

## IDEA OF ISLAMIC ORDER

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**T**HE general theme viz *Development and Solidarity* when contextualised in the framework of a religious approach to life necessarily involves the idea of Order to which is subscribes — for human 'solidarity' is the consummation of that idea in History and 'development' a progressive movement in time towards the realisation of that ideal. Regarded from that perspective both Islam and Christianity on *this side of the river of life* have one and the same programme — how to realize the Kingdom of God on Earth. These two fellowships of faith on close examination would find that although their strategies are different their final purposes and eventual goal and their attitude to human history are the same.

Islam primarily means Order. When we talk of order we invariably think of a system of components, parts of elements functioning in unison subject to certain uniform and well established principles. Thus we talk of the Heavenly Order which manifests sequence or succession in space and time; motion of the stars and planets reflected on the path they traverse seems to be along a predetermined path — as if the whole movement is the result of some order or command having been issued. When we visualise conditions in which everything in its proper place performs its proper functions we think of the *ordered whole* in which this is possible. There may be fixed arrangements found in the existing constitution of things; a natural, moral or spiritual order in which things proceed according to definite laws. We even talk of securing maintenance and observance of laws of submission to a constituted authority; when we do this we try to conceive of the existence of the legal order which makes this possible.

It is along the course of ideas such as these that one contemplates the *Idea of Islamic Order*: Islam is thus viewed as a religion which provides for an informing principle in terms of which unity of diverse elements can be realised by control of the internal elements of a system conformably to the logic of some super-imposed order. In this sense Islam itself is submission to the Divine Order of things and involves a commitment that each of the believers makes in his own way to reflect that order in all that he does or stands for in his day-to-day work in this life.

This mode of regarding the religion of Islam finds its anchorage in the well

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known verse of the Qur'an which says: "So set thy face for religion, being upright in the nature made by Allah in which He has created man. There is no altering of Allah's creation. That is the right religion but most people know it not". (Chapt. 30 v. 30).

According to this verse, Islam becomes the *natural religion of man* or the religion suited to the nature of man. Islam as a religion has the quality of being suited to the nature of man, so to say; as to the truth of which, human nature itself bears testimony. Its fundamental principles e.g. the unity of all comprehensive providence of Allah, the universality of Divine revelation and the accountability for all actions in a life after death are discernible in the very warp and woof of the supreme doctrine in terms of which the Qur'an outlines that status, dignity and the responsibility of man to conduct himself a serviceable element in a wider synthesis — which embraces all lower orders and subservient denominations. Thus the historical order, natural order, inwardly conceived psychological and/or objectively perceived historical or spiritual order are all held under the supreme sway of a transcendent law that somehow controls all lower orders. God is transcendent to all His creation which appears an ordered whole because it is an epiphany of His will. But He, at the same time is also immanent in the creation itself so much so that He is aware of the minutest that there be.

Indeed, the creation of man is to be viewed precisely as reflecting the same pattern which is manifested by the Divine in all its activity. The created element in man, is suffused with the *uncreated* (or Divine) element the latter being suggested in that verse of the Qur'an which says that God has breathed His spirit into Adam (Nafakhtu-fih-min-roohi). There is in man the created element which, of course, will with his death perish and pass away as will all else, but as to this Divine element, which has been lodged in him since it partakes of the character of the Divine it will abide for ever.

In the verse that immediately follows, it would appear that man is invited to turn to God, to be *self-controlled*, to establish the relationship of prayerful disposition with the Divine. He is also asked to desist from being one of the *mushrikeen*, that is not to be one of those that associate others as partners with the Divine; for if he did that, his perception of the universe would not partake of the character of being an ordered whole.

One has often heard of Islam providing for such and such a kind of culture or a particular economic or political system or providing for a particular mode of regarding man's role here below. Now whatever qualified validity can be assigned to these denominations and categories of thought, belief and practice, the fair face of Islam lies far beyond anything that can be said specifically about its several specialised reflections in space-time conditions. Islam being a religion which is a concomitant of man's nature (and that nature too which is divinely ordained and established, to partake of the character of

universality,) necessarily transcends space-time limitations in which the need to improvise particular cultures or economic or political systems are felt and responded to.

The Qur'an has referred to the Divine in several contexts; it has viewed it both as *Power* and *Presence* in the universe and in that context has highlighted the essential characteristic of Islam as 'Dinullah'. The verse in question is the following.

"Allah bears witness that there is no God but He and so do the Angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining justice. There is no God but He, the Mighty, the Wise. Surely, the true religion with Allah is Islam". (Surah Al-Imran, Chapt. 3, v.17).

Who else can bear witness about Allah except Allah Himself, who is alone qualified to comprehend the reach of Divinity? The testimony that there is no God but one God is borne by God Himself and also His Angels and those who are possessed of knowledge and are maintainers of justice. It is in this state of affairs that *Din* with God is declared to be Islam. Since God is timeless, ageless, is also present at all times and in all places, the religion of Islam that talks of God's relation with man is also *timeless*, universal and therefore available to all people in all times and in all places. In this perspective, the totality of religion as it has developed from Adam down to Muhammad (on whom be God's prayer and peace) reflects only the *Din*, which with Allah, is Islam. This is true of all the historical manifestations of Islam down the ages through Prophets like Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ etc, who are themselves called Muslims in the Qur'an, and this for the simple reason that so very systematic, unique, all-embracing and all-comprehensive is the Divine principle that its manifestation in any one given Prophetic consciousness makes it appear only a variation upon one unified whole, displaying its several characteristics at one and the same level, although with the passage of time in a maturer form.

God, in Islam, is sometimes viewed as boundless and limitless *Power* and at other times He is viewed as *Law* which has to be submitted to, and sometimes again He is viewed as ubiquitous *Presence* with whom man is required to enter into relationship of devotion — as he may do by offering himself for acceptance through dedicated service and sincere worship and ardent prayer. Sometimes He is viewed as a *King* — nay, the King of Kings and further it is said of Him: "He decides to give dominion to whom He will and takes it away from whom He pleases". That 'power' is an aspect of God being all-powerful. And in the following verse, this idea has been made very clear:

"Say O Allah, Owner of the Kingdom, Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou pleasest and takest away the kingdom from whom

Thou pleasest, and Thou exaltest from Thou pleasest and abasest from Thou pleasest. In Thine hand is the good. Surely Thou art Possessor of power over all things." (See Chapt. 3 vs. 25).

Along this course of thought there is to be perceived the divine Order which encloses everything in its own fold. Here the Divine Presence manifests itself as a sustaining power and there is no point in man's outer and inner being where he is not touched by His all embracing Mercy and Grace. Islam presents a continuing systematic course of relationship into which the finite individual can enter at varying stages of his development and in various forms. Contemplation of the Divine unity in this way gives another approach to Islam as Order.

When we talk of particularised manifestations of Islam, care must be taken to relate them to a space-time limitation in order to understand them somewhat more meaningfully. If the question be: Does Islam stand for a particular system of governance of a country or a particular mode of securing economic organisation of its institutions, then the answer is, from my point of view, quite clear — No, there is no such particularised system. Indeed, Islam is too universal to be at the same time a particular mode of realising that universal subject within the space-time limitation. Islam gives us a compendium of guidelines so that, consistently therewith, we too can organise our economic and political institutions; we can set out to engage ourselves in a progressive pursuit of Qur'anic values and ideals, but then the forms in which these ideals or values are to be realised in fact would themselves be out-of-date soon and will have to be replaced by other forms in order to maintain the thrust of the Divine ideal progressively realising itself in history. Across the 1400 years that Islam has endured, the world has changed, its methods of production, and the organisation of the business of managing the affairs of a society, have radically changed. These changes have necessitated pro rata changes in the economic or political institutional set-up for mankind. Now, although this is true it is also true that the direction along which values like liberty, equality, justice etc. have been progressively realised do also continually present to us a spectacle which with the passage of time conforms to the changing conditions of society. It is this strategy of Islam which makes it possible for man who is creature of space-time limitation to realise the age-old values conformably with the temper of the times and consistently with the changing conditions of society. In each age, therefore, the *Mujtahid* in the world of Islam will be able to point out to the Ummah how best the Qur'anic programme of inviting man to the ways of God, establishing the well known criteria and norms of ordered society, and even of how best to secure the avoidance of all those things that are forbidden and unclean, may be realized. But the same *Mujtahid* later on,

or one succeeding him in another age, will pronounce the institutions that had been sanctioned in the name of Islam to be out of date, and he for his part will thus proceed to sanction newer modes of organising these institutions.

So long as the sort of consciousness which Islam has enshrined in the heart and soul of a believer is allowed to remain the operative principle of his life, he will be able to give creative expression to that consciousness and to the forms of outer conditions, in terms of which the business of life can be organised more effectively. Islam presents an all-embracing ideal, but in each age it is only in a limited sense that that ideal can be adequately reflected and this will be so each time we are called upon to assess, from the Islamic point of view, the Islamic character of an economic-cum-political organisation. To do this we have to fall back on the Qur'anic revelation which gives us our spiritual compass and a chart to be able to study our own approach to a given solution of the problem in hand and either accept it as being reflective of Muslim ideals or criticise it for falling short of them. But that judgement again is contingent on space-time limitations and there is nothing absolute about any solution to problems posed by the human predicament.

This is equally true about the concept of culture. There is such a thing as Islamic culture, but it is something which does not stand by itself so as to be perceptible in the abstract. Islam goes to India and creates a Taj Mahal, goes to Spain and creates an Al-Hambra; in some sense both of these architectural monuments are manifestations of the Islamic aesthetic impulse, but in another sense each one of them is a child begotten by the masculine principle of History inter-acting with a specific earthly feminine formation. Muslim cultures, speaking generally, is born of this interaction between Islamic impulse and the earthly formation — the latter serving as a kind of maternal base and the former serving as the fecundating principle. It is as impossible to think of Islamic culture in the abstract as it is to think of Islamic political institutions in the abstract — both of those are emerging forms, the offspring of interaction of the universal principles of Islam operating in a given historical set-up or given earthly co-ordinates. It is in this way that ever newer patterns of manifestations come into being. Religion of Islam came to throw new light on older traditions which it affirmed and it also came to impart to them new vitality.

But Islam is definitely not a revolutionary doctrine in the sense that it came to uproot pre-existing forms of cultural expression. It came to elevate them to a higher plane of spiritual manifestation without detracting in the least from the original impulse that had called them into being. Islam came to *verify* all pre-existing traditions. It is a religion of affirmation — of all pre-existing religious traditions. To believe in all the Books and Prophets is part

of our faith.

Although the specific content of Islamic Order cannot be set-forth with any show of *finality* for the reason propounded above, it is still possible to provide some internal criteria with the help of which to identify that Order which may claim to be Islamic and to secure its establishment. The Islamic strategy seems to be to highlight some important concepts which are essential for its upkeep and maintenance. Islam says we must change, but with reference to unchanging principles.

First of these is the concept of '*taqwa*' and therefrom we have the word '*muttaqi*' — by which I understand the one who is *self-controlled*. The idea of man acquiring a grip over his lower animal impulses would appear to be the essential hall-mark of a Muslim. There are within man certain animal instincts given to him for the up-keep of his biological base of life, instincts like hunger and craving for sex. The former helps the preservation of the individual life and the latter secures the preservation of the species to which the individual belongs. Then there is the feeling of fear which enables man to seek out ways and means to secure his survival against elements or forces that are threatening his life. Now, although satisfaction of these instincts is necessary for the up-keep of biological life on the human plane, the craving for securing satisfaction of these instincts often enough reaches a point where, far from ministering to the purpose of life, their satisfaction becomes an end-in-itself and, therefore, prevents the possibility of the emergence of higher forms of life. Religion has always decried over-indulgence in respect of these instincts, which obstructs the onset of Angelic life in man; to this end it has enjoined regulation of these instincts and has set *bounds* beyond which their satisfaction has been prohibited. All obligations which help us to discriminate between *lawful* and *unlawful* food, as also the institution of marriage and discipline for fasting for a month each year, when satisfaction of these two instincts during day-time is switched off — all point in the same direction. Now a '*muttaqi*' is one who has acquired control over his animal 'self' to such an extent that he can consciously submit to the law of high obligation imposed on him by the Divine order of things. Indeed, until one is *self-controlled* in this sense, one cannot obey the higher law. After all no one can serve two masters at one and the same time. It would appear that the Qur'an is itself a source of guidance only to those who are *muttaqun* — for not until a certain degree of control over oneself is acquired how can one submit freely to the higher law?

The next important teaching of Islam is that mankind is created as though it were *one single indivisible self* (*ka nafs in wahidatin*). He who wantonly takes away the life of one individual is regarded by Islam as if he has taken away the life of the whole of mankind. The unity of life is respected to such an extent that the Prophet universalised the rule by saying: The best among

you is he who desires the best for all. In Islam all believers are brothers and regard each other as responsible to one another.

Side-by-Side with this concept, is the one which refers to *Ummatin Wahidatin* i.e. the community of believers forms one indivisible and significant whole. No wonder practically all the prayers contained in the Qur'an are expressed in the plural, thus establishing that even when one prays separately as an individual, one really prays for the whole body of believers. Higher forms of synthesis of life like that of the family, of the community, or the life of the nation or of humanity are accorded by Islam independent status, and an individual is called upon to be responsible for their upkeep and maintenance.

Then there is the concept of '*ayat*' in Islam. Each verse of the Qur'an is called an *ayat*. Additionally several *ayats* are pointed out in *external nature* as also in the *inner self of the being of man upon which we are all to bestow our concentrated thought*. By constantly meditating over these *ayats* man is helped to go beyond them and transcend them in the direction of higher Presence: from Nature, for instance, he aspires to reach Nature's God. From intimations he has within himself of the presence of the Divine, he is able to enter into special relations with his Lord and Maker through *zikrullah*. He infers the Omnipresence of the Divine Spirit under whose sway he surrenders himself to be governed by the law which has been revealed to him through the prophetic dispensation.

Finally, there is the concept of *jihad* which means persistent striving to be able to press oneself forward for the realization of goals that count. "Those that strive unto Us", says God in the Qur'an, "We always show them the way". And from this energetic and persistent attempt to right the wrong, to resist the evil, to discover the solution of a perplexing problem, we have the whole developmental strategy of a believer to live vigorously and earnestly in the world. The great philosophers, sages, preachers, warriors, statesmen, etc. in the world of Islam come within the category of *Mujahidin*. It is these who strive to maintain order; it is they who establish conditions in terms of which harmonious social order itself could be contemplated and it is they who prepare individuals as serviceable elements in a wider synthesis to the end that ordered life be made possible. A *mujahid* in Islam represents the balance wheel that represents the ordered existence of social, political and cultural life.

It is not necessary to refer separately to the significance of *iqra* (to read) the first word with which the Qur'an begins or to admonitions that enjoin upon man to use the *pen*, or to *think*, or *consider*, to *ponder*, to *rationalise* since these are all part of the infra-structure of Islamic life and are embraced within the concepts of *Jihad* or *Ijtihad*. They highlight the role which has been assigned to man to restore the balance not only in human society but fundamentally

within himself.

Islam's order is a dynamic and progressive order and the life we are called upon to lead is not a quietistic or static one but one which is in the nature of a continual attempt to reach higher levels of *ordered* existence to the end that the universal law under which Nature is made to function in an orderly way and also progressively, thanks to human surrender, comes to reflect its harmony in the lives not only of the individual man and woman but also in society considered as a whole.

Thus the human order must correspond to the natural order — if the religious way of life as taught by Islam is to be at all meaningful.

The need to have a political or constitutional order is such a paramount demand that human nature makes upon us that no explanation is called for to explain why we should have order. The problem posed by the need to have political order is however such that it is not capable of being solved by any simplistic solution. In order to have order we have to assign someone the power to maintain that order. Every human being is endowed with certain appetites, needs and desires, and good things of life that satisfy these in any given society are indeed so few and the hands that stretch out to grasp them so many that it is difficult to maintain orderly relationships between human beings and to prevent them from impinging upon the rights of those who also require to their share of the good things of life which they are seeking to obtain. As it has been said, the good things of life in any society are as few as is bread in a besieged city and, what is more, what is meat for one is poison for another. Out of this state of affairs arises a tendency in society which gives rise to conflicts of interests. And in order to resolve these conflicts of interest we have to have somebody — one or many — in power over the rest of their fellow men to be able to avoid particularly these conflicts which erupt into tension and which beget wars. Thus the paradox of politics is that once we bring somebody in power it becomes difficult to control him for the simple reason that, such is human nature, the recipient of such exclusive power will try to have as much of it as possible, and if possible, even to try to perpetuate his claim to its continued exercise regardless of the fact that it is working havoc on the rest of his fellow beings. No wonder Lord Acton said "All power corrupts and absolute power tends to corrupt *absolutely*" — not for the reasons that are generally advanced in defence of this obvious truth but eventually because the rational thought of every individual who is in a position of power is soon converted into "power-thought", with the result that he loses his grip over things as they are: instead he is caught up by the illusion that he is omniscient. And anything that is said in criticism of an exercise of his power which prejudices other peoples' rights will not appeal to him as reasonable.



The fundamental natural condition of human society is such that the institution of governments is necessary. And as Bernard Shaw said in his Preface to "Too Good to be True": "Government is neither automatic nor abstract and it is necessary whether two or three are gathered together — or two or three billions — for keeps". The analysis of the process is, to quote his words, as follows:

"The business of the rulers is to check disastrously selfish or unexpected behaviour on the part of individuals in social affairs.

"This business can be done only by devising and enforcing rules of social conduct codifying the greatest common measure of agreement as to the necessary sacrifices of individual liberty to the good of the community.

"The paradox of government is that as the good of the community involves a maximum of individual liberty for all its members the rulers have at the same time to enslave everyone ruthlessly and to secure for everyone the utmost possible freedom.

"In primitive communities people feed and lodge themselves without bothering the Government. In big civilizations this is impossible; so the first business of Government is to provide for the production and distribution of wealth from day to day and the just sharing of the labour and leisure involved. Thus the individual citizen has to be compelled not only to behave himself properly, but to work productively.

"The moral slavery of the compulsion to behave properly is a whole-time compulsion admitting of no liberty; but the personal slavery of the compulsion to work lasts only as many hours daily as suffice to discharge the economic duties of the citizen, the remaining hours (over and above those needed for feeding, sleeping, locomotion, etc.) being his leisure.

"Leisure is the sphere of individual liberty: labour is the sphere of slavery.

"People who think they can be honestly free all the time are idiots: people who seek whole-time freedom by putting their share of productive work on others are thieves.

"The use of the word slavery to denote subjection to public government has grown up among the idiots and thieves, and is resorted to here only because it is expedient to explain things to fools according to their folly.

"So much for the fundamental natural conditions of social organization. They are as completely beyond argument as the precession of the equinoxes; but they present different problems to different people. To the thief, for instance, the problem is how to evade his share in the labour of production, to increase his share in the distribution of the production, and to corrupt the Government so that it may protect and glorify his chicaneries instead of liquidating him . . .

"The history of civilization is the history of the conflict between these

rival views of the situation. The Pirate King, the Robber Baron, and the Manchester Man produced between them a government which they called the Empire, the State, the Realm, the Republic, or any other imposing name that did not give away its central purpose. The Chestertonians produced a government which they called The Church; and in due time the Last of the Chestertons joined this Catholic Church, like a very large ship entering a very small harbour, to the great peril of its many rickety old piers and wharves, and the swamping of all the same craft in its neighbourhood. So let us see what the Catholic Church made of its governmental problem."

Shaw goes on to point out further that although the Church was democratic to the extent that its aim was to save the souls of *all* persons without regard to their age, sex, nationality, class or colour, "it was not prepared to see the point of view of the nobleman who felt that God would not damn a man of his qualities and deny him his redemption. Within its fold all souls were equal before God." He then points out that from this democratic faith the Church did not draw this ridiculous conclusion that all men and women are equally qualified or equally desirous to legislate, to govern, to administer, to make decisions, to manage public affairs or even their own private affairs. It faced the fact that only about 5 per cent of the population are capable of exercising these powers and are certain to be corrupted by them unless they have an irresistible vocation for public work and a faith in its beneficence which will induce them to take vows to abstain from any profit that is not shared by all others and from all indulgences which might blunt their consciences or subject them to the family influences so bitterly deprecated by Jesus. This natural 'called' minority was never elected in the scandalous way we call democratic. Its members were in the first instance self-elected; that is, they voluntarily lived holy lives and devoted themselves to the public welfare in obedience to the impulse of the Holy Ghost within them. *This impulse was their vocation. They were called from above, not chosen by the uncalled.* To protect themselves and obtain the necessary power, they organised themselves and called their organisation the Church. Despite this all those who exercised power within the Church were genuinely called to their vocation as if from above they asked to take vows before being placed in authority. The reason in support of this view was that before priests can govern they must have a common faith as to the fundamental conditions of the stable human society. Otherwise the result might be an assembly of random men of genius unable to agree on a single legislative measure or point of policy. Corresponding to this approach we have the office of *mujtahid* in a Muslim society not because he is exceptionally wise and learned or because he is unable to make a mistake about what the rule of *Shari'ah* is which is to be applied in a given case, but essentially because if everyone who claims to have a opinion of his own in these matters

were left to his independent opinion there would be a certain amount of conflict in the viewpoints of the believers despite the fact that in the last resort their ultimate end, which is to serve Islamic ideals, is motivated by common factor. But in the face of the relativity of their independent judgement it would be difficult to decide whether there is a common measure of agreement between them in terms of which affairs of the *Ummah* or of the Islamic state can be organised or conducted.

The basis of any Order is bound to be democratic but it does not follow that this Order can be sustained by a democratic method which would allow each individual to have the last word in governing himself. Development is the progressive realization of the idea of 'Order' which a given religious society has accepted as worthwhile and is pledged to see actualized in History. Development, whether of man or society, may be viewed as the purposive effort towards the realization of an Order to which they are committed.

The concept of development is ordinarily limited to economic development which in turn is viewed as the taking of steps for securing the material development of a people, an issue that is settled by finding answers to questions such as:- what is the *per capita* income of society, or its gross national product or the rate of its economic growth. Although not altogether irrelevant, these questions are not very decisive where development is treated in the context of human solidarity — of man's craving to secure the brotherhood of man and to replace forces that minister to competition by those that make for co-operation and the all-round progress and welfare of the human race. If the concept of world order is built upon a concept of man which is acceptable to two rival cultures or religions, the development will not interfere with their living as one harmonious group of people. But if the kind of man they seek to develop is different, then there is bound to be a clash of opinion concerning the common demoninator of human thinking, feeling and believing. It is not realized that even economic progress and development primarily depend upon non-economic forces, just as the development of society intended to secure the forces of human solidarity and fraternization is essentially a phenomenon which treats psychological categories as primary and fundamental. It is in the hearts of men that the seeds for harmonious development have to be sown, and it is also there that the forces which make for violence and combativeness have to be smothered.