

MUSLIMS IN THE WEST

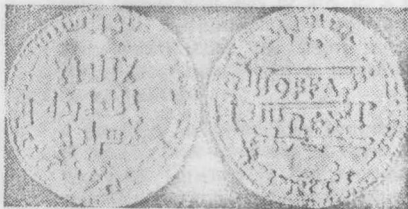
The new exodus

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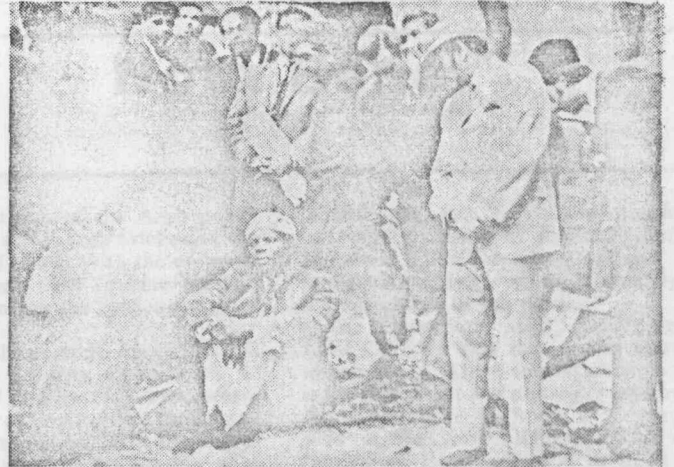
The coming of Muslims to the West in recent times represents a kind of movement of population unknown in Islamic history. This movement has introduced a new dimension to the centuries-old question of the relationship between Islam and the Western world. It is a dimension which is having and promises to have even greater and more momentous implications for the history of both the West and of Islam.

The contact between Islam and the West has been very old. One of the oldest and quite astounding indications of this is the coin of King Offa of Kent in the seventh century. That this was not followed up on a greater scale is indicative of the sporadic and tenuous nature of the contact. But Europe has always felt the presence of the Muslim world, although this was usually at a distance and clouded by feelings of uneasiness, mistrust and fear as first the 'Arab invasion' and later the 'Ottoman peril' threatened the southern and east-European frontiers of Christendom. Those were the times when the Muslim world was clearly in the ascendant and they too had a contempt for the 'Franks' which was not out of keeping with the dark and barbarous conditions obtaining in Europe then.

Then the roles were reversed and the world witnessed an upsurge of European imperialism and colonialism which extended its power and influence to many parts of the known and unknown world. In the beginning it was this naked imperialism and colonialism which brought Muslims to the West in conditions far, very far from humane. Among the slaves transported from West Africa to the West Indies and America, many were Muslims. And it is no accident that many 'Negroes' in those parts are coming to Islam in increasing numbers as part of a conscious effort to regain 'a lost heritage'. Indentured Indian Muslim immigrants in the West Indies, Malays in Surinam, and one might include



Courtesy: British Museum
Gold dinar of King Offa of Kent (755-96 A.D.) showing Arabic inscription meaning 'There is no god but Allah alone and there is no associate unto Him' and on the other side 'Offa Rex'.



Eid scene in London: the exodus and the disorientation

Impact Photo: M. D. Arshed

those in South Africa, were among those who formed the first Muslim communities in the West in conditions which were less brutal than slavery, but often no less testing.

The post-imperial relationship

Apart from the above, the movement of Muslims to the West in recent decades has been an entirely voluntary or at the most induced migration. In many essentials, it still forms part of the legacy of European imperialism. We find by and large people from a particular area leaving to seek opportunities in the 'metropolitan' countries of their erstwhile colonial masters. Thus we find Algerians, Tunisians, Mauritians migrating to France; Pakistanis, Indians, Kenyans, Malaysians, Nigerians, Cypriot Turks etc to Britain, Indonesians to Holland and Turks to Germany, although in this latter case because of a traditional German 'friendship' with Turkey.

Broadly speaking, this migration resulted from the continued underdevelopment of the Muslim world. This forced out the people to seek economic well-being in 'developed' but often distant societies. Many of those who have come are unskilled and find menial jobs as in the textile factories in the north of England or on the railways in Germany. Some of them, by dint of hard work, have been able to set themselves up as traders and businessmen. Others are professional people like the doctors and teachers who come to gain experience by working in the West. There is also a sizeable number of Muslim refugees in Europe and America, for example, Turkestani Muslims from Central Asia fleeing from Communist rule. In Germany alone these number about 35,000. Then there is a large number of Muslim students who are to be found in institutions of higher learning in various parts of

Europe, Britain, America and Canada pursuing by and large scientific and technological studies.

No proper statistics are available concerning the number of Muslims in the various countries of the West. But the number runs into millions. In France alone, there are over two million Muslims. In Britain, although the British Yearbook 1970 gives a figure of 1 million, other estimates centre around the more realistic figure of 300,000. In Germany, other parts of western Europe and in the United States, the figure runs into hundreds of thousands.

What then are the prospects of these Muslims who have come to live in the West? However diverse their backgrounds and objectives and however amorphous and scattered this body of Muslims may be at the moment, one thing is clear: they will not remain a shifting, volatile population. Pakistanis in Britain, for example, although they may have come with the intention of making a quick pile and returning after a few years, are settling down without knowing it. Their children are now born in the West. And this generation of youth coupled with the number of westerners who are accepting Islam (although at the moment few in number) either through inter-marriage or genuine conviction, would instil a greater degree of permanence to the Muslim presence in the West.

Beyond this, there is little that can be said with certainty. How far would this body of Muslims work for and preserve social cohesion and group action? How far will they remain true to the values of Islam? How effectively would they meet the challenges posed by a different environment?

There are many negative pointers. The vast majority of Muslims who come to the West come from an inadequate or indifferent Islamic background. There is very little

inter-communication between the various groups as for example as between the Pakistanis, the Turks and the Arabs in Britain (except on a student level, at times). And one would often come across more fervour in the celebration of seasonal or national festivals than of Muslim occasions like Eids. Often, reaction to the different environment is in the extremes. Pakistanis and some other groups are generally prone to isolation—whether from aloofness or feelings of inferiority but hardly from the more neutral feeling of being 'different.' Turkish Cypriots integrate far more readily and in this they are somewhat akin to the Arabs. There are however exceptions as with one group of Sudanese of the same tribe who came to Britain. They all lived in one house in Leeds, spoke, cooked, ate, and did almost everything in the same manner as they had done among the Sha'iqi in northern Sudan.

There are however quite a number of positive pointers. Associations are being formed to look after the religious and social interests of the community. In many of the main towns and cities, there is a centre or occasionally a mosque where at least the Friday prayer is held. In many colleges and universities, there are Muslim student associations whose activities are animated by the conviction that Islam is an intellectual force and way of life which is second to none. Various professional bodies are also being formed, as for example, among doctors in Britain and engineers in Europe. Various schemes at different levels are being put into effect to deal with the religious education of Muslim children. Trusts are being formed to tackle problems on a larger and wider scale. And although most people tend to think that there is a widespread and even total hostility prevailing on the part of the West towards Islam and Muslims, yet there are instances of help and appreciation from various authorities as for example the German government's assistance to Imams and the German railways' provision of prayer facilities on trains for its Muslim workers.

Despite this, it is true to say that the Muslims in coming to the West, have come to a society which knows very little of their beliefs and way of life, to a society which is mechanised and competitive—from which they can learn much and derive great benefit and at the same time be sucked into.

Keeping in mind the problems, can these Muslims—as some of them already do—look forward to the promise of a strengthened and invigorated Muslim community in the heartlands of the West? Can they see a development taking place in the West similar to the spread of Islam eastwards into places like Malaysia and Indonesia. Whatever, the answer, it is yet a long, long time away.

Nota Bene

'SCRIBE'

The supposed aim of the Arab policy until June 1967 was to seek eviction of the squatter state of Israel. With the dramatic emergence of 'new facts' in June, the aim was set as removing the consequences of aggression.

Then came the famous resolution 242 passed by the Security Council on 22 November 1967 and the objective accordingly redefined as seeking the implementation of this resolution. The opening of the Suez Canal seems to be the aim now. What's next, could be anybody's guess. Perhaps forcing Golda to take a shopping trip to Khan Khalil.

Whether for reasons genuine or because of Kissinger-Rogers clash of personalities, the American public opinion has recently been a shade restive about Israel's real attitude to peace. These prevalent misconceptions have been effectively rebutted by Goldberg.

He has detailed at least five concessions made so far by Israel. Israel wanted: (1) direct negotiations but agreed to begin talking through Jarring, (2) negotiations at the Foreign Minister level but came down to ambassadorial, (3) discussions to be held close to the M.E. but agreed to commence in New York, (4) agreed and indefinite ceasefire but consented to unilateral Egyptian declaration, and (5) removal of missiles and sites but agreed to accept the U.S. Phantoms.

The baby is now more than three and as it should be, there is now a paternity dispute.

First it was Lord George-Brown who claimed to have fathered the Resolution 242. Then came Arthur Goldberg, ex-Judge of the U.S. Supreme Court, later U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and now only a Zionist. With due shyness and modesty he acknowledges that Britain and America did work together but as "impartial observers reported at the time that America's role was the primary one." Lord Caradon (previously Sir Hugh Foot) who then was the British Ambassador to the U.N. gives 'credit for that' to the Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov of the Soviet Union. The choice now is between believing the gentlemen or the midwife.

The significant point, says Goldberg, is "that it does not specifically require Israel to withdraw to the June 5, 1967 lines . . . it enunciates as a principle 'withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict'. The word 'all' does not precede 'territories

in the English text. This was not accidental but was the product of *negotiated design*". Moreover, the resolution is not self-implementing but depends ultimately on the agreement of the parties."

The important point, according to Lord Caradon was that it was accepted unanimously. More important, however, is the fact that it was not really read by the Arabs who have not found it necessary to read it even now. Although the word 'territories' is not preceded by the article *the*, the resolution still reads to say 'territories occupied in the recent conflict'.

Could it also mean the recent conflict in 1948, in the Goldbergian way, of course?

Tunku Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General, Islamic Secretariat, Jeddah and **Prof. Husayn Nasr**, Vice Chancellor, Tehran University paid a brief visit to London recently.

Field Martial Ayub Khan, former President of Pakistan has proceeded on a fortnight's visit to USA.

Dr. Fazlur Rahman the Muslim orientalist who was relieved in 1968 from the Directorship of the Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan, is being sued by the Government of Pakistan for over-drawing a sum of about £1000 from the public exchequer. Dr. Rahman now teaches at Chicago, USA.

Sir Geoffrey Wilson, 61, formerly of the Foreign Office and now in the Ministry of Overseas Development is to succeed Mr. Mark Bonham Carter as chairman of the Race Relation Board in the autumn.

Mr. Bocar Ousman Semega-Janneh, presented his Letters of Commission at Buckingham Palace as the new High Commissioner for Gambia.

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