



# The Soup Without the Bowl

INSTITUTIONS are to ideals what vehicles are to destinations. Or, what form is to content, method is to truth, means are to ends. And even if between the idea and the reality always falls the shadow of doubt and inaction, there is also an intimate, inextricable, bond that unites faith with deeds or our 'Islam' with its 'institutions'. For, what would be the 'faith' of Islam, if it knew not the serenity of the *salah*, the fortitude of the *saum*, the sweetening of the *zakah* and the grace of the *haji*. Faith without practice and institutions is like speech without words, possible in the unity of the Self but impossible in the multiplicity of the Community. Not surprisingly, then, the first 'pillar' of Islam, the iman of the individual soul, carries in the traditional self-presentation the image of the odd wheel which leads the chariot of Islam.

The agony of the Muslim consciousness today is not so much the rupture of faith and deeds, Islam and institutions, but the chasm that separates its *eternal* institutions for securing bliss in the Hereafter from the *temporal* ones for conducting the affairs of this world. The shadow that falls between the idea and the reality of Islam runs through the *internalization* of the institutions of faith from the total *abandon* of the institutions of the world. For, who could have failed to notice that the Umma acts today as if it were an ideal that could do without the contradiction of realization.

All that the Umma owns of the world are mere memories and sentiments: phantoms of the past glory or mirages of the power to come. It indulges in a sentimentality that is devoid of all substance and views its mission in terms of an ideal that need not have any institution. The Communists may have the Party, the Christians may possess their Church,

even the Sufis are welcome to their *tariqas*, but for the simple, disenfranchised and misled Muslim, there can be no institution worthy of his cause. The State no longer functions as the political arm of the Muslim society. The stage of Muslim Politics has turned into a bestiary where ideological monsters of every shape and hue roam about in complete abandon. The Muslim places of learning have been requisitioned by the alien troops of occupation. World-order is the preserve of the others. And yet, the scarosant tradition tells the Muslim victim of history that his sublime faith is in no need of any worldly chattels. The entire world, so claim the spiritual masters of the disenfranchised believer of Islam, is his estate. He has inherited it by the simple affirmation of faith. The only discomfoting fact is that it belongs to others.

What is true of the political and civic institutions of Islam is also true of its mental and intellectual disciplines. Islamic thought today knows of no methodology worthy of the name. Whether it is the question of the traditional Qur'anic exegesis or that of the critical evaluation of Muslim history, whether the issue pertains to the personal ethics or the global morality of the contemporary man, the conscientious Muslim thinker is always dragged back to square one of the Muslim intellectual discourse. Before he can challenge the modern champions of the mind, he has to always wrestle with the ghosts of his own past. Prior to entering the ivory tower of academic disciplines, the Muslim intellectual has to spend his entire life surveying the whole inventory of the basement of Epistemology and Methodology. Little wonder that he seldom reaches the lofty heights of the citadel of disciplined, concrete, thought. His self-doubt and self-inquiry take so much of time and energies that he cannot survey the world at large at all.

Islam is the haven of supreme individual conscience, so goes the claim of our ideologues. Islam is the nightmare

of the orderly instinct, the scourge of the organisational genius and the capitulation of the institutional mentality, so reads the verdict of our history. Religious and other-worldly order cannibalises on civic and political institutionalisation in Islam. Orderly in prayer, disciplined in pilgrimage, heroic in fasting and joyous in almsgiving, the Muslim scoffs at any institution that is not for the Hereafter. He'll have nothing to do with anyone who claims his loyalty on behalf of worldly power, glory or goods. Super-human discipline and self-restraint for the sake of religion goes hand in hand with sub-human anarchy and chaos for the affairs of this world. Subordination and discipline, coordination and obedience, organisation and hierarchy are the blank pages of Muslim conscience, no matter how the ghosts of piety might appear in the dreamland of sacrosanct discourse. Because of the unruly anarchy in him, alas only the ruthless tyrant has succeeded in taming the conscientious Muslim in actual history. Freedom of conscience has been bought at the price of political capitulation and civic anarchy.

In the perception the Muslim Umma of the Medinese times, praying and fighting in unison, Islam was a doctrine of the unity of spirit and matter. The system of 'Islam' that is the product of the scholastic mind and the anchorage of our thought, however, accepts the duality of faith and the world. It demands everything for the faith and gives nothing to the world. In so doing, it accepts only those forms of institutionalisation that are internal and self-regulatory and rejects those that are based on coercion and force. True enough, inasmuch as Islam is an intimate act of the submission of the individual soul, it cannot be institutionalised. However, the Islam which is the collective reality of the Umma cannot fulfill its mission its history unless the soup of its faith fills the bowl of its political world. For, to have Umma-consciousness without any Umma-institutions is to render our Islam like a soup without a bowl. ■