history and train their guns against Islam. History is full of precedences. Buddhism spread here during the reign of Ashoka and Harsha. During the rule of Samnar kings their cult was the dominating cult of the kingdom. Then came the age of the Vedic religion. People were put to gallows and by the use of force India was made a Hindu country. Moreover, Indian rulers propagated their religion by military invasion in countries like Jawa, Sumatra and Cambodia where remains of Hindu religion and culture are still found. Christianity flourished during the reign of Christian rulers in the countries they invaded.

There will be nothing strange if a particular case is proved beyond doubt that some Muslim rulers used their influences for the propagation of Islam. This should not be used as an argument to defame Islam. Stranger still is the reality that the ruling class which is using brute force to spread its viewpoint levels such charges against Islam. Why don't they not look into their own practices.

Compulsion in the matter of religion is out of question in today's world. Today we have every right to remain committed to our belief and ideology. A lot of people are embracing Islam today. Are they being won by sword? If it is sword it is not an iron sword but the sword of truth which attracts people.