

A. B. Shah

Challenges to Secularism

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CHALLENGES TO SECULARISM

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by
A. B. SHAH



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Introduction

THE CONTENTS OF this book are made up of three articles and the correspondence which followed their publication, in part or in full, respectively in *The Statesman* (January 10/11, 1967), *Weekend Review* (March 23, 1968) and *The Times of India* (February 17/19, 1968). There is also a catechism which contains the questions put to me by a Muslim friend and my replies to them in brief. These have not been published elsewhere. The purpose of including the questions in the anthology is, besides clarifying certain issues, also to indicate the intellectual and cultural level at which the thinking of the average educated Muslim is still confined in India.

The issues dealt with in these articles pose a challenge to secularism in India. Unless tackled with courage and firmness, they would also undermine the very foundations of the Indian state by aggravating communal tensions, retarding economic development and inhibiting social liberalization among Hindus as well as Muslims. For instance, the Shankaracharya of Puri has threatened (*Maharashtra Times*, May 12, 1968) to enrol a lakh of volunteers and launch a fresh agitation unless his demand for a total ban on the slaughter of the cow and her progeny is conceded by the Government of India before the end of this year. Meanwhile, he has also offered to withdraw his demand if it could be shown that beef-eating was prevalent in ancient times in India. He is reported (*Lokasatta*, May 12, 1968) to have addressed a post-card to me, accepting my counter-challenge for a debate on this question.* I hope that the debate will come off at Bombay sometime soon. However, the fact that the Shankaracharya has in the same breath reiterated his threat of agitation bodes ill for the coming year.

The other threat comes from Muslim communalism. The Jamaat-i-Islami-i-Hind and other similar organizations have for

* (*Added in proofs*) This has now been confirmed by the Shankaracharya in a letter dated May 31, and I hope that the debate will come off in September/October this year at Bombay. Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi has agreed to represent the secular point of view in the debate.

some time been talking of 'organized self-defence' against what they regard as the Hindus' planned and deliberate attempt at a systematic liquidation of the Muslims in India. Their contention is that the Government has failed to protect the Muslims against the increasing aggressiveness of the R.S.S. and the Jana Sangh, that all political parties in India (except, of course, the Muslim League) are anti-Muslim, and that therefore fighting back in self-defence in an organized manner is the only course left open to the Muslims. There is talk of forming an 'Ali Sena' in Hyderabad, which presumably will set the pattern for other regions to follow in the course of time. There are a number of other portents, which together indicate the shape of things to come unless adequate steps are taken in time. Briefly, Hindus and Muslims will increasingly polarize along religious lines and the politics of pre-partition days will once again be revived everywhere in India from Kerala to Kashmir.

The creation of Pakistan was supposed to put, once and for all, an end to the recurrence of a situation of this type. That this solution did not work as expected should make one look deeper into the soil from which it derives sustenance. It would then become apparent that whether it is the Shankaracharya's demand or the Muslims' refusal to agree to a modernization of their personal law or the increasing frequency of communal incidents—in each case the problem is political only in its expression; essentially, it is cultural and is rooted in an attitude of blind adherence to religion as the arbiter of public policy. Many Hindus and almost all Muslims have yet to realize that the injunctions of religion which have a bearing on secular affairs have to be subordinated to the demands of the modern conscience and the criteria provided by the sciences of man and nature. This presupposes a critical re-examination of the teachings of religion in the light of modern requirements. Unless such an attitude grows rapidly enough, Hindus and Muslims will continue to confront each other as two implacably opposed religious communities. Each will seek, in every way possible, to mould its life on patterns that became outdated centuries ago. For historical reasons, the Hindus have here a certain advantage over the Muslims. They had some sort of renaissance in the nineteenth century and today there is a fairly large educated middle class among the Hindus, whose members have no hesitation in speaking out against

the demands of Hindu obscurantists. The Muslims have yet to throw up such a class. Till the Muslim community in India produces a large enough number of secular-minded Muslims—like Mr M. C. Chagla, Mr A. R. Dawood, Mr Zafar Futehally, Mr Hamid Dalwai or Mr S. E. Hassnain—Hindu-Muslim tension is bound to continue in India. It is only when forward-looking Hindus and forward-looking Muslims confront backward-looking Hindus and backward-looking Muslims that communal riots will become a thing of the past. This does not mean that all Hindus or all Muslims will be forward-looking at any time to come. What is important is that each community will have among its members sufficient representatives of every point of view and that the like-minded from both communities (as also from other communities) will work together for shared secular goals instead of sticking to their own community in the name of solidarity and religion. Even then riots will occasionally take place but the religion of the rioting group will not be taken as an infallible criterion of its being in the right or the wrong. At present Hindu communalists as well as many non-communal Hindus feel that all Hindu-Muslim riots originate at provocation from the Muslims. The Muslims, of course, feel the other way round. However, neither group shows any serious interest in facts. If it did, it would soon realize that its own community does not harbour angels alone. For instance, in Maharashtra (excluding Greater Bombay) there took place 225 communal incidents, not all of them resulting in riots, during the three years 1965-1967. Responsibility for providing the first provocation or for resorting to violence first could be unambiguously fixed in 43 of them. Of these 43, fanatical elements among the Hindus were guilty in this sense in eight cases and those among the Muslims in 35. Even after allowing for a wide enough margin of error, it should be clear that no pot has the right to call the kettle black. And yet the organs of Hindu and Muslim communalism incessantly shout that all virtue is on one side, all vice on the other.

This is not the place to go into the problem of communal riots in detail—that must wait for a future occasion. The point to note here is that if twenty years after the creation of Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim riots are still with us, it is time we realized that political solutions alone would not suffice. Nor is mere goodness enough. Gandhi and his followers tried that method too, and they were

disowned by communalists of both sides. What is necessary is a liquidation of the outlook in which communalism breeds, and that can only be done by steady effort at educating public opinion in a different and more noble outlook, namely, that of democratic secularism based on reason and scientific knowledge. It is in this spirit that the Indian Secular Forum offers this anthology to those, especially of the younger generation, who would like to see a decent and humane order to develop in this land.

Bombay

May 12, 1968

A. B. SHAH

PART I

COW - S L A U G H T E R

The Challenge from Hindu Obscurantism

The Hindu religion prohibits cow-slaughter for the Hindus, not for the world. The religious prohibition comes from within. Any imposition from without means compulsion. Such compulsion is repugnant to religion. India is the land not only of the Hindus, but also of the Musalmans, the Sikhs, the Parsis, the Christians and the Jews and all who claim to be Indian and are loyal to the Indian Union. If they can prohibit cow-slaughter in India on the religious grounds, why cannot the Pakistan Government prohibit, say, idol worship in Pakistan on similar grounds? I am not a temple-goer, but if I were prohibited from going to a temple in Pakistan, I would make it a point to go there even at the risk of losing my head. Just as Shariat cannot be imposed on the non-Muslims, the Hindu law cannot be imposed on the non-Hindus.

M. K. GANDHI

Cow-Slaughter and Democracy*

BEGINNING WITH THE fast unto death of Potti Sriramulu for the creation of a separate Telugu-speaking State and the subsequent creation of Andhra Pradesh by the Government of India in 1952, public life in India has witnessed an increasing use of extra-parliamentary methods for the realization of group objectives. The decision to create Andhra Pradesh, not because the demand for linguistic States was regarded by Mr Nehru as harmless and legitimate but because he did not wish to appear heartless in the face of self-immolation and thus lose votes for his party, started a dangerous process in Indian politics. Over the years, not the education of public opinion but the arousing of mass passions became the standard technique of all agitational groups. Last year's agitation for a total ban on the slaughter of the cow and her progeny regardless of its economic advisability is only the latest example of such an attitude. By then the Frankensteinian monster of mass agitation had assumed such a terrifying aspect that except the pro-Moscow Communist Party of India and the Jana Sangh no political party had the courage even to mention the issue in its election manifesto. The Jana Sangh, of course, supported the demand for the ban. The CPI opposed it, which was easy enough for it since it does not have a mass following to keep in the States where the agitation was strong. Of the other parties, only the PSP kept at least silent on the demand instead of supporting it in public. Many leaders of the Congress, Swatantra and Samyukta Socialist parties made a number of statements in support of the demand. Among these were men who are known for the courage of their convictions, as also those who are Christians, Muslims or Parsis and therefore have no religious objection to eating beef.

* Introduction to A. B. Shah (ed), *Cow-Slaughter: Horns of a Dilemma*, Lalvani Publishing House, Bombay 1967. Except the first three paragraphs and the last, this article was first published in *The Statesman* (Calcutta) of January 10, 1967.

In most agitations of this type the method is that of mass *morchas* which soon lead to looting and arson. However, in such cases the Government can at least hit back without a guilty conscience in the interests of law and order provided it has the will to govern. Whenever such a will was evident as, for example, at the time of the recent abortive 'national march' of students on the Capital, the organizers of the agitation saw that on balance it would be wiser not to challenge the authority of the state. The capacity for making this clear was the basic difference between Mr G. L. Nanda and his successor in the Home Ministry. Mr Nanda could never make up his mind between the claims of popularity and those of peace. Mr Chavan, on the other hand, had the commonsense and moral courage to realize that the two may not always be compatible, at least in the short run. He also saw that in the case of a conflict between them, the citizen's right to go about his normal business without molestation had to get precedence over those who sought to paralyse public life by taking recourse to coercion.

However, the Government is seemingly helpless when an individual of standing in public life and venerated by a large number of followers threatens self-immolation through fasting or fire in order to compel it to take steps which may not be in public interest or within its competence. The fast undertaken last year by the Shankaracharya of Puri for a total ban on cow-slaughter throughout the country and the one undertaken by Sant Fateh Singh against Chandigarh being made the common capital of Punjabi Suba and Haryana illustrate this point. Both the Shankaracharya and the Sant are objects of religious devotion and could evoke the deepest passions of their followers. Nor was that all. They were being used as willing instruments of vulgar politics and thus, in effect, were violating the sanctity of one of the noblest of human feelings. Consequently, even if either of them did, in a moment of lucidity, think of giving up the fast it would have been difficult for him to do so. Those who were using him for their own political ends would not have easily agreed to it. If ultimately both the fasts ended short of death, the credit for it should go to the new-found firmness of the Union Government.

It would be wrong to imagine that wisdom would lie in conceding their demands even if they were legitimate. What is at issue in such cases is not the desirability of completely banning

cow-slaughter in India or of giving Punjabi Suba and Haryana the full appurtenances of a separate State and making Chandigarh the capital of Punjabi Suba alone. As it is, both the demands are patently unreasonable. However, what is more important is the method adopted for their realization, and it makes them not only all the more unreasonable but also dangerous. The warning contained in the situation created by the fasts and agitations of last year and the *gheraos* of this year may only be ignored by the country at the risk of an irresistible threat to its very integrity as a nation, regardless of whether it continues to be a democratic one.

Sant Fateh Singh's demand need not engage us any more. The Shankaracharya's demand is still likely to create trouble. It has been made out by some, including the Union Government and most of the national press, as reasonable in itself. The argument is that in a democratic state the wishes of an overwhelming majority of its citizens ought to be respected and given appropriate statutory expression. If the government of the day refuses to do this the citizens are justified in adopting any methods that are available to them for the realization of their demand. This, in brief, is the argument advanced even by a number of Hindus who otherwise are opposed to the ban on cow-slaughter.

That this position is fallacious needs to be shown even if it may be obvious to some. There are at least three points on which the common argument in favour of cow-slaughter appears unsatisfactory to me. First, democracy does not give the majority, even if it were ninety-nine per cent strong, the right to act in a manner that would either undermine democracy or interfere with the right of other groups to live in their own way. Just as total prohibition as distinguished from restriction on drinking in the interests of health is undemocratic even if only one citizen wishes to drink, so also a total ban on the slaughter of cows would be undemocratic even if there were only one beef-eater in the country. All that the agitators for the ban may legitimately demand is that they should not be compelled to eat beef, to slaughter cows or to send their own cows to the slaughter-house. They may also legitimately demand that cow-slaughter should not be carried out in the vicinity of Hindu temples. Any demand beyond this would be an encroachment on the rights of

those who do not believe in the sanctity of the cow or, even if they believe in its sanctity, do not believe in its inviolability.

That there is a distinction between the sanctity of the cow and its inviolability needs to be pointed out to most Hindus, including many high-placed ones, who claim to be proud of the Hindu tradition without knowing enough about it. The fact of the matter is that for about three hundred years after the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, beef-eating was common in India. Not only archaeological evidence supports this view but there are a number of statements in the Hindu scriptures which explicitly recommend beef-eating on certain occasions. For instance, the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad recommends beef *pulao* to a couple desirous of having a son who is proficient in all the three Vedas and capable of conquering learned assemblies. Similarly, the *Grihya Sutras* recommend the killing of a cow or a calf to entertain an important guest such as the king, one's son-in-law, a dear friend, and the like. Indeed the whole tone and temper of life during the Vedic and Upanishad period seems to have been altogether different from what came to be the case after Buddhism and Jainism had taken root in Indian society. The situation became still worse after the rise of Shankar and his highly sophisticated but world-negating philosophy.

Those Hindus who today claim the support of religion in favour of their demand for a ban on cow-slaughter are either ignorant or knowingly dishonest. If they want to justify their demand, the only course open to them is to say that they are opposed to cow-slaughter regardless of what their history says and that, being a majority community, they are going to see it accepted by the rest of the country.

Secondly, there is no evidence that a majority of Hindus themselves really want cow-slaughter to be banned. The demand of a few high-caste members of the intelligentsia cannot, in the absence of other evidence, be taken as a demand of the majority of Hindus. Indeed, the evidence, if anything, is to the contrary. Even during the two decades after Independence the Indian peasant has been selling dry cows to the butcher for the simple reason that he cannot afford to maintain them. Some years ago, a non-official resolution for a ban on cow-slaughter was thrown out by the Legislative Assembly of what was then the Bombay

State on the ground that it would merely result in the slow death by starvation of about 50,000 animals every year in Maharashtra and lead to an outbreak of epidemics. Also, if an opinion poll were to be taken today of the peasants, who are the most directly concerned with the problem, they would refuse to accept the responsibility for preserving cows which had ceased to be of economic value to them. As a matter of fact, the Panchayat Samiti of Karad in Maharashtra has already passed a resolution expressing its opposition to the Shankaracharya's demand.

Thirdly, even if a majority of Hindus were to support this demand, how would it justify them in imposing their own religious beliefs on others? That a number of Muslims have supported the demand for banning cow-slaughter should not mislead one into believing that they are really happy over it. More likely than not, being conscious of their minority status, they are only trying to be on the right side of whatever section of the majority community claims to speak on behalf of it in a militant manner and gives enough signs of its being victorious in the end. The Congress here has a lesson for it. If it yields to the demand of the Jana Sangh this time, it may very well find that Muslims give increasing support to the Jana Sangh in the belief that ultimately the latter will replace the Congress. Not only the obligation of safeguarding the rights of dissident groups but also—and this is more likely to appeal to the Congress—its own interest in retaining whatever power it still has, should make it reconsider the position it has already taken on the demand in principle.

One question, however, remains. If the Shankaracharya is obstinate and is likely to die as a result of a second fast, what should the Government do? Should it not try to prevent his death and the disturbances that are likely to break out as its consequence? I am clear that the proper answer to such doubts is in the negative. If the brief account of the growing use of non-parliamentary methods in a parliamentary system given above is of any significance, it is this: the question is not merely that of the reasonableness of a demand itself but also of the methods employed for realising the demand. If the Congress Government at the Centre or any Government at the State level succumbs to the pressure tactics of the revivalist movement in India, it may very well find that sooner than it imagined it would have to give up all claims to secularism. Worse than that, the Indian state will

cease to be secular even in name and this would weaken India's already dubious claim to continue in Kashmir in the name of secularism. I would, therefore, suggest that if the Government is clear about its own tasks as government, it should call the Shankaracharya's bluff and take the necessary steps to ward off the exploitation of his possible death for political purposes. Since Independence, this country has gone through a number of tragedies, some of them disastrous. One more minor tragedy need not make a great difference to it.

DISCUSSION*

SANTOSH KUMAR GUPTA (Calcutta)

Mr A. B. Shah (*The Statesman*, January 10-11) writes that "democracy does not give the majority, even if it were 99% strong the right to act in a manner that would either undermine democracy or interfere with the right of other groups" adding that "a total ban on the slaughter of cows would be undemocratic even if there is only one beef-eater in the country."

When any other meat would serve the purpose no normal person can object to the interdiction of cattle slaughter specially when there are millions who feel unhappy over it. The Muslims are not being deprived of any religious right. The Supreme Court Judgment in the Bihar, U.P., M.P. butchers' case against the total ban on cow-slaughter (April 23, 1958) in those States, mentions that cow-slaughter is entirely optional in Muslim law.

Mr A. B. Shah's quotation from the Veda is not correct as he omits quotations from the Rig Veda where the cow is called *Aghnya* (which can never be killed).

Mahatma Gandhi said: "I do not want Swaraj in India where the cow is being killed" and this feeling led him to seek a compromise with the Muslims for stopping Gohatya. But the compromise eluded him and for twenty years the Hindus have been waiting for this concession from the Muslims and other non-Hindus. That is why the Hindus now seek to ban it by law.

* The following letters appeared in the Readers' Column of *The Statesman*, Calcutta.

S. RAHMAN (Murshidabad)

I heartily thank Mr A. B. Shah for correctly presenting the viewpoint (*The Statesman*, January 10-11) of democratically minded people on the question of a ban on cow-slaughter. Though democracy is government by the majority, it does not mean that the majority can impose its own customs and beliefs upon the rest of their countrymen.

What point is there in secularism if a considerable section of the population is prevented on religious grounds, from living in their own way? If Muslims are not allowed to eat beef, physically it does little harm to them. But psychologically, they will fall victims to a damaging inferiority complex. The cow is regarded as *Gomata* by the Hindu. This speaks very highly of Hinduism's regard for the sub-human creation. But tolerance is also another mighty pillar which supports the magnificence of Hindu idealism. Religion is self-purification. It does not ask its followers to force its principles upon others.

RATNA CHATTERJEE (Calcutta)

Mr A. B. Shah's article (*The Statesman*, January 10-11) on cow-slaughter though very logical omitted a most important point. Even unproductive cows help to provide food in these days of food shortage to a considerable section of the population of the country.

Our present Government is absolutely incapable of holding the price-line on food and if cow-slaughter is banned by law the prices of other meats will soar, bringing added hardship to millions.

A. V. SHAKTHI (U.S.A.)

Mr A. B. Shah's article "Democracy and the Move for a Ban on Cow Slaughter" (January 10-11) was one of those classic rhetorics of our progressives to whom Hinduism is anathema. And anything—yes, even "democracy"—comes quite handy to nip in the bud any Hindu "reaction" that might raise its head from time to time. I thought democracy had something intrinsically to do with the majority of the population. But no, to Mr Shah and his ilk, when Hindus happen to be in a majority it becomes a case of "communalism" (a word very carefully avoided by Mr Shah, though) and

oppression by the majority. Does he regard Congress rule in India democratic? I wonder, because the Congress got only a little over 40% votes. Such awkward facts are very conveniently ignored by our progressives.

It is because Hindus are disorganized that, though they constitute 90% of the population and though, barring a few exceptions like Mr Shah, they fervently wish a ban on cow slaughter, the demand is considered anti-democratic. Let Mr Shah and those of his view note that, while it is the religious duty of Hindus to protect and serve the cow it is not the religious duty of either the Muslims or the Christians to kill or eat beef. Even Muslim rulers in India like Babar and Akbar had banned cow slaughter.

Mr Shah points out that those Hindus who claim the support of religion for their demand to ban cow slaughter are "either ignorant or knowingly evasive". Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Puri should sit at Mr Shah's feet and catch the gems of Hinduism that fall from his lips or pen. Mr Shah vaguely quotes from some scriptures. I give one below from the Rigveda:

"The cow is the mother of Rudras, the daughter of Vasus and the sister of Adityas. The cow is the only source of milk and ghee which serve as nectar (Amrit). That is why the wise are given this understanding that the cow should not be slaughtered, because it serves humanity". (Rigveda 8/101/15).

And let me ask why it is pointed out with an accusing finger that the campaign has been timed with an eye on the elections? To contest elections on certain issues in a democracy is a fundamental right of the people. Here again the "Hindu phobia" of our progressives is seen. If Hindus use the legitimate rights provided by the Constitution, it becomes undemocratic.

I. B. BANERJEE (Calcutta)

Mr A. B. Shah's article on the cow slaughter issue does not give a realistic criticism of the move for a total ban.

The teachings of all Hindu prophets and saints and of the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which guide Hindu religious and social life as also the teachings of ahimsa by Buddhism and Jainism are well established. Even in the Indus Valley civilization the cow was an object of sanctity. The fact that cer-

tain aboriginal tribes called "Chandalas" in ancient times were beef eaters cannot justify the statement that beef eating was common in India.

A ban on cow slaughter will doubtless mean increased yield of milk, cow manure, and bulls for tilling and transport. We may however take a lesson from the States which have already banned cow slaughter.

S. P. MUKHERJEE (Punjab)

Congratulations to Mr A. B. Shah on his clear and just views on the cow slaughter issue. His convictions are those of many. It is painful that a learned section of our population should make such a furore over an issue which is really unimportant. If humanitarian considerations are the only ones that motivate the issue then the goats, the hens, the pigs, the fish and such other animals as are killed need to be protected also. If religious sentiment is the guiding factor then it is asking for imposing one's beliefs on others. On neither ground is the demand justifiable.

MEDINIMOHAN CHOUDHURY (Gauhati)

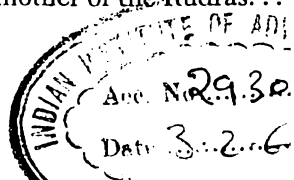
For Hindus all lives are equal. Why then is the cow alone put at such a premium? As a humble Hindu I fail to understand why our gurus are so worried about the cow alone while hundreds of goats and hens are brutally killed in our temples every day.

RANJIT GUPTA (Calcutta)

Mr A. V. Shakthi (February 9-10) has twitted Mr A. B. Shah for his "vague" quotation from "some scriptures" to support the statement that beef eating was common in India. Here are a few clear references:

Rigveda X 86.14: Indra says that "they" cook for him fifteen plus twenty oxen. Rigveda X 31.14: Horses, bulls, oxen, barren cows and rams are sacrificed for Agni. Rigveda VIII 43.11: Agni is described as one whose food is the ox and the barren cow. Rigveda X 79.6: It is suggested that the cow was sacrificed with a sword or an axe. (All these quotations have been taken from Kanc's *Dharmashastra*).

Mr Shakthi's quotation, "The cow is the mother of the Rudras..."



etc. is taken from Rigveda XIII 101, 15, 16, and can be reconciled with the other passages only by assuming that for obvious reasons barren cows alone were slaughtered, while milk-yielding cows were carefully looked after. Gradually this consideration for the milch cow became stronger; in Rigveda XIII 101, 1 the cow is called "devi".

Yet beef eating as a habit did not fade out then: it continued along with this increasing and parallel regard for the cow. Taitereya Brahmana III 9, 8, indicates that cows were sacrificed. Satapatha Brahmana III 1, 2, 21, states: Yajnavalka eats the meat of cows and oxen provided it is tender (like Lin Yu Tang centuries later, who likes vegetables if they are good). Aitereya Brahmana 6, 8, states that the ox is among the animals to be sacrificed. It is to be presumed that the sentiment against cow slaughter hardened later.

Incidentally, what will greatly distress the Bengalis is that Manu regards fish-eating as the worst form of meat-eating, and forbids all fish (V 14-15); he, however, relents (V-16) in favour of fish called Rohita, Pathina, Rajiva and fish having scales as permissible. No legal ban would however be necessary against this fell habit: natural and economic forces will suffice to stop it.

Hindu Scriptures and Cow-Slaughter*

The Shankaracharya's Challenge

THE SHANKARACHARYA of Puri, who undertook a 'fast unto death' before the last general election for the ostensible purpose of persuading the Government of India to impose a total ban on the slaughter of the cow and her progeny, was recently reported to have said that he would withdraw the demand if it could be shown that Hindu scriptures permitted cow-slaughter. Of course, he has qualified his offer by adding that he would not accept a Western interpretation of what the scriptures say. This proviso could be a clever ruse for escaping from an inconvenient situation merely by arguing that all Western scholars have consistently misinterpreted what Hindu scriptures 'really' enjoin, permit or prohibit. However, I shall assume that the Shankaracharya has made his offer in good faith and accept his condition. I shall quote only the scriptures in translation or summary (quoting in the original Sanskrit, though easier, would make no sense to most readers), and give precise references for those who would like to check on the quotations. I may add that the translation and interpretation have been approved by two Hindu scholars of Sanskrit. One of them, Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi, is President of the Pradna Pathashala at Wai (known as the Kashi of the Deccan) and was for many years Gandhi's trusted adviser on religious matters. The other, Dr G. R. Rane, teaches Sanskrit at Deccan Education Society's Kirti College at Bombay. Dr Rane is also a member of the Samyukta Socialist Party, whose parliamentary candidate from Bombay had lent open support to the Shankaracharya's demand during the latter's pre-election visit to Bombay. It is obvious that neither the Tarkateerth nor the Professor can be suspected of anti-Hindu prejudice. At the same time, I must state here that they would not be willing to accept the

* *Weekend Review*, Delhi, March 23, 1968.

Shankaracharya as a reliable authority on Hindu philosophy or religion.

To take the *Rigveda* first. At R.V.I.28. 8-9, the Rishi says: 'With swift pressers press today/Sweet Soma juice for Indra's drink./ Take up in beakers what remains: the Soma on the filter pour/ And on the ox-hide set the dregs.' (Italics mine.) There are a number of verses like this in the *Rigveda* where the use of ox-hide in the preparation of Soma is mentioned. The conclusion is obvious: Vedic Indians—they were not yet *Hindus* as the term is understood today—were fond of intoxicating drink and did not regard ox-hide as impure.

At R.V.II.7.5, one finds: Ours art thou, Agni, Bharat, honoured by us *with barren cows;/With bullocks and with kine in calf.* (Italics mine.) I do not know what this stanza would suggest to a devout Hindu; to a non-devout Jain like me, it only suggests that the Vedic Indians were fond of roasted beef. At R.V. VIII. 43.11, Agni is described as 'fed on ox and cow', suggesting like the preceding quotation that cattle were sacrificed and roasted in fire.

Even marriage and death ceremonies in Vedic times called for slaughter of cattle. For instance, the famous Bridal Hymn in the *Rigveda* (X.85.13) says: 'The bridal pomp of Surya, which Savitar started, moved along./In Agha days are oxen slain, in Arjunis they wed the bride'. Similarly, the Cremation Hymn (R.V.X.16.7) mentions the ritual enveloping of the corpse with cow flesh before setting fire to it.

It is true that at certain places in the *Rigveda* the cow is referred to as *Aghnya* (not to be killed), but whenever this is done the cow under reference is a milch cow and is so indicated by the use of adjectives like *payoduhā* or *payobhir*. The Vedic people saw nothing wrong in killing barren and useless cows, which are mentioned as *vashā* or *vehat*.

I take now the Brāhmanas. At I.15 in the *Aiteriya* Brāhmana, the kindling of Agni on the arrival of King Soma is compared to the slaughtering of a bull or barren cow on the arrival of a human king or dignitary. Similarly, at II.7.11.1 in the *Taittiriya* Brāhmana and XXXI.14.5 in *Panchavinsha* Brāhmana, the Rishi Agastya (*sic*) is credited with the slaughter of a hundred bulls. More interesting still is verse III.1.2.21 in the *Shatapatha* Brāhmana,

where the sage Yajnavalkya endearingly asserts that (even though the cow is the supporter of everyone) he *would* eat beef 'if it is luscious'. At IV.5.2.1 in the same Brahmana we are told that a barren cow can be slaughtered in the Soma sacrifice. Not only for religious purposes like this but also for secular ones one could kill a cow and eat beef. Thus at III.4.1.2 we learn that a great bull or a great goat should be sacrificed in honour of an important guest. Similarly, the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad (VI.4.18) advises a couple to take an evening meal of beef or veal *pulao* if they desire to beget a son who is learned in the Vedas.

I am not quoting from the *Manusmriti* in detail because its authority is of a lower order than that of the works already referred to. It is also of a later date and is self-contradictory on many points, including the eating of meat. However, it may be noted that in ancient times the most popular form of meat was beef, not mutton, so that unless explicitly excluded by name, meat-eating not only included but generally meant beef-eating. And there are a number of verses in the *Manusmriti* which permit (e.g. V.27, 28, 30, 42, 44, 56) and sometimes even enjoin (V.35) meat-eating by Brahmins no less than non-Brahmins. Also, Mahamahopadhyaya P. V. Kane, at p.1200 of his monumental *History of the Dharmashastras*, Vol. II, Part 2, says that 'a barren cow is to be offered to Mitra and Varuna Some sacrificed three *anubandhya* cows, viz., to Mitra and Varuna, to the Visva Devas and to Brihaspati'.

Before closing this article, let me say a word about the Buddhist attitude to meat-eating. The Buddha emphasized non-injury to animals, including non-killing, because of the Brahminical excesses in sacrificial ritual and the huge numbers of animals that were killed everywhere for priestly gain. As Mr Mukandilal has shown with ample documentation in his essay 'Cow Cult in India' in *Cow-Slaughter: Horns of a Dilemma* edited by me, for nearly three hundred years after the rise of Buddhism beef-eating was prevalent on a large scale in India. Even the monks were not averse to it. Indeed, it would seem that high caste Indians had no objection even to human flesh on certain occasions, as is shown by the following story.

"Thereupon Suppiya saw a certain sick priest, and asked him:

"Sir, of what do you stand in need?"

"Meat broth", was the reply.

"Very well, Sir; I will send you some".

But as she failed on the next day to obtain any suitable meat, she made the preparation from her own thigh; and afterwards by the favour of the Teacher her body was made whole.

Though not directly related to the Shankaracharya's position, I have deliberately referred to the Buddhist attitude to meat-eating. It was only when Brahminical supremacy was seriously threatened by the growing popularity of Buddhism that Indian society took to vegetarianism and total abjurement of intoxicating drinks. The vulgar materialism of post-Vedic Brahminism called forth as reaction the austere sense-abnegation of Buddhism and Jainism, but for which the economy would have completely collapsed. However, instead of searching for a new balance between the claims of the spirit and of the flesh in the light of these protests, the Brahminical priesthood just appropriated the popular teachings of the protestant sects and carried them to an absurd length. In the event, indiscriminate slaughter of cattle was replaced by equally indiscriminate preservation regardless of its implications for the economy.

The Shankaracharya may not be concerned over the state of the nation's economy, nor need he have a historical perspective. However, those who are less 'spiritually' inclined have to be more responsible in their attitude. They cannot, without being guilty of hypocrisy, speak on the one hand of economic growth, secularism and democracy, and on the other express sympathy for the Shankaracharya's demand. These are harsh words but in the attitude to this question of the politicians and most of those who control the media of mass communication is involved much more than the cow's right to live at the expense of man. What is involved is a decision that no modern society, whatever its political orientation, can avoid except at its peril. Briefly put, the decision requires a clear choice between reason and passion as the arbiter on major issues of public policy. If passion is allowed to overwhelm reason on issues like that of cow-slaughter, as it indeed was with the cowardly connivance of most political leaders in the months preceding the last general election, sooner than anyone imagined it would result in the rule of the mass man. And, as Aristotle noted

more than two thousand years ago, mobocracy inevitably leads to the rule of the tyrant, for whom neither the Shankaracharya, nor the cow, nor even the politician can count for more than an instrument of personal ambition.

It is therefore heartening that the Shankaracharya has changed his method from fasting to dialogue, even if the latter has to be carried on in terms unilaterally laid down by him. This article is a layman's attempt to meet his challenge on the plane of reason, and I would not be surprised if it does not satisfy him. However, in that case I would still take his statement in good faith and offer a counter-challenge to him. As President of the Indian Secular Forum and Secretary of the Indian Renaissance Institute which sponsored the publication of *Cow-Slaughter*, I would invite him for a formal debate with our representative on the basis of Hindu scriptures alone. The debate will be open to the press and a few invitees from both sides but not to the public so as ensure that the audience does not disturb the participants in any way. The discussion will be presided over by an eminent citizen, preferably with legal background and everything that is said by either party or the Chairman will be recorded on the tape with a view to early publication. Will the Shankaracharya accept this challenge?

DISCUSSION*

CH. SATYANARAYANA RAO, MLC (Hyderabad)

As a regular reader of *Weekend Review*, I think I have got every right to strongly protest at the publishing of the article "Hindu Scriptures and Cow Slaughter" by Mr Shah.

I never imagined that such challenges by little-known individuals will be given such importance as to be published in a national-level news magazine like *Weekend Review*.

Mr Shah has admitted that he is a layman, which makes him unfit or even unwise to challenge a person who is revered by millions of our countrymen. Mr Shah has quoted in the article an incident from *The Story of Visaka*, saying that Indians loved

* The following letters appeared in the *Weekend Review*, Delhi.

human flesh. He has foolishly misunderstood the idea of self-sacrifice behind this incident. Modern Indians like Mr Shah who boast of secularism are confusing the country and are getting confused. Mr Shah, it seems, is also worried about the idea of banning cow-slaughter becoming popular. If the majority decision to ban cow-slaughter is implemented, he says it is mobocracy. Then Mr Shah should admit that presently India is not having democracy but mobocracy, because we are being ruled by majority decisions.

Being an agriculturist, I think I know better than Mr Shah the importance of the cow in India's (agricultural) economy.

Again, Mr Shah confessed that he is a non-devout Jain, then it is unnecessary for him to meddle in the religious affairs of Hindus. It would give me great pleasure if Mr Shah devotes his time to more constructive items like food problem or national integration.

Once again, as an active reader of *Weekend Review*, I request you not to give space to such utterances. We want some interesting and enlightening articles, but not waste-paper-basket-worth articles.

V. K. SINHA (Bombay)

As another regular and 'active' reader of *Weekend Review* may I make some observations on the letter by C. S. Rao published in your issue of April 20, 1968.

Mr Rao's plaintive remark that *Weekend Review* should not publish articles by 'little known individuals' does little credit to him. I would suggest that Mr Rao should perhaps not only read *Weekend Review* regularly but also more carefully. He would, I am certain, discover that your weekly publishes an article not on the basis of the public stature of its writer but on its intrinsic merit.

One is amazed at Mr Rao's statement that a 'layman' is unfit to challenge a person who is revered by millions of our countrymen. So were Stalin and Hitler, and so is Mao if one is not to go beyond this century. And one is further amazed at Mr Rao's peculiar conception of democracy, all the more painful because it is expressed by a member of a Legislative Assembly. A decision, carried out even by majority does not by itself become right or even democratic. Otherwise, we need not have fundamental rights

and courts to protect them. Mr Rao, I think, needs to go once again into the ABC of the theory of democracy.

Mr Rao's suggestion that Mr Shah, being a non-devout Jain, has no business to meddle in the religious affairs of the Hindus is too palpably absurd to need any refutation. Moreover, Mr Rao here unwittingly confesses that the cow slaughter question is a religious question. And therefore one wonders whether a state claiming to be secular can deal with it. Mr Rao doesn't mind a layman devoting his time to 'constructive items' like food problems or national integration but he questions his right to discuss the question of cow slaughter! One does feel a little worried about the future of democracy in India when even our legislators begin to argue in crypto-fascist tones—laying down *who* should say, *what* they should say.

SHARIT KUMAR BHOWMICK (Bombay)

I do not agree with Ch. Satyanarayana Rao's criticism of Mr A. B. Shah's article "Hindu Scriptures and Cow Slaughter" (*Weekend Review*, April 20, Letters to the Editor). Mr Rao seems to be under the wrong notion that "little known individuals like Mr. Shah are not capable of challenging the ban on cow slaughter". If Mr Shah called himself a layman he has done so out of modesty. He has written numerous articles on this topic in various newspapers and magazines and has also edited a book entitled "Cow Slaughter: On the Horns of a Dilemma."

Mr Rao claims that as an agriculturist he realises the importance of the cow in India's economy. Does he not know that in India we have an overwhelming majority of cows over buffaloes and yet more than 55 per cent of milk is supplied by the latter? As an agriculturist Mr Rao assumes that by allowing the cow to be slaughtered we are deprived of its milk. Has Denmark, the richest country in dairy produce, banned cow slaughter? More cows do not necessarily mean more milk. A few well fed cows will give more milk than a large population of cows, which are undernourished, as in India.

As we are a secular state, and not a Hindu state, this question of cow slaughter is of importance to all Indians; hence I do not see anything wrong in Mr Shah, a Jain, commenting on the cow slaughter issue. It is a pity that Mr Rao has allowed his religious sentiments to overpower his logical reasoning.

PART II

ISLAM IN INDIA

The Challenge from Muslim Obscurantism

The phantom of an Islamic State has haunted the Musalman throughout the ages and is a result of the memory of the glorious past when Islam rising like a storm from the least expected quarter of the world—(the) wilds of Arabia—instantly enveloped the world, pulling down from their high pedestal gods who had ruled over man since the creation, uprooting centuries-old institutions and superstitions and supplanting all civilizations that had been built on an enslaved humanity.... It is this brilliant achievement of the Arabian nomads, the like of which the world had never seen before that makes the Musalman today live in the past and yearn for the return of the glory that was Islam. He finds himself struggling at the crossroads, wrapped in the mantle of the past and with the deadweight of centuries on his back, frustrated and bewildered and hesitant to turn one corner or the other. The freshness and the simplicity of the faith, which gave determination to his mind and spring to his muscle is now denied to him. He has neither the means nor the ability to conquer and there are no countries to conquer. Little does he understand that the forces, which are pitted against him are entirely different from those against which early Islam had to fight, and that on the clues given by his own ancestors the human mind has achieved results which he cannot understand. He therefore finds himself in a state of helplessness, waiting for someone to come and help him out of this morass of uncertainty and confusion. And he will go waiting like this without anything happening. Nothing but a bold re-orientation of Islam to separate the vital from the lifeless can preserve it as a World Idea and convert the Musalman into a citizen of the present and the future world from the archaic incongruity that he is today.

— Report of the Court of Inquiry (Munir Commission) constituted under Punjab Act 11 of 1954 to enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953, Superintendent of Government Printing, Punjab, 1954, pp. 231-32.

Islam in India

Challenge and Opportunity

THOSE MUSLIMS who on the creation of Pakistan decided to stay on in India also made, through that decision, a choice that is unique in the history of Islam. Till then Muslims had lived as rulers, as a persecuted or a protected minority, or in unstable co-existence in a non-Muslim society. Never before had they shared power with others in a spirit of equality that transcended religious divisions. Neither history nor doctrine had prepared them for freedom and the obligations that go with it in a multi-religious society. For unlike the Bible, the Quran makes no distinction between the secular and the spiritual sphere of life. Indeed, in its fusion of the two Islam goes beyond Hinduism. The latter, or rather the dominant tradition of it, is world-negating in spirit and every school of Hinduism places emphasis on individual salvation through one's own efforts. It underplays the importance of the temporal order and thus makes modernization comparatively easy from one point of view. Islam, on the other hand, looks upon the community (*umma*) as the sole medium through which God's purpose as revealed in the Quran can be realized. The individual has no existence as a Muslim except as a limb of the community. Islam thus rules out the rise of a movement that may question in any radical sense the ideological basis of Muslim society. For any such movement is bound to be of a few individuals in the beginning—indeed, the Prophet's own was no different—and they can only survive if the fundamental doctrine of their society recognizes the ultimate value of the individual apart from his membership of the community. The fact that unlike Hinduism, Islam is a revealed religion, which also asserts that Muhammad was the last prophet, puts on the Quran a seal of finality insofar as man's social and spiritual evolution is concerned.

This is palpably absurd, however offensive the word may sound to believers. Since leaders of Muslim opinion would not do it for reasons of expediency, someone else must point out that no scripture of any religion, 'revealed' by God or 'heard' by the Rishis, can claim finality in any field. The knowledge that man has gained since the beginning of the modern age leaves no escape from certain conclusions regarding religion. For instance, the cosmogony of every religion is wrong; the ethics propounded by it, while marking an advance at the time of its origin, is historically relative and on many points out of date; the social order it sanctifies is hopelessly unsuited to the needs of the modern world; and, more important than all this, the conception of man that it seeks to authenticate through ritual and law is both unduly generous and unduly harsh in the light of what we already know of the inner and outer worlds of man.

To take only one example, man is alone in this vast universe, unprotected by any benevolent Deity who would guide him like a father along an unfamiliar path strewn with danger and temptation. Contrary to what the founder of every religion taught, there is no path to salvation that is guaranteed safe. Whatever the path one takes, every point of it is a cross-roads that could not have been foreseen by the map-makers of old. Man is, therefore, on his own. He has to use his reason, discover with the help of knowledge the moral truths most appropriate to his times, and work, if he would, for their realization in co-operation with his fellows. This is a much more demanding role than that of following a leader who speaks of eternal truths in the name of God, His Messiah or the Rishis of ancient times. Equally, it is an inspiring role. For the first time since his appearance on this globe man is spiritually free. He can now hope to accomplish what Omar Khayyam could only wistfully long for. But he can succeed provided only that the loss of an anthropomorphic God leads, not to helplessness but a purification of his humanity and a release of his creative potentialities in a new framework of thought. At the centre of this new framework should be the living individual of flesh and blood instead of an abstract collectivity represented by language, class, race or religion, each one of which is an anachronism today.

The problem of the Muslims in India is an aspect of the situation in which man finds himself in the contemporary world,

Only, the parameters which specify it are different. For instance, like their co-religionists in Pakistan or any other 'Islamic' country, Indian Muslims have to come to terms with the spirit of modernity if they wish to move ahead from their present position in the rear of the procession of mankind. But being citizens of a non-Muslim state, unlike the Muslims of Pakistan or West Asia they do not have the choice of stewing in their own juice till some kindly fate comes to their help. India has decided to forge ahead as a secular democracy based on a recognition of the rights of man regardless of language, caste, sex or religion. This commitment to human rights also distinguishes the situation of Muslims in India from that of their confrères in countries like the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. For secularism under an atheistic dictatorship can only mean persecution as the experience of various religious groups, including Muslims, in communist countries amply demonstrates. It is only under a democratic system that secularism implies religious freedom, not as a gesture of generosity but as one of the fundamental rights of man, whose recognition lends moral sanction to the state.

The challenge of modernity that Islam faces in India is therefore also an opportunity for its adherents to undertake a creative 'reinterpretation' of their faith. One of the purposes of such an undertaking would be to separate those elements of it which have universal significance from others which are essentially the product of the specific historical situation in which Islam arose and developed. That every religion has elements of either type is obvious and need not be argued out here. What is necessary is the formulation of criteria with the help of which a critical reappraisal of its cognitive and moral components can be carried out today. Apart from the criteria of scientific method in the field of discursive knowledge, I would suggest that the fundamental rights of the citizen embodied in the Constitution of India, or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN, be taken as providing a reasonable set of criteria for this purpose.

A critical reappraisal of Islam on the lines suggested above can be effectively undertaken only by educated and forward-looking Muslims. However, most educated Indian Muslims today seem

to be suffering from a feeling of despair and loneliness. They feel alienated from their own community because of the apparently unbridgeable gulf that separates them from it in matters of education, culture, standards of living and the goals of endeavour. At the same time, thanks to a variety of factors they are not yet able to identify themselves with the mainstream of India's national life. The memories of partition with all that preceded and followed it are still alive in the minds of both Hindus and Muslims. The relations between India and Pakistan still show no sign of becoming normal and friendly. The Hindus still continue to be narcissistically self-contained and the Muslims defeatist in outlook, so that free exchange of ideas and sharing of experience between members of the two communities is an exception rather than the rule. As a result of all this, the Muslims have over the years developed a feeling that they are second-class citizens and their future in India is bleak. A few of them no doubt succeed in avoiding the frustration that such a situation breeds, but most withdraw into their own private world or else turn to the politics of extremism in their search for belonging. However, none of these escapes can be of much avail except at the cost of self-respect or cultural identity. Withdrawal from public life merely means a confession of defeat and needs no comment as regards its futility. It is also obvious that recourse to communal politics will only boomerang onto the Muslims themselves. It will put a seal of voluntary approval on the psychological ghetto in which a certain type of leadership, Muslim no less than Hindu, would like the Muslims to live. And in the end, it will call forth the Hindu brand of anti-semitism, which would consume both the ghetto and its inhabitants.

Communism will, if anything, prove still worse though quite a few of the 'progressive' Muslims in India seem to imagine that in communism alone lies their salvation. This should be obvious to anyone whose thinking is not constrained to move within a framework of borrowed stereotypes. For under the compulsion of demographic realities and the pressure of a neighbouring and not very friendly Pakistan, even a communist dictatorship is bound to take on a saffron hue in India. Muslim intellectuals who entertain illusions on this score have only to look into the distribution of power among the nationalities of the Soviet Union,

They will discover, for instance, that most of the key posts in that country, even in the non-Russian republics, are still held by the Russian-speaking people though they constitute a bare 55 per cent of the total population. As to religious tolerance, only the wilfully blind can ignore the persecution of Islam, as of any other religion, under a communist regime. There is no ground for believing that Muslims would fare any better if communism were to triumph in India. For one thing, the Hindus who, by a jelly-fish-like definition of the term, include all those who are not Muslims, Christians or Zoroastrians, constitute nearly 85 per cent of the Indian people. Secondly, communism has not been able to liquidate group loyalties based on language, nationality or religion even when it is not in power. Once in power, its cohesive appeal is seriously undermined by the transformation that power, or the prospect of it, brings about in the role of ideology. What is once believed to be a philosophy of freedom and equality becomes an instrument of power politics. To this end, new meanings are given to terms that for ages have expressed the aspirations of ordinary men and women all over the civilized world. Thus persecution is paraded as tolerance and tyranny advertised as the highest expression of freedom. 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.'

But this is not all. Communists in Russia were not particularly motivated against Muslims. Their persecution of Islam was and is the result of an ideological, but nonetheless primarily intellectual, obsession. In India, on the other hand, the persecution of Muslims by a Hindu-dominated communist regime will also be rooted in geopolitics and in the deeper layers of history. It will be more like the persecution of the Jews than of the Muslims in the Soviet Union. Under the Jana Sangh, Muslims may at least expect to enjoy the status of a protected minority; under communism, they will not have even that.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that neither politics nor professional success can by itself provide a remedy against the anguish and undefined anxiety of educated Muslims in India. Their roots lie not so much in the Indian environment as in the prolonged stagnation of the Muslim community through-

out the world. Only, in India the crisis appears in a particularly acute form. However, the very situation which makes it so acute here also carries within it the elements necessary for its resolution. To harness them in the service of the universal values that the Prophet tried to express in the idiom and context of a tribal people more than thirteen hundred years ago, and to interpret his words in the context of a radically different world—this is the only way in which educated Muslims of India can overcome their *anomie* and, at the same time, serve Islam and the country of their choice.

An approach of this kind has implications which it may be worthwhile to point out in brief. First, Muslims everywhere must realize that they can survive with honour in the modern world only if they accept science not merely as the mother of technology but as a cultural discipline with consequences for their outlook on man and the universe. Science in this latter sense is an adventure of ideas and its success depends on the extent to which human reason is allowed free play in dealing with facts and the legacy of traditional beliefs. It is in this respect that Islam, like Christianity and Hinduism in an earlier period, has failed its followers. Its doctrine of finality and the claim to infallibility (in matters secular no less than spiritual) made in behalf of the Quran, the Sunna and even the *umma* leave little scope for anything but 'formal study by predetermined methods and rules'. Consequently, 'the core of the faith—revelation and the person of the Prophet; the community (*umma*) concept and the historical relationship to other faiths; and, last but not least, the evolution of phase after phase of Islamic thinking, feeling and practice—is to this day tacitly excluded from indigenous research.' This lack of interest in analytical self-understanding is, as von Grunebaum suggests, perhaps related to the 'basic antihumanism' of Islamic civilization, that is, to 'the determined refusal to accept man to any extent whatever as the arbiter or the measure of things.'^o For such self-understanding presupposes the recognition of human creativity, and this is impossible in a culture that rules out critical inquiry into its own foundations. It is in this sense that 'the criticism of religion', as Marx said, 'is the beginning of all criticism.' Educated Muslims have yet to undertake such criticism.

^o G. E. von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam* (Vintage edition), New York 1964, pp. 62, 55.

This is not the place to go into the causes of their default so far, but it is necessary to note that what holds them back is lack of moral courage rather than absence of precedent or ignorance of method. True, anyone who attempts it is likely to invite on himself the wrath of a certain section of the present-day Muslim leadership. It may also be argued that a cautious approach would yield the best results in the long run. However, the argument for caution is apt to be overworked. In the absence of dedicated and sustained effort at educating community opinion, 'caution' is merely a euphemism for 'cowardice'. And it is cowardice of which most leaders of Muslim opinion, including scholars of the Marxist persuasion, have been guilty in relation to their people. Were it not so, it would be difficult to understand their studied silence, for instance, on the inequitable character of Muslim personal law insofar as it discriminates against women in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance rights even though it has been considerably modified in countries with Islam as state religion.

The fact is that the present leadership of Indian Muslims is either irremediably orthodox or else, too much involved in the politics of patronage. In private, the latter would stand for a liberal interpretation of the tradition of Islam so as to suit the needs of the modern age. Its public stance, however, is one of cautious equivocation calculated to preserve its progressive image without being called upon to pay any price in terms of popularity with Muslims or standing with non-Muslims. What Muslims in India desperately need today is a bold and new leadership that has no vested interest in their continued stagnation. Its members will have to take a fresh look at the history of Islam and its crisis in the contemporary world. They will have to approach their task, not as champions of one ideology or another but as humanists concerned with the freedom and dignity of individual human beings. Only thus can they subject to scientific scrutiny the beliefs, attitudes and institutions that have been responsible for the debacle of Islam during the preceding hundred and fifty years. This is what the leaders of the Hindu renaissance did in the nineteenth century, and this is also what *their* spiritual forebears in Western Europe did in a still earlier age. Muslim society in India as in the rest of the world still awaits a similar renaissance, which alone can once again make

the sap of life flow through its veins. The pioneers of this renaissance can only come from the small class of educated Muslims. Most of them are today engaged in self-pity of the Mock Turtle kind, or ivory tower scholarship that has no bearing on their own problems or on those of the larger Indian society. However, if they decide to meet the challenge that Islam has been facing since at least the early years of the nineteenth century, they will soon discover that the Indian situation offers them a unique opportunity for initiating a new period of development in the history of their people. For, let us remember, Islam appeared as a liberating and unifying force in a society that was riven with tribal feuds and governed by static, closed view of life. Once again, it has to play a similar role, only in a new situation which in reality is more favourable for it despite appearances to the contrary. If educated Muslims accept this challenge, they will no doubt meet abuse and ridicule from some of their co-religionists at home and abroad. But they will also find a vast and as yet untapped source of support in the younger generation—Muslim as well as non-Muslim, in India as well as in Pakistan—whose members are being increasingly disillusioned with the politics and shibboleths of the pre-Independence days. That is also the way, and in my opinion the only way, by which they will be able to develop a new identity, more humane and better in keeping with the true spirit of Islam, in co-operation with like-minded Hindus and others of a still different faith.

DISCUSSION*

HABIBUR RAHMAN (Hyderabad)

In his article "Islam In India" (February 16|17), Mr A. B. Shah has persuaded "educated" Indian Muslims to start a "critical inquiry into its own foundations", i.e. the foundations of Islam. These, as everybody knows, consists of a sincere faith in the unity of God, the prophethood of Mohammed and the day of reckoning. The author advises Muslims to "accept science as

* The following letters appeared in *The Times of India*, Bombay.

a cultural discipline with consequences for their outlook on man and the universe."

He has approvingly quoted Marx that "the criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism." Obviously, the intention is to wean Muslims away from religion itself. I am afraid no Muslim, "educated" or otherwise, would be prepared for this adventure unless he has already rejected the foundations of Islam and has thus lost the right to be called a Muslim.

Mr Shah's claim that Christianity and Hinduism have already performed this great feat of criticising their own foundations is open to question. With regard to Hinduism, at any rate, the claim is absolutely without foundation. I wonder whether Mr Shah knows that many "educated" Hindus do not take a single step in their daily transactions without first consulting their astrologers.

His dictum that any people "can survive with honour in the modern world only if they accept science not merely as the mother of technology but as a cultural discipline with consequences for their outlook on man and the universe" has long ago been exploded by scientists themselves many of whom have acknowledged the limitations of science and have confessed the existence of a supernatural power.

Science is no longer the panacea for the ills of humanity. While it has conferred innumerable blessings on man by way of worldly comforts, it has also brought mankind to the verge of total destruction. Sincere belief in God and the hereafter is the only remedy by which we can keep the dangerous tendencies of science under control.

K. D. VALICHA (Bombay)

In his letter (March 1/2), Mr Habibur Rahman has failed to refute the case made out by Mr A. B. Shah. If Islam cannot withstand a "critical inquiry into its own foundations", then I am afraid one cannot speak very highly of that religion.

It is not true that Hinduism and Christianity have not "performed this great feat of criticising their own foundations". The task of self-criticism is performed by intellectuals, not by the common man who may or may not "consult astrologers". Is there any Muslim intellectual who has subjected Islam to criticism?

There are scores of such intellectuals both among the Hindus and the Christians.

It is equally wrong that the belief in science "has long ago been exploded by scientists themselves". What is in question is not the results of science but its methods. Any religion that totally disregards empirical and scientific methods is bound to lose some of its relevance.

Finally, it is facile to suppose that "sincere belief in God and the hereafter is the only remedy by which we can keep the dangerous tendencies of science under control". Such sincere belief in God as an alternative to science is naive and meaningless. Religion has significance only after its essential value has been freed from its empirical basis and it rises to a higher plane in an attempt at a final synthesis—and this certainly involves, to begin with, a "critical inquiry into its own foundations."

A. KARIM SHAIKH (Bombay)

Mr A. B. Shah (February 17-19) and Professor K. D. Valicha (March 11-12), who want Islam to be subjected to a critical inquiry by its followers, are ignorant of the basic Islamic concept that distinguishes Islam from other religions. The followers of other religions like Christianity, Hinduism, etc. have been subjecting their religions to critical inquiry and, whenever necessary, have been modifying their tenets, with the result that today the pure and original form of Christianity, Hinduism, etc., as first decreed by God, is in no way different from man-made laws of convenience.

As against these practices, the teachings of Islam are still free from such encroachments by man-made laws, mainly because the concept of religion among Muslims is quite different from that of the followers of other religions. To a Muslim, Islam is a system of life prescribed by God through his last prophet and is above and beyond any kind of alteration or modification.

To a Muslim, his religion is not a playground for performing intellectual exercises or philosophical pyrotechnics. There is no compromising on principles, either in the name of intellectualism or of critical inquiry.

It is also wrong to believe that Islam and science are incompatible. A properly directed study of this religion will bear out

this statement, provided all pre-conceived ideas about Islam are driven out of one's mind.

A. A. A. FYZEE (Bombay)

Professor K. D. Valicha asks: "Is there any Muslim intellectual who has subjected Islam to criticism?"

The answer is in two parts. The history of Indian efforts in this direction will be found in M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, Aziz Ahmad's two recent works, and in Fyzee, *A Modern Approach to Islam*, Chapter III.

As regards other parts of the world, the literature is enormous, but the following may be mentioned: Kenneth Cragg, *Counsels in Contemporary Islam*; E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State*; Ali Abd El Raziq, *Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*; Allal al-Fasi, *al-Naqd al-Dhati* (Cairo, and Tunis).

The real dilemma is that although criticism is offered, the majority of Muslims prefer orthodoxy. In view of what happened at the Inquisition and in the Crusades, at Buchenwald and Hiroshima, of what is now happening in the bazaars of Viet Nam and the plains of the Negev; of the way in which Harijans have been treated for the last one thousand years since chapter eleven of Manu was written, would it not be better for the physician to heal himself rather than make generalised statements based on superficial study?

The other parts of the letter are equally entertaining, but I am not good at controversy and would invite the learned professor to further and deeper study.

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY (Bombay)

Mr A. B. Shah's article "Islam in India" (February 17-18) contains several home truths about Muslims in India. "Most educated Muslims seem to be suffering from a feeling of despair and loneliness", "A feeling that they are second-class citizens", "Islam has failed its followers", "Muslims in India need a bold and new leadership".

As a Muslim who has occasionally tried to play a small part in the uplift of his community, I find nothing that I can take umbrage at in any statement of the article. Mr Habibur Rahman (March 4-5) suggests that a "sincere belief in God and the here-

after is the only remedy". But I know many Muslims whose condition is pathetic because they place more reliance on a literal interpretation of the Quran than on rationality.

Mr A. Karim Shaikh, (March 18-19) says that it is wrong to believe that Islam and science are incompatible. They are not, in fact, but in the narrow, literal Islam of today's India, they are. The originally broadminded Islamic concepts have been outdated till they are directly opposed to social progress. The personal laws of Islam, particularly, are extremely unreasonable.

In my own case, I have had to come to a pact with my brother that in the event of either of our death's occurring before our mother's, our children would not be disinherited, as would be the case according to Muslim law. Islamic law has failed us here.

Several of my friends have suffered from the easy manner in which they have been divorced under Muslim law, under a covenant framed 1,300 years ago. Inheritance, marriage and employment are the things with which men are most concerned. As far as the future of my own children goes, I would be very glad if the personal laws of Islam were altered to conform to modern concepts of justice throughout the world.

W. N. SAPRU (Jammu)

I have no difficulty in understanding Mr A. K. Shaikh's straightforward and forthright statement (March 18-19) that Islam "is not a playground for performing intellectual exercises of philosophical pyrotechnics". I also appreciate Mr A. A. A. Fyzee's reference (March 18-19) to various critical studies on the subject. Mr Fyzee is considered to be an authority on Islam, but I confess I was somewhat non-plussed by his attempt to connect critical studies of Islam with the Inquisition, the Crusades, Buchenwald, Hiroshima, Viet Nam, Negev and the Harijans. These are undeniably instances of man's behaviour that are both disgraceful and indefensible, regardless of the fact that they were perpetrated by Christians, Jews and Hindus.

Had politics, power, human psychology or mass behaviour been under discussion, a reference to cases like these would have been perfectly relevant. But the foundations of a religion on the other hand appear to be an independent and distinct

subject altogether, and I think Mr Fyzee ought not to mix them up.

A. A. A. FYZEE (Bombay)

Mr W. N. Sapru's letter (March 29-30) necessitates a brief (and final) reply to clear up a very common fallacy. Religion, as understood by the Supreme Court of India, is not only the personal and individual belief of man, but belief and conduct in consonance with it. This rule is common to many religions including Islam. It follows that legally and theologically, religion is both faith and action.

When, therefore, a religion is criticised it is not merely a theory that is challenged, but a theory plus certain actions in accord with its design. Where a Muslim king has committed a wrong, it is generally suggested by the non-Muslim critic that this is a shortcoming of Islam. The Muslim apologist immediately replies by distinguishing between the faith and the act. The two persons are not *ad idem*; this is a case of logical and semantic confusion.

My studies are confined to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. I have little knowledge of, but great respect for, other religions. It seems to be fairly clear about the Semitic religions that the theory and practice of religion do not coincide in the vast majority of cases. Religion, like *sharia*, is an ideal, rarely achieved in the ordinary life of people. Men professing a certain religion are known historically to twist its provisions to further their own political or personal ends and to err in the performance of religious duty. In this respect, all religions seem to be alike.

Thus, it is only a Muslim who can criticise Islam, his own religion; he alone can tell other Muslims how to be better Muslims and to reform Islam. This rule applies to every religion. A controversy between persons of two different faiths often results in mud-slinging and misunderstanding. Few people care to study their own religion; much less do they understand any other except to see the black spots. It is only when a person of the stamp of a Massignon, or a Goldziher or a Brunschwig enters the field that criticism is elevated to a sphere where the pure theory of Islam can be discussed and distinguished from human

action, mass or individual. In most other cases, there is a mixture of motives, or confusion of thought, logical or semantic.

M. ZAINUDDIN (Bombay)

With reference to Mr. Zafar Futehally's comments on the Islamic laws of inheritance (April 6-8), I would like to point out that the question of legal rights on family property arises only in the eventuality of the death of the relative who leaves behind an estate. They cannot be taken for granted during the life-time of the property-holder who is also free to bestow his entire property on whomsoever he desires.

How does the pact entered into by Mr. Futehally with his brother guarantee against such a possibility? The pact, therefore, is no improvement on the Muslim law.

There is a better answer to Mr Futehally's problem. The 177th verse of Surah II—*Al Baqarah* (The Cow) of the Holy Quran (which is the basic source of all Muslim law) enjoins on all persons to "give wealth, for love of Allah, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask". The same verse, it may surprise Mr Futehally, lays down that you shall "keep the pact, if you make one." What more should Mr. Futehally expect from Muslim law and the Holy Quran?

NIZAMUDDIN QURESHI (Ahmedabad)

Mr Zafar Futehally (April 3-5) wants an alteration of the personal laws of Islam in conformity with modern concepts of justice. But laws ought to be indigenous. They ought to conform to the life of the society. Muslims have to a large extent remained static and as such modernism in any form is alien to them.

Mr A. B. Shah (February 17-19) says, "Muslims in India need a bold and new leadership". It may sound burlesque, but there is no room for leadership. Maulvis are there constantly to remind Muslims to perform *namaz*, *roza* and Haj. To an ordinary Muslim, this is all that is required by his religion.

Mr A. Karim Shaikh (March 12-13) says that it is wrong to believe that Islam and science are incompatible. In theory, it may be correct. But in practice, all adhere to tradition.

Muslims believe that Allah has made this world and every-

thing therein, including their society. To alter it would be a sacrilege. They have, therefore, no problems to be solved, educational, social or economic. It is an irony of fate that a community on which leadership is enjoined by the Koran obstinately refuses to lead itself. The remedy is to realise our responsibility to build our community and the country we inhabit by re-reading Islam in the light of the knowledge the world has gained in the current era.

A. B. SHAH

My article, "Islam In India" (February 17-19), was not addressed to those—Hindus or Muslims, or the followers of any other faith or ideology—who are convinced that truths perceived in the past retain unimpaired validity today. I am not so vain as to imagine that where history and recent experience have failed, a single article of mine could succeed in waking them up from their 'dogmatic slumber'. I am therefore not surprised by the reaction of readers like Messrs Habibur Rahman, A Karim Shaikh and M. Zainuddin. I did not expect to start a dialogue with them in modern terms.

What did surprise and even disappoint me was Professor A. A. A. Fyzee's reaction (March 18, April 11). He is a scholar with a feeling for history and a sensitive intellectual committed to modern, liberal values. In a society whose spokesmen are among the most indefatigable upholders of orthodoxy anywhere in the world, the responsibility of men like Professor Fyzee is specially great. And yet, instead of giving his views publicly on the issues raised in my article (indeed, he does not even once refer to it!), he passes them by. Probably, as his reference to the Inquisition suggests, he does not wish to antagonise the faithful. But why does he demand that non-Muslims should not discuss Islam except at the research level? No belief or institution can claim such exemption from critical appraisal at the hands of anyone who is interested in it. Nor need a dialogue between adherents of different religions lead to misunderstanding. It certainly need not degenerate into mud-slinging unless one is self-righteous, as blind followers of any religion generally are.

Even then non-Muslims like me would be happy to let Islam alone if there were a vigorous movement among India's Muslims

for the modernization of their culture and society. There are Muslims who are capable of initiating such a movement, and my article was primarily aimed at them. At present their number is small and, like Mr. Zafar Futehally (April 3-5), they are isolated from one another. Till many more like him are willing to stand up and be counted, others who regard themselves as humanists first and non-Muslims afterwards, must go on prodding them despite the unpleasantness of the task.

Islam and Modernity

A Catechism

(The questions that follow were formulated by a Muslim friend who was present at a discussion meeting at the Anjuman-i-Islam, Bombay on April 14, 1968 following the publication of extracts from the preceding article, 'Islam in India: Challenge and Opportunity'.)

- Q. *When you say that "Those Muslims who on the creation of Pakistan decided to stay in India . . . etc", do you mean to say that the migration of population was in the plan of partition and Indian Muslims went against it?*
- A. No, exchange of populations was not a part of the plan of partition, in the sense that Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India were not required to migrate to India and Pakistan respectively. However, there was no bar to such migration and, as a matter of fact, mass migrations—voluntary as well as forced—did continue for about four years after the partitioning of the sub-continent. A number of Muslims who emigrated from India to Pakistan also came back after some time, and there are quite a few Muslim families some of whose members have stayed on in India while the others have migrated to and settled down in Pakistan. Those who stayed on here may therefore be deemed to have made a free choice to do so unless it can be shown that the Government of India prevented them from leaving.
- Q. *Please define 'modernity'. Topless dress, obscenity, addiction to drugs, alcoholism, night clubs, speculation, gambling, L.S.D., extra-marital relations, dating, lawlessness, homosexuality, etc. are the manifestations of modernity. Do you advise the Muslims to accept these ways of life?*
- A. For a fairly detailed discussion of what modernity means, please refer to *Tradition and Modernity in India* edited by me and C. R. M. Rao (Manaktalas, Bombay 1965, Reprinted

1967). Briefly, modernity stands for those beliefs and attitudes which distinguish the modern from the medieval man: the spirit of critical inquiry and refusal to accept any authority, however great, unless it meets the tests of reason and empirical confirmation; respect for human creativity and faith in man's ability to shape his destiny; acceptance of science not merely as a source of power but as the only reliable key to nature; willingness to test all ideologies, including religion, by their consequences for human welfare in this world rather than in the next; recognition of the moral autonomy and responsibility of the individual, hence of his inherent worth regardless of caste, religion, race or sex; and a number of similar other things.

Modernity does *not* imply any of the so-called manifestations attributed to it in the second part of the question. As a matter of fact, quite a few of them—obscenity in literature, lawlessness, homosexuality and extra-marital relations were to be found in all medieval or ancient civilizations, including the Islamic. For instance, homosexuality was widely prevalent in the Greek and Islamic civilizations; lawlessness, in the medieval European and Indian civilizations. Similar statements can be made about drug addiction, extra-marital relations (what does the system of women slaves in Islam mean?) and alcoholism prevalent in past cultures. The fact that such a question is asked is itself an indication of the level at which the average educated Muslim thinks.

- Q. *How do you distinguish between feeling of injustice and of despair among Muslims?*
- A. Most Indian Muslims seem to feel that they are not getting what is their due in terms of their numbers; this is the feeling of injustice. Most of them also feel that they cannot hope to get justice in a country in which they constitute less than 15 per cent of the total population; this is the feeling of despair.

I may add that in my view both these feelings arise primarily from the Muslims' failure not only to adapt their political outlook to the emerging secular state in India but also to modify their outlook on man, society and nature in the light of modern knowledge.

- Q. (a) *How do you say that 'most educated Muslims feel loneliness and despair'?*
- (b) *When there is a large number of Muslims, what is the cause of their loneliness and despair?*
- A. (a) From my talks with educated Muslims and my reading of what appears in the publications of political or quasi-social Muslim organizations, apart from what some Muslim leaders occasionally say in public, especially when they are out of power.
- (b) This part of the question is discussed in the main article itself.
- Q. *What is the mainstream of national life? Please explain.*
- A. By the 'mainstream of national life' is meant all those activities—political, economic, social and cultural—which constitute the life of the Indian people *as a nation*. Even if some of these activities are of local or sectional interest, they will be part of *national* life provided they have significance beyond the group that is involved in them and make a contribution to the evolution of a common, identifiable national culture and society. Thus educational planning in India, the development of science and technology, the growing industrialization of the Indian economy, the steady (even if slow) modernization of rural society, the national press (daily as well as periodical), the debates on problems of economic, defence, foreign and language policies—these and many other elements constitute the national life of India. Politics, though important, is only one such element and it is not the most important element of the national life of a people.
- My submission is that, with a few exceptions, Indian Muslims have kept aloof from all these processes. They seem to prefer keeping within their own shell, probably because the environment in which they have to function is non-Muslim to a much greater extent than before partition and they have not yet been able to accept the rights and obligations of citizenship in a secular, democratic state.
- Q. *How do you distinguish between the feeling of defeatism of Indian Muslims from their feeling of injustice?*

- A. This question has already been answered earlier.
- Q. *What have you to say about the anti-Muslim riots and their impact on the Muslim mind?*
- A. This question would require a full-length article, which I hope to do in a few months. Here I shall only answer it in brief.

All riots—whether anti-Muslim or anti-Hindu, anti-Harijan or anti-Ahmadi—are a disgrace to the country or State in which they take place, and Government should take the severest possible action, including shooting in public, against those who are found guilty of provoking them. However, let us realize that communal riots are an index of religious revivalism, which is gaining strength among Muslims no less than among Hindus. The Muslims' opposition to the modernization of their personal law in the name of religion, their opposition to family planning on the same ground, their insistence on judging every problem in the sphere of domestic or foreign policies from the point of view of 'Islamic' countries rather than India's, the pro-Pakistani and anti-Indian propaganda carried on overtly or covertly by *some* (not all) Muslim organizations in India and the absence of forthright public criticism of such undesirable things from sober and enlightened Muslims, and the attempts of some reactionary Mullas, for example, in Gujarat, to convert Hindus or neo-Buddhists to Islam—all these project an unfavourable picture of the Muslim community before the eyes of the well-meaning but inadequately informed Hindus. The result is a strengthening of Hindu communalism, which is able to exploit the fears of many a non-communalist Hindu.

Secondly, it is not true, as is suggested by the wording of the question, that all communal riots are anti-Muslim in the sense that the first provocation is provided by Hindus. Please see the statement in the *Introduction* on this point, and also consider the fact that there are hardly any Hindu-Christian riots in India though nearly 2 crore Christians inhabit the land.

The question about the impact of such riots on the Muslim mind is rhetorical and needs no answer. It can be put, with a suitable change in the wording, in relation to

Hindus also. The point is that fear and hatred are bred in an atmosphere of mutual exclusiveness and they set in a chain reaction. The only way to change this situation, in the long run, is rapid modernization of both Hindu and Muslim societies. In the short run, Government has to be firm and, if necessary, change the existing law in order to provide deterrent punishment to those who plan or provoke riots. But Government can do little even then unless local leaders of both communities show much greater good sense than they have done so far and co-operate with it in a critical-constructive way.

Q. *You have not at all said anything about such an important factor as anti-Muslim riots—a main bug that is eating into the core of national life and driving the Muslims to despair?*

A. This question has just been answered above.

Q. *What do you mean by accepting science as a cultural discipline? Which religious community has accepted it and how?*

A. Science has two aspects: quest for truth and conquest of nature. Of the two, the former is basic and historically prior. Science as quest is a cultural discipline, which clarifies and often modifies our notion of truth, provides a method of discovering it and, more important still, of testing its validity. Thus, during the last three hundred years it has given us important knowledge about the structure of the universe, the properties of matter and living creatures, and the mind of man. This knowledge constitutes the core of the positive achievements of various sciences—cosmology, physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and their branches too numerous to mention. It has forced thinking men to revise their ideas on God, soul, heaven and hell, the origin of the universe and the evolution of life, the human being by himself and in society, ideas of virtue and vice, good and evil, rights of women, indeed everything that is of interest to us. For a detailed discussion of science as quest please see my *Scientific Method* (Allied Publishers, Bombay 1964).

Culture is nothing but the set of *vital* ideas that govern a man's (or society's) life and the institutions he builds or

the activities he undertakes to translate these ideas into practice. Because science influences and even changes these ideas, it is a cultural, as distinguished from a professional or technological, discipline.

Different societies have assimilated science as a cultural discipline to different degrees—Westerners more than Easterners, Hindus more than Muslims, Protestants more than Catholics, and so on. The extent of success achieved by them depends directly on the degree to which they have cultivated a spirit of free inquiry and of tolerance of non-conformist opinion.

Q. *Do you know that Islam is not merely a method of rituals but a complete and perfect code of life?*

A. I know that many Muslims believe so, though their own practice may differ from it as much as that of the followers of any other religion differs from the precepts of *their* religion. Also, every religion is a 'complete and perfect code of life' in the eyes of those who sincerely believe in it. Even communists, who are atheists, have the same attitude to Marxism.

Where does all this lead except to a competition in fanaticism?

Q. *Do you know that a Muslim ceases to be a Muslim the moment he believes he has a right to change the rules given by the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad?*

A. This question raises a number of interesting points. First, are Muslim scholars agreed among themselves on what makes one Muslim? Obviously, they were not as early as in Abu Hanifa's time (see 'The Fiqh Akbar I' and 'The Epistle of Abu Hanifa to Uthmān al-Battī, quoted in *Islam*, edited by John A. Williams, Prentice-Hall International, London 1961), that is, within a hundred years of the Prophet's death. The poliferation of sects within Islam and their brutal persecution of one another, all in the name of Islam and all professing unqualified faith in the Quran, should make one chary of swearing by the scripture. Nor is religious persecution confined to the medieval period of the history of Islam, as the anti-Ahmadi riots in Pakistan in 1953 demon-

strated with gruesome evidence. Incidentally, the Munir Commission, which enquired into these riots, also came to the conclusion that it was not possible to formulate a universally acceptable definition of 'Muslim' even within the orthodox fold. The Commission says at p. 205 of its Report:

'What is Islam and who is a *momin* or a Muslim? We put this question to the *ulama*.....We cannot refrain from saying here that it was a matter of infinite regret to us that the *ulama* whose first duty should be to have settled views on this subject were hopelessly disagreed among themselves.'

After giving the definitions given by various *ulama* the Commission observes (p. 218):

'Keeping in view the several definitions given by the *ulama*, need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental? If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given by any one of the *ulama*, we remain Muslims according to the view of that *alim* but *kafirs* according to the definition of everyone else.'

Proceeding further, the Commission says (p. 219):

'The net result of all this is that neither Shias nor Sunnis nor Deobandis nor Ahl-i-Hadith nor Barelvis are Muslims. Any change from one view to the other must be accompanied in an Islamic state with the penalty of death if the Government of the state is in the hands of the party which considers the other party to be *kafirs*.'

Now the interesting thing is that all these self-righteous and mutually hostile Muslim sects swear by the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad. Obviously, therefore, their differences centre round the *interpretation* to be put on the text of the Quran and the Prophet's authentic precepts. *There is no criterion anywhere in the entire literature of Islam which shows how such interpretation is to be arrived at in a manner that would satisfy all learned divines.* Perennial

sectarianism is thus inherent in Islam as in any other religion whose adherents insist on treating its scriptures as literally the final word of God.

Secondly, even where the Quran is unambiguous, how many Muslims really live according to it, in deed as in word? Is there any Muslim state which is, or ever was, based on *shariat* after the Prophet's death? Is Pakistan a *kafir* state because its Government recently espoused family planning as a fundamental human right? Was Mr M. A. Jinnah a Muslim though in his address to the Pakistani Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947 he said the following?

'...everyone of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this State with equal rights, privileges and obligations',

and

'You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State',

and finally,

'I think that we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that *in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims*, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the *political sense as citizens of the State.*' (italics mine)

Mr Jinnah did not believe in the idea of *dhimmis*, still less of *kafirs* who, according to the Quran, can be given only the option of accepting Islam or death. Those Muslims who oppose family planning or a modernization of their personal law on the ground that the Quran does not permit it should make up their mind as to whether they would follow the Quran blindly in all respects, or only in those where it suits their convenience. And is it not true that the traditional personal law of the Muslims is shown greater consideration

in India than in 'Islamic' countries like Turkey, Pakistan, Iran or Egypt in matters of marriage and divorce?

To sum up, Muslims in India have to decide whether they wish to live as the citizens of a secular, democratic state with equal rights and obligations under the law, or to continue stagnating as long as Hindu politicians allow them to do so for the sake of their votes. In either case, they are not going to be able to follow the Quran blindly. (Nor need this upset them too much: no people have followed their scriptures blindly except perhaps during the first few years of the founding of their religion, in any case never after the death of the founder.) But if Muslims decide to adopt a critical and historical approach to their tradition, including the Quran and the *sunnah*, they will be able to progress without ceasing to be good Muslims in their personal life. If on the other hand, they decide to follow the guidance of *ulama* like Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi, they will only harm themselves and the glorious elements in the heritage of Islam.

- Q. *How can you say that Muslims have done no research in Islam when according to Edmund Burke there were more than a thousand eminent writers on law who have written far more voluminous works than those known in the common law in England?*
- A. Quantity is no substitute for quality; the text of the *Bhagavadgita* is not even one-tenth of Dr S. Radhakrishnan's commentary on it. The same is true of the works of almost all Muslim scholars of Islam. In the words of Professor M. Mujeeb (*The Indian Muslims*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1967, p. 58),

'The urge to study the Quran and the whole corpus of *hadiths* in order to form an independent judgement was discouraged, and scholars devoted their attention instead to writing commentaries upon or preparing adaptations of the recognized and prescribed books. Indian Muslim jurists did not permit themselves the exercise of independent judgement even in matters of detail.'

I do not know if the questioner would regard Professor

Mujeeb as a *Muslim* scholar. I know that *Radiance* (April 7, 1968) regards Syed Ameer Ali and Professor A. A. A. Fyzee as guilty of 'intellectualism'.

Lest it should be thought that Indian Muslims have, by and large, been specially lacking in a critical faculty, let us see what Al-Ghazālī had to say as early as the eleventh century A.D. In his *Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazālī* (tr. Montgomery Watt, George Allen & Unwin, London 1953), we find:

'...those who devote themselves eagerly to the mathematical sciences ought to be restrained. Even if their subject-matter is not relevant to religion, yet, since they belong to the foundations of philosophical sciences, the student is infected with the evil and corruption of the philosophers. (p. 34).

'Just as it is not a condition of religion to reject medical science, so likewise the rejection of natural science is not one of its conditions, *except with regard to particular points*. (p. 36; italics mine.)

'Whoever researches in such matters (medical science and astronomy) knows of necessity that this knowledge is attained only by Divine inspiration and by assistance from God most high. It cannot be reached by observation.' (p. 65)

And finally,

'Indeed a man is very foolish and very ignorant if he tries to show by intellectual means that these arrangements (of formal worship) are wise, or if he fancies that they are specified accidentally and not from a Divine mystery in them which fixes them by way of the property.' (p. 70)

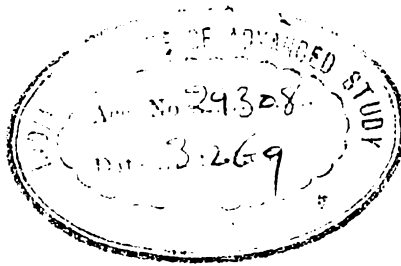
Similar mystification and pooh-poohing of rational inquiry is to be found in all religions, but whereas most followers of other religions have accepted science without any reserve, most followers of Islam even today would reject scientific theories if they went against what is said in the Quran.

- Q. *You must have read a lot of literature against purdah. Have you read any book in favour of it?*

- A. I have not come across any book which deals exclusively with *purdah*, but I have come across many books which *inter alia* give a defence of the system. The defence given is in every case unconvincing and sometimes obnoxious.
- Q. *What do you mean by the debacle of Islam?*
- A. The degradation and stagnation of Muslim society almost everywhere in the world.
- Q. *What is the injustice done to woman in Islam in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance?*
- A. (a) *Marriage*. According to the Quran, a Muslim man can have four wives and any number of women slaves at a time, whereas a Muslim woman can have only one husband at a time. This is not to suggest that polyandry should be permitted, but only to point out that polygamy and male freedom to have extra-marital relations in the absence of similar freedom for women are unjust.
- (b) *Divorce*. A Muslim can divorce his wife, without giving any reason or providing for her maintenance, by merely pronouncing three times his wish to do so. Also, 'meher' is not legally obligatory.
- (c) *Inheritance*. A female heir can get only half of what a male heir can get by way of inheritance.
- It may be added that the Muslim law of evidence is similarly unfavourable to women.
- Q. *Can woman be equal to man in every respect?*
- A. No; nor, for that matter, can one man be equal to another. Women are superior to men in certain respects, and *vice versa*. And yet, despite the variation from one human being to another, all are equal in the eyes of law and, I would like to believe, in the eyes of God too.
- Q. *How do you distinguish progressive thinking and modern living from constructive thinking and respectful living?*
- A. Progressive thinking, if I understand the words correctly (they are not mine), implies the acceptance of science as a cultural discipline and is thus constructive thinking. If 'respectful living' means a mode of living in which one respects

the inherent worth of other human beings regardless of their sex or religion, it would imply an attitude of tolerance to dissenters, even to apostates and *kafirs*. It would in this sense be equivalent to 'modern living' as I would understand the phrase.

- Q. *When shameful acts of sodomy and homosexuality can enjoy legal sanction in the West, why should Islam not be proud of its rigidity and orthodoxy?*
- A. The claims of the West as well as those of Islam or Hinduism have to be critically examined in the light of what we believe good or bad from the standpoint of human welfare. One should not blindly follow any religion or tradition; that, indeed, is what the scientific attitude enjoins. Also, it should be remembered that the shortcomings of one culture cannot be the defence of those of another.



ABOUT THE BOOK

The issues dealt with in this book pose a challenge to secularism in India. Unless tackled with courage and firmness, they would also undermine the very foundations of the Indian State by aggravating communal tensions, retarding economic development and inhibiting social liberalization among Hindus no less than among Muslims.

Whether it is the Shankaracharya's demand for a total ban on cow-slaughter, or the Muslims' refusal to agree to a modernization of their personal law, or the increasing frequency of Hindu-Muslim riots—in each case, the problem is political only in its expression; essentially, it is cultural and is rooted in an attitude of blind adherence to religion as the arbiter of public policy. Many Hindus and most Muslims have yet to realize that the injunctions of religion which have a bearing on secular affairs have to be subordinated to the demands of the modern conscience and criteria provided by the sciences of man and nature. This book seeks to examine from such a point of view two of the challenges that Hindu as well as Muslim obscurantism poses to secularism in India.

The Indian Secular Forum, which has sponsored this book, is a voluntary, non-sectarian group of citizens who, despite differences of faith, are agreed that the proper role of religion in the contemporary world is that of a personal relationship between the individual and his God. They are opposed to its exploitation for promoting mutual hatred and separatism, or for perpetuating inequitable relations between the sexes and among social groups.

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