

"O mankind, surely we have created you from male and female, and made you tribes and families that you may know one another."

(Quran 49:13)

# PROGRESSIVE ISLAM

A monthly publication dedicated to the promotion of knowledge concerning  
Islam and modern thought.

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## THE UNIVERSAL ASPECT OF SOCIAL PLANNING

It is an undeniable fact that a human being can not live without a society of fellow creatures. Right from antiquity down to the present age, this idea of man as a social being had always been thought about with different emphasis and various conceptions of its meaning and value. We could very well understand this since man's thought and belief shall never be the same everywhere due to the differing cultural, situational, spatial and temporal forces that moulded his outlook on life.

This difference between human beings has been put forward by the Quran as one of the categories of human existence. The differing conceptions concerning man and his society is thus a logical outcome of the fact that human beings do not share the same outlook on life. But despite these differences in systems of thought and belief, there exist certain common factors possessing universal validity in various times and places. One of these common factors is the survival of the group and the continuity of its culture and tradition. One of the common factors in the realm of norms is for instance the prohibition against incest. *It is on these universally valid common denominations of humanity that the Islamic faith bases its systems of thought and belief. Although the Islamic faith is not universally embraced by the whole of mankind, yet in order to become universally valid it has*

*to be based on truths and principles which are to be found in all places and in all times, and which pertain to the original nature of man.* Thus for instance the Shari'ah's formulation of the laws relating to the supply of water is derived from the universally valid fact that

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human beings can not live without water. Since water is a condition for his life, the right to have it is inviolable. Since the right to have it is inviolable, no single human being can have the ownership or monopoly of the main sources of water supply. Here the Islamic law established the principle of collective ownership of certain vital conditions of living. Collective ownership, which is symbolized by the term 'the rights of God', does not confine itself only to agricultural matters such as water supply but to other sources of human livelihood and psycho-physical welfare. Thus as Santillana observed, Islamic law, having as its scope social utility, is essentially progressive<sup>1</sup>). That there are some parts of the Shari'ah which are outdated and to a certain extent absurd such as to be found in the books on law, does not affect the nature of its totality and the structure on which it is based. There has never been any system of law before which was completely devoid of defects. In our opinion, those defects which we have come to regard as such now, belong to the domain of details rather than to the main structure.

We have cited as an example of the Islamic basis of law as derived from a universally established human necessity, that connected with the supply of water. We have also mentioned that the same principle and attitude from which the law concerning the supply of water is derived namely that dealing with collective ownership, is also applicable to other spheres of social regulation. This would include vital industries, roads,

national means of defence, etc., etc. Thus our universal approach towards the ordering of our society pervades the entire realm of our social planning. *In fact if we try to look a bit further, we shall discover that in almost all phases of human thought and action, the Islamic faith recommended its adherents to seek the foundations which possess universal validity. The Quran has described the religion of Islam as the ideal nature in which God has created all men. Consequently in the ordering of our social life we must look to the experiences of humanity in general as far as it permits us to do so. That common element of humanity which God has endowed all of us with, unravels itself in diverse forms in different times and places. That we might separate the right from the wrong development of our basic human nature, we must compare the developments of different societies with one another and also with that of ours. For by comparing one another's experience we learn more about each other. It is in respect of this attitude that we shall ban from our Islamic society any form of cultural parochialism prejudicial to our development. Whoever opposes or hinders our attempt to widen our intellectual horizon is guilty of cultural parochialism, an outlook repulsive to the spirit of Islam. It is not sufficient for us to say that our forefathers had said so and so, and therefore it shall be so and so. Rather we must re-assess our intellectual heritage in the light of modern achievements.*

<sup>1</sup>) In *Legacy of Islam*, art. *Law and Society*.

## BUDGETING AND TAXATION IN THE TIME OF THE HOLY PROPHET

By

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah

*Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah is author of several works on Islamic topics. At the moment he is residing in Paris. The article which he kindly sent us below, reflected a new approach towards the study of Islam. Not only the method of study, but the selection of the subject itself is of prime importance. Questions related to budgeting and taxation belong to those which we ought to consider as vital. We have more than once emphasized the fact that the material basis of life must be tackled first before we proceed to cultivate its spiritual and psychological aspects. The Prophet himself is an exemplary guide in our approach to this subject. Dr. Hamidullah's presentation of the subject is illuminative as well as encouraging towards further research in this direction. Ed.*

Of all the religious books of yore, to my knowledge the *Qur'an* is the only one which has laid down precise instructions as to the policy of the

state regarding the expenditure of its income. In pre-Islamic days the income of the state was considered to be the private property of the head

of the state (or the chief of the tribe), but the Prophet declared that the proceeds from *zakah* (i.e. income coming from the pockets of the Muslim nationals of the state) is forbidden (*haram*) for him (the Prophet), for his family and for the members not only of his clan of the *Banu-Hashim*, but even of the allied and cousin-clan of the *Banu-al Muttalib*. This proud tradition of Islam, whenever acted upon, eliminated corruption and brought peace and prosperity to all who lived in a Muslim state. The institutions of the time of the holy Prophet have so far received but only meagre attention on the part of scholars, and it will take many generations of savants to fill this lacuna. Fortunately the data is not lacking; only it is dispersed, and has to be picked up from a vast amount of literature and then put together to make the picture complete. An attempt is being made here to give a brief account of the system of taxation and budgeting in the time of the holy Prophet.

#### Background

Before doing so, it may be useful to recall the conditions in the pre-Islamic Arabia. Leaving aside the pre-Athens and pre-Rome civilizations in Arabia, in the states of Ma'in and Saba' — the latter of the Queen Bilqis' fame — on which our knowledge is scanty and uncertain and which relate to Yaman, which is rather far removed from the Hijaz, I would refer to Mecca and Madinah only in this connection.

#### Mecca

The earliest inhabitants of the region of Mecca were of the 'Amaliqah (and it is a branch of this same tribe which was living in Palestine at the time of the Exodus, when the Jews, emigrating from Egypt, attempted to expel them and appropriate the land).

According to the history *Manaih-al-Karm* (cited in *Mirat al-Haramayn*, I, 69), these pre-historic Amalecites used to levy a tithe on those merchants who entered Mecca with their goods. When, about two thousand years before Christ, in the time of the Prophet Isma'il a confederacy was established in the city-state of Mecca, under two cousin clans of *Jurhum* and *Qatura*, our sources (Ibn-Hisham, p. 72; Azraqi, p. 47; *Aghani*, XIII, 108) report that the people entering from the northern route, paid the tithe to the *Jurhumite* chief; and those entering from the southern route, paid the same to the *Qaturite* chief. Coming nearer to historical times, when Qusayy (ancestor of the Holy Prophet in the fifth degree), wrested power from the tribe of *Khuza'ah*, and the Qurayshites got hegemony in the city, we come across another institution for income. Qusayy is the contemporary of the first Byzantine Emperor (4th century of the Christian

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era). When he saw that his clan was not sufficiently numerous, and feared that his *coup d'etat* might not be recognized by the general Arabs, who used to throng in Mecca for the pilgrimage instituted by the prophet Abraham, he suggested to his clansmen to donate for a fund which he would use for feasting the pilgrims and providing transport to the poor and destitute ones having no means of their own to return home. This contribution was called *rafadah*, and became an annual tax (Cf. Ibn-Hisham, p. 83. Tabari, p. 1099, Ibn-Sa'd, 1/1, p. 41, Yaqut; Makkah, etc). There were some other sources of municipal income also. For instance, the offerings for the temple of the *Ka'bah*, or for the several idols in the city, venerated by the local people as well as by the foreign pilgrims, were preserved (under the name of *Amwal Muhajjarah*), and were certainly used in emergencies, such as the defence of the city against foreign attack, etc. The tips paid to the officer in charge of the holy well of *Zamzam* (for drinking its water) and to the one in charge of the holy arrows consulted as oracles, went apparently to the private coffers of these officers or "Ministers" of the Mecca oligarchy. (For the offerings to the *Ka'bah*, see Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Al-'Iqd*, ed. Bulaq, II, 45-46, among others.)

#### Madinah

In pre-Islamic Madinah, there was anarchy, Arabs and Jews constantly fighting with each other and never evolving a central authority. Yet, among the Jews of the *Banu-al-Nadir*, at least, we come across central finance. In his biography of the Prophet, Sha'mi reports, that the *Nadirites* had a treasury (*kanz*), to which they all contributed for emergency requirements; that when they migrated to Khaybar, which place was later occupied by the Prophet, he asked them the surrender of this treasury and when the

officer in charge was proved to have told a lie in his assertion that the treasury was exhausted, because it was later found concealed in a secret place, he was punished, and the treasury was confiscated.

This is enough to give us an idea of the conditions prevailing in the more advanced centres of human conglomerations in Arabia before Islam.

### *Early Islam*

As we all know, when Islam was first preached it was not the religion of the state, but had, on the contrary, to struggle against very heavy odds for its very existence. The number of its adherents no doubt increased steadily and gradually, yet for the first thirteen years of its life, this small community had no liberty even to live, much less to organize itself. The teachings of Islam being based from the beginning on high levels of morality, it was natural that the Prophet exhorted his disciples always to give charity. We have unmistakable proof of it in the *Qur'an*, where the so-called Meccan chapters also speak of such terms as *zakah* purification, growth; therefore giving away a part of the growth to purify it), *sadaqah* (charity, truthfulness; therefore charity as a sign of true believer), *haqq* (right: therefore if charity is the right of the poor, it is the duty of the well-to-do), *nafaqah* (expenditure, particularly in the path of God) all signifying practically the same thing, — a sort of almsgiving. I have not yet found proof of these contributions of the first Muslims having been collected and disbursed by the central authority. Probably each Muslim spent according to his means and at his own will, whenever there was a worthy cause or a deserving case. Naturally there was no fixed rate either at that time. It is perhaps noteworthy that in one of these early chapters of the *Qur'an*, there is an exhortation to Muslims, saying that the former religious communities, Jews and Christians, too, were enjoined by God to spend their money in charitable causes.

### *After the Hijrah*

The conditions changed fundamentally when the holy Prophet and the persecuted Muslims left Mecca and settled in Madinah. A state was established there, a small city-state though; the Muslims had now all the liberty they needed to live as they liked, without fear or persecution. The *Qur'an* (4 : 4) calls money the very means of existence, a support *sine qua non*, of humanity. No wonder if the *Qur'an* repeats the expression scores of times — an expression in which the service of prayer and the payment of the surplus-

property tax have been conjugated and placed at the same level, and consequently imply the welding of the spiritual and the temporal into one greater and completer whole.

The State established in Madinah was not the continuation of something already existing, a mere change of dynasty; it was on the other hand an evolution from tribalism to a superior order of society, a city-state first, and a vester state later. Naturally every thing had to be created anew, from top to bottom, because the persons at the helm of affairs, the Prophet and his immediate collaborators, had inherited neither any traditions of government nor any administrative institutions.

As far as the financial aspect of the administration is concerned, we see a gradual evolution, beginning with persuasion and recommendation and culminating into obligations and duties enforced with all the power that society could command. In the very first sermon which the Prophet delivered on his arrival in Madinah, he said: "In order to save you from hell, you have to spend, even a part of a date-fruit" (Ibn-Hisham, p. 340). One of his earliest acts was to rehabilitate the displaced persons, the refugees coming from Mecca without any means of livelihood. The arrangement was simple but efficacious: he ascertained the number of the refugee families, and then convoked a general meeting of the well-to-do Muslim inhabitants of Madinah, and told them that each head of the family should take one Meccan family. This fraternization was based on the condition that members of the two families would jointly work, jointly earn, and jointly share, even inheriting each other's property to the exclusion of other blood-relations. This was an emergency order, with, of course, the possibility of separation at option.

Next we come across an organized system of the distribution of charities; the Prophet himself received the contributions, and then distributed them among the most needy. As has already been mentioned he and his near relatives were not to benefit from this charity, which was declared religiously forbidden (*haram*) to them, eliminating all possibilities of temptations to abuse public confidence.

The third stage was to make charity a state duty, a real tax. Its exact date may not be determined, yet it cannot be later than the year 8 of *hijrah*. For we possess a document, a treaty between the Prophet and the newly converted tribe of Aslam, in which not only the expression "establishing services of prayer and paying *zakah* tax" has been accorded from the duty of leaving their homes and migrating to the territory of the Islamic State (Cf. *al-Watha'iq al-Siyasiyah*, No. 165). We know that on the conquest of Mecca in

the year 8 H., the obligation of the emigration of the Arab tribes from their home and hearth to the Islamic territory was abandoned

It seems that during this period the *zakah* tax was brought to the Prophet, who had made no arrangement to send officials to collect it. This came in the fourth and the last stage, when tax-collectors were posted all over the country, and detailed instructions were given them as to the rate and tariffs of various taxes.

### *Nature of Zakah and Sadaqah*

From the brief sketch given above, it will be apparent that the Prophet did not change the terms (*zakah*, *haqq* and *sadaqah*) yet there was a marked evolution in their sense. In Mecca they meant a charity, an alms-giving; in Madinah they implied nothing less than a fixed duty, even as prayer and fasting. The term *nafaqah* or *infaq* was retained in the original Meccan sense even in Madinah, and it meant voluntary charity, at the option and according to the means of the individuals; it entailed certainly a divine reward in the after-life if acted upon, yet it did not entail a sanction, a punishment (neither in this world nor in the here-after) if disregarded. This is important to bear in mind in order to better grasp the nature of taxation in Islam. For all practical purposes, *zakah*, *haqq* and *sadaqah* may be taken as synonymous terms, meaning a government tax with the double sanction, spiritual and temporal, even as is the entire life of a Muslim in which both these aspects are welded together to create an equilibrium in man with his complex nature. The most one can say is, that these terms applied to contributions coming from the Muslims; income from non-Muslims was not included in *zakah*; it could be *kharaj*, *ghanimah* etc.

The *zakah* and the *sadaqah* of the time of the Prophet included not only tax on cash, but also the land revenue and the tax on domesticated animals (sheep, goats, camels and cows); it included further the tax on bee-hives, on mines (particularly of gold and silver, and apparently also of iron), on treasure groves, and the like. Without going into all the details and making exhaustive research here, it may be said that the *zakah* and *sadaqah* comprised in fact the entire state income of the time of the holy Prophet in so far as it was collected from the Muslim subjects. There is no reason to believe that the items taxed and the rates charged were meant to be unchangeable even with the exigencies of times and circumstances. Classical Muslim scholars have clearly recognized that. The caliph 'Umar is reported to have lowered the existing rate of import duty on consumers goods coming to Ma-

dinah from ten to only five percent (abu-'Ubayd, 1660).

### *Tariffs of Taxes*

The *Qur'an* is silent as to the rates to be charged on different taxable articles belonging to the Muslims. This silence may be taken as an indication to the elasticity of the Muslim law on the subject. The Arabia of fourteen hundred years ago did not provide much, owing to the barren nature of the soil. There was some agricultural land; it was subjected to a tithe (*'ushr*) at every harvest if the land of an individual produced more than a certain minimum which was tax-free. There were date groves, vineyards, fields of wheat and barley and so on, including gardens of fruit trees. Taxes on such items were paid in kind, and not in cash. Then there were domesticated animals; roughly they paid one per cent, every year, provided they were fed on general pastures, and provided also that the number of animals belonging to an individual surpassed the tax-free minimum. In the case of currency, gold and silver the rate was two and a half per cent every year. It is to be noted that this tax was not levied on income, but on the savings: if a certain amount was saved and remained unspent during a whole year, the owner was in duty bound to pay the necessary tax to the central government or its agents. Commerce was also included in the same category; the tax was paid on the stocks. Here debts were taken into consideration, and proportionately the amount was deducted from the savings and the stocks; the rest was taxable. The exploitation of mines was also to the tithe, and already in the time of the Prophet this item of income was well-known.

Besides these there were other sources of income, such as import duty on foreigners. International trade was not un-known in Madinah at this epoch, and the Nabatean traders used to bring to that place wheat, oil, olive etc. There was also a sort of scutage tax on those who did not render military service. Another source of income were the agreements which had been made between the Prophet and different localities.

### *Expenditure*

The *Qur'an* (9 : 61) had laid down very precise orders as to the expenditure of the State income, which is not left at the tender mercy of the head of the State. It says:

"The *sadaqat* (i.e. taxes coming from Muslims) are intended nothing otherwise than for the Muslim poor (*fuqara'*), the poor among the resident aliens (*masakin*), for functionaries of the tax administration, for winning the hearts, for libera-

ting the slaves and the prisoners of war, for aiding those heavily indebted, in the path of God, and for the wayfarer; this is an obligation from God and God is knowing, wise."

A very brief explanation may not be out of place. The *fugara* or the Muslim poor do not call for any elaborate discussion here. The very high authority of the caliph 'Umar is there to support the view that the term *masakin* meant the poor among the non-Muslim inhabitants of the Islamic State. The Semitic philology also confirms it; for instance in the famous code of Hammurabi we come across the term *mushkino* which there means a resident alien, very much akin to the *dhimmis* of the later Muslim law. The root

"s-k-n" means residing, inhabiting, i.e. in a foreign country. The functionaries, whose salaries are charged on the income, are not only those engaged for the collection, but also accounting, auditing and disbursing. Seeing the items of expenditure, it means practically the entire administration of the time of the Prophet. Baladhuri, in his *Ansab*, refers to the fact, that the caliph 'Umar once requested the governor of Syria to send some Greek experts to Madinah to put right the government accounts.

These were certainly non-Muslims; and of course had to be paid for the service. For "those whose hearts are to be won," the following quotation may be of interest: As to "those whose hearts are to be won," they are of four kinds. Firstly there are those, whose hearts are won in order to make them come to the aid of the Muslims. Secondly there are those whose hearts are won for making them abstain from doing harm to Muslims. Thirdly there are those whose hearts are won for (their) embracing Islam. Fourthly there are those whose winning of heart persuades their peoples and their clans (aqually) to embrace Islam. So it is permissible that each and every (one belonging to) these kinds should be the recipient of this item of *zakah* be he a Muslim or a polytheist." (abu-Ya'la'-al-Farra': *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyah*, p. 116). We may call it in modern terms the secret service. That the government had to provide regularly in its annual budget for the liberation of slaves and subjects of the Islamic State (both Muslims and non-Muslims) taken prisoner by the enemy in a war, is too eloquent to require explanation. Slavery in Islam is for the benefit of the slave, not for his exploitation by the capitalist. A slave originally came from the prisoners of war, who had lost all their belongings, home, family and all else; as slaves in an Islamic State they got a home and means of livelihood. Not only is it the duty of the Muslim State to gradually buy the slaves and free them, but a slave can also at his will get freed if he is willing

to earn and pay off his value to his master, who is not entitled to refuse this (on the authority of the *Qur'an*: 24 : 33) if the court is satisfied that the slave has been sufficiently civilized and would cause no harm to the State if he is freed. The item "heavily indebted" is wide enough; mere loans could be given him. The interest-free lending under government supervision would eradicate usury from the country (even as meeting all requirements of the people), just as the other item eradicates slavery from the Islamic society. The "path of God" is also a comprehensible term; from equipping the national army down to grants in aid to students, all could be included therein. The last item, "wayfarer", may be aided not only by free boarding and lodging, but also by improving touristic conditions: hotels, restaurants, means of transports, security of roads and the like.

If we visualise the condition of Arabia in the time of the holy Phophet, it is not difficult to see that the above-mentioned items practically exhausted all the needs and requirements of the budding state and nascent community of Islam; they went much beyond what was known in the neighbouring "civilized" countries of Byzantium and Iran. In fact the Prophet established a welfare State. If we look to its spirit, there is not the least difficulty in concluding that the Islamic law of finance has great elasticity for further expansion to meeting the requirements of any age and any civilization.

#### *Budgets of the time of the Prophet*

The Islamic State, founded and run by the holy Prophet, was a growing and over-expanding organism. It began in the first year of the *hijrah* with only a few streets of the small city of Madinah. But a few years later when he breathed his last, the whole of Arabia and parts of southern Palestine and 'Iraq were under his jurisdiction. This meant almost a million square miles. This was the achievement of ten years only, that is to say, about 274 square miles were on an average added *DAILY* to the Islamic State. Naturally therefore the income of the State varied from year to year, even from day to day. It is not possible to give exact figures for the entire country for any year; only stray figures can be given:

The income from Bahrayn (not the island of this name, but modern al-Hasa' district, opposite the island of Bahrayn) was eighty thousand *dirhams* (Yaqut, *Mu'jam-al-Buldan*, §Bahrayn).

The region of Khaybar had agreed to divide its agricultural products in a 50 : 50 ratio. This brought twenty thousand *wasq* (apparently of dates and wheat) to the Muslim government

every year. (Ibn abi-Shaybah, cited in the foot note of abu-'Ubayd's *Amwal*, 1437).

The localities in Palestine (of Jarba' and Adhruh) had each engaged to pay annually one hundred *dinars* (Ibn Sa'd, etc.)

The port of Aylah, on the gulf of 'Aqabah, paid three hundred *dinars* every year. (Ibn Sa'd; Maq-rizi; *imta'*, I, 468).

The region of Najran, in Yaman, paid two thousand garments every year, each garment valuing one ounce of gold.

(*al-Kharaj* of abu-Yusuf, p. 41, among others). There was weaving industry in this locality which was inhabited by the Christians,

The port of Maqna, on the gulf of 'Aqabah, paid one fourth of its date harvest, one fourth of fishery catches, and one fourth of the spinnings of the women folk. (Ibn-Sa'd, II/I, p. 48, etc.) But the actual income is not mentioned. The same is true of Fadak, and Wadi-al-Qura', where the farmers had to deliver harvest, yet I have not come across the actual amounts paid.

There were other vaster and richer regions, and their incomes could be guessed from what we have cited above.

As to the expenditure side, I shall refer to one case, that of the Jewish tribe of the *Banu 'Urayd*. In a document quoted by Ibn-Sa'd Daybuli and others, the Prophet had granted them "ten *wasq* wheat, and ten *wasq* barley at every harvest; and fifty *wasq* of date fruits every year." — (A *wasq* is equivalent to a camel's load or sixty *sa'* and the *sa'* contained about eight pounds of grain. Cf. *Amwal* of abu-'Ubayd, 1587, 1590).

Later Epochs

This was but an attempt to glean material from a vast literature, and it is not possible to exhaust

it so easily. If other scholars also bring into relief the results of their studies in this field gradually one may have fuller data to reconstruct the whole picture.

We possess greater details regarding later epochs, especially the 'Abbasid caliphate, for which even the budget notes for the whole empire have been published, for instance by Von Kremer in several of his German writings. These refer only to income, yet they are interesting in the sense that we know nothing about contemporary Europe, the empire of Charlemagne, for instance, who is said to have exchanged embassies with Harun al-Rashid. A comparative study of these later budgets explodes particularly one myth that of the financial break-down in the time of the caliph 'Umar ibn-'Abd al-'Aziz, due to his reforms and abolition of many taxes. In fact, the income of the province of 'Iraq is sufficient testimony to the contrary:

Income of 'Iraq in the time of 'Umar 120 million *dirhams*.

ibn Ziyad .....	100	"	"
al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf .....	18	"	"
'Umar b. Abd al-'Aziz ....	120	"	"
ibn-Hubayrah .....	100	"	"
Yusuf b. 'Umar ....	60 to 70	"	"

And we know how short was the duration of 'Umar ibn 'Ab al-'Aziz's reign. If his just rule could have been prolonged to some more time, he could have restored, and even surpassed, old records.

Von Kremer himself quotes these figures for 'Iraq, but, strangely, gives at the same time this self-contradictory opinion: "However there is no doubt that this bigotted caliph 'Umar II undermined the finances by his stupid orders." *Cultur-geschichte*, I, 262). Should one say: A liar has no memory!

# THE SPIRITUAL SYSTEM OF ISLAM

BY

MAULANA SYED ABUL ALA MAUDUDI

What is the spiritual system of Islam and what is its relation with the whole system of life? To understand this it is necessary that we should first appreciate fully the difference that exists between the Islamic conception of spiritu-

ality and that of other religions and philosophical systems. In the absence of a clear understanding of this difference it often happens that when talking about the spiritual system of Islam many of the conceptions which have been

associated with the word "spiritual" begin unconsciously to revolve in one's mind, and then in this welter of confusion, it becomes difficult for one to understand what sort of a spiritual system in fact Islam represents, which without leaving the well known sphere of the spirit interferes in the sphere of matter too and not merely interferes with but seeks to dominate it.

The idea which is commonly prevalent in the realm of philosophy and religion is that body and soul are mutually antagonistic, having separate spheres of activity, with implications (different or even mutually conflicting) making it appear that their simultaneous development is not possible. For the spirit the realm of body and matter is a prison-house, the contacts and interests of worldly life are the shackles and chains in which the spirit is tied and imprisoned. The affairs and business of this world are like a marsh in which the soul is enmeshed and its development brought to end. The inevitable consequence of this conception has been the separation of spiritualism and worldliness into two different channels. Those who accepted worldliness were convinced in the very beginning in that spirituality would not be able to keep pace with them, and this threw them headlong into materialism. Social activity, culture politics, economics, and in short all spheres of worldly activity in life, were deprived of the light of spirituality and the earth was filled with injustice. On the other hand those who wanted to acquire spirituality invented such ways and means for the development of their spirit, as were entirely outside this world. According to their point of view it was not possible to find any method for spiritual development which would be compatible with normal life in this world. In their view weakening and mortification of the flesh was necessary for developing and perfecting the spirit. They invented spiritual exercises and ascetic practices which would kill one's desires and render the body senseless, even useless. They regarded the forests, the mountains, and solitary corners, as the fittest places for spiritual development so that the hustle and bustle of civilisation would not interfere in the practice of meditation. They could not conceive of the possibility of any method of spiritual development except to wash their hands of the world and its affairs and sever all those contacts which keep it tied down to the realm of matter.

This conflict of body and soul resulted in the evolution of two different meanings and purposes for the perfection of man. On one side was the perfection of worldly life which meant that a man should be surrounded by material

comforts and bounties and ultimately turn himself into and act like a good bird, a nice crocodile, a fine horse, and a successful wolf; and on the other side the perfection of spiritual life which implied that man should possess certain spiritual powers with the ultimate object of becoming like a good wireless set, a powerful telescope, and a delicate microscope, or that his sight and speech should become a substitute for a complete medical chest.

In this matter the Islamic viewpoint differs from that of all other religions and philosophical systems prevailing in the world. According to it God has appointed the human spirit as His "Khalifa" (representative). He has invested it with certain authority and laid upon it certain responsibilities and obligations for the fulfilment of which He has endowed it with a physical frame of the best and fittest type. This body has been granted with the sole object that the soul should make use of it in the exercise of its authority and the fulfilment of its duties and responsibilities. Hence body is not a prison-house for the soul but its work-house or factory, and if there is any possibility for the growth and development of the soul it is only through the use of the powers and instruments provided by this factory, thus enabling it to exhibit its potentialities. Consequently this world is not a place of punishment in which the human soul has been caught somehow or the other but is a work-house and manufactory to which God has sent the soul to function and work. Innumerable things in this world have been placed in its possession. Many more human beings have been created in this world along with it to fulfil the duties of this very caliphate. The demands of nature have for his benefit in this world civilisation, culture, society, the sciences of economics, politics and other spheres of life. The spiritual development which is possible in this world should not take the form of man turning his face from this work-house or factory and retiring and reposing in some corner. Rather the only form it should take is that man should live and work in it and give proof of his ability. It is an examination-hall for him. Every aspect and sphere of life is, as it were, a question paper in this test. The house, the city, the quarter, the street, the market place, the office, the factory, the school, the lawcourts, the police station, the cantonment, the parliament, the peace conference, and the battlefield, all represent question papers on different subjects which man has been called upon to answer. If he does not take any question paper, or leaves most of the answer books blank, he cannot secure any marks but a zero. The only possibility of success and develop-



ment would lie in a man's spending of his whole time and giving his whole attention to this examination and to attempt at least partially to answer the question paper handed over to him.

In this manner Islam rejects and condemns the ascetic view of life, and prepares a path for the spiritual development of man not outside this world but inside it. According to it the real place for the uplift, success, prosperity and development of the spirit lies right in the mid-stream of activity in life and not on the bank of the river. We should now find out what criterion is placed by Islam before us to judge the development or decline of the spirit. The answer to this question lies in the conception of „Khilafat” which I have just mentioned. In his capacity as the Caliph (representative) of God man is answerable to Him for all the activities in life. It is his duty to use all the authority with which he is invested and all the means placed at his disposal in this world in accordance with the Divine will. He should utilise to the greatest extent possible all the faculties and potentialities vouchsafed to him for seeking the pleasure of God. In various types of contacts with other human beings he should adopt an attitude which would be favoured by God. In brief all his efforts and energies should be concentrated on regulating the affairs of this world in the manner his God wants them. The more a man performs this duty with a sense of responsibility, dutifulness, a worshipful attitude, obedience, and with the object of seeking the pleasure of his Master, the nearer he will be to God. And in the eyes of Islam spiritual development is synonymous with nearness to God. Contrary to this he will remain away from God if he is lazy, shirking, lacking in a sense of responsibility, transgressing, rebellious and disobedient. And distance from God signifies, in the language of Islam, the spiritual decline of man.

This explanation makes it clear that from the Islamic point of view the sphere of activity of a man of religion and a man of the world is the same. Both will work in the same work-house; rather a man of religion will work with greater zeal and gusto than a man of the world. All the affairs of life beginning with in the four corners of a house and right upto the market square and the scene of an international conference, and the responsibilities attached to them all will be undertaken equally by a man of religion with a man of the world, and indeed to a greater degree. Ofcourse what will separate their paths from each other will be the nature of their relations with God. Whatever a religious man will do he will do with the feeling

that he is answerable to God, with the object of securing the pleasure of God, and in accordance with the law which God has ordained for him. As against this whatever a worldly man will do will be done in an irresponsible manner in a spirit of indifference towards God and according to the methods invented by man himself. This very distinction makes the whole material life of a man of religion a completely spiritual life and the whole life of a man of the world devoid of the light of spirituality.

I will now explain in brief how Islam finds a way for the spiritual development of man through the whirlpool of life in this world.

The first stage in this path is „faith” (Iman) that is, the overwhelming of the mind and heart of a man by the idea that God alone is his Master, Sovereign and Deity; seeking the pleasure of God alone is the aim of all his efforts; and the commands of God only make up the law of his life. The stronger and deeper this idea becomes the more perfect the Islamic mentality that will be shaped, and in the same degree will a man be able to tread the path of spiritual development with patience and steadfastness.

The second stage in this path is obedience (Itaat) implying that a man divests himself of his independence altogether, and accepts obedience to God in practice after having proclaimed a belief in Him as his creed. This obedience is called “Islam” (Obedience) in the language of the Quran).

The third stage is that of piety (Taqva) which can be interpreted, in the ordinary language, as dutifulness and possession of a sense of responsibility. Piety (Taqva) consists in a man so conducting himself in every walk of life as if he firmly believed that he is answerable to God for his thoughts, words, and deeds, and in desisting from every thing which God has forbidden; in his readiness to undertake all that God has commanded and living his life in the full knowledge of the distinction between what is lawful and what is not, what is correct and what is wrong, and what is good and what is bad.

The last and the highest stage is that of benefaction (Ihsan) which signifies that man's will becomes united with God's will. Whatever God likes man should favour the same and whatever is abhorrent to God should be hateful to man also from the bottom of his heart. Man should not only himself avoid the evils which God does not like being spread in His earth but should

use all his power and energy to wipe it off the face of the earth, and should not merely rest content with adorning himself with virtues which God desires to see widespread in the world. Man should, even at the cost of his life, establish and propagate it in the world. A man arriving at this stage attains the highest point of nearness to God and hence this is the highest stage of a man's spiritual development.

This path of spiritual development is not meant for individuals only but for communities and nations as well. Like an individual a community also, passing through the various stages of faith, obedience, and piety reaches the ultimate stage of "Ihsan" (benefaction) and a state also with all its administrative machinery becomes (Momin) faithful, (Muslim) obedient (Muttaqi) pious and (Mohsin) benefactor. In fact, the objects aimed at by Islam are achieved in a perfect manner only when a whole community treads this path and a "Muttaqi" and Mohsin" (pious and benefactor) state comes into existence in this world.

Let us now cast a glance at the system of spiritual training which Islam has planned for preparing individuals and society in this manner. This system comprises four pillars as follows.

The first pillar is prayers (Namaz) which revives the memory of God in a man's mind five times a day, reminds him about the fear of God, develops in him His love, makes him remember the Divine commands again and again,

and trains him in obedience to God. These prayers are not only to be offered by individuals separately but it is also obligatory to offer them with the community so that the whole community and society may be prepared for treading the path of this spiritual development.

The second pillar is the fast which trains a man individually, and the Muslim community as a whole, in piety, for a full month every year.

The third pillar is "Zakat" which develops the sense of monetary sacrifice, sympathy, and co-operation among all Muslims. In these days people wrongly interpret "zakat" as a mere tax though the spirit underlying its payment is entirely different from the spirit underlying the payment of taxes. The real meaning of "Zakat" is development and purification. By using this word Islam desires to impress on man the reality that, inspired by a true love of God, the monetary help which he will render to his brethren, will uplift his soul and purify his morals.

The fourth pillar is Hajj (pilgrimage) which aims at forming a universal brotherhood of the faithful on the basis of worship of God, and culminates in a movement which has been answering the call to truth throughout the centuries and will, God willing, go on answering this call till eternity.

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<sup>1</sup>) Human independence never existed in reality. Independence is here used in a relative sense, that is, from the point of view of religion. Ed.

## ISLAMIC ART

By

Salim al-Habschi

It is well accepted among art critics that a certain independent art does exist manifesting itself in the countries of the great belt extending from the Atlantic Morocco and Spain to the Indian Peninsula. Though each of the countries included within the belt has had already its own artistic traditions different from those of its neighbours, the sum total of the whole product is amazingly united by a definite artistic spirit. An unmistakable type of expression is

detectable in every particular variation. This unification happened to have occurred only after the unification of those countries under the flag of Islam, at about the 1st century A. H.—8th century A.D., and the consequent conversion of their nations to this new religion.

Persian Art had been moulded under Islam into a certain form, essentially identical to the corresponding art that flourished under the same

circumstances in Syria. And these two would be further identified with those of Asia Minor, N. Africa and Andalusia (Spain). The countries and the arts under Islam were tied up by the unity of religion. Hence the nomenclature *Islamic art*.

The Arabs of Jahiliyya, before the advent of Islam, were mostly nomadic tribes, possessing almost nothing of any artistic tradition or ability. And this is only natural, as such geographical medium where they lived would not furnish or favour any ground for such visual revelations. But, on the other hand, Arabic Poetry was mastered under their tutelage, and they bequeathed to modern Arabs a legacy of classical Poetry and Literature, still constituting one of the most important sources of Arabic Philology and History.

Indeed the pagan Arabs had expressed their own talent in the domain on minor arts, such as decoration of metal works, lances, swords and other particulars pertaining to the paraphernalia of ancient warriors. In the southern periphery of the Peninsula, however, the Arabs had been wellknown for their fine textile manufacture. Moreover, there have been iconographers who modelled idol statues used to be carried by the nomads and worshipped wherever they halt, as well as artists who designed and sculptured valuable idols for the famous shrines. When the Prophet (Allaihiassalaam) re-entered Mecca in victory at 629 A.D., he found the great Pan-Arabian shrine studded with fine modelled idols, and the walls were covered with mural paintings depicting Angels, Prophets and other religious pictures used perhaps for religious rituals. Because Islam primarily existed to establish the religion of only ONE GOD to be directly worshipped, the Prophet (Am) destroyed them all, except an abstract stone of historic significance; thus putting the end to Idolatry and Iconolatry altogether. This gesture has been interpreted by the orthodox Muslim jurists as an injunction forbidding production of personified or human figures. But if the problem be subjected to the juridical IJTIIAAD, we find that this presumed prohibition is now losing its validity, since the Arabs themselves and the modern nations converted to Islam, have definitely changed their mental attitude towards susceptibility for Idolatry or Iconolatry.

However, since the triumph of this monotheistic religion in Arabia, idol craftsmanship has totally disappeared and all Arabian artistic manifestations, not excluding Poetry, were purified. No man, poet or artist could presume to indulge any more of those Jahilite immoral traditions and customs then predominating and irreproachably hailed as salutary.

The early Muslims, directly influenced by the Prophet's exemplary life, lead a more or less unsophisticated course of living and without particular pretensions to art — except in Poetry, which they developed and reformed.

Soon, the very precursor of Islamic Art, which is concentrated in Mosques and Architecture, moulded itself when the Prophet ordered to build his Mosque in Mecca. This first Mosque in history was but a simple construction; a four-walled structure enclosing an open space for prayer, built of palm trunks and mud. Only after the death of the Prophet, in the first century A.H., in the year 632 A.D., was the building of Mosques developed, and the minor arts flourished. The Muslims made acquaintance, through the newly converted nations, to several mature artistic styles and traditions. The Arab architects and artisans were delighted to witness the splendour of the Mesopotamian architecture stamped with the Sassanian grandour. In no less effect, were the Muslims surprised by the extravagance of the Christian Churches of Syria and Jerusalem. And here, it is worth mentioning, that many Western critics and chroniclers accused Islam of having plagiarized foreign styles. But according to unbiased scrutiny, one would realize that the Muslims only learnt from other extant arts and they did not plagiarize but assimilated those styles and artistic forms or formulas, and applied them in their own original way, according to the spirit of the religion and complying to the prerequisites of matching with the Christian grandour. This precedent has been urging since the Muslims got into contact with the outer world, where the Saracen art and the Sassanian were fermenting. So, at first the Umayyad rulers, allowing themselves to aquire the imperial luxuries, ordered the Muslims to develop their mosques and embellish them with decorations, employing even non-Muslim architects or the converts to reach their goal. But amazingly, the result was that every Mosque or palace became the most representative of Islamic Art despite the possibility of unoriginality of the sources moulded into the pure Islamic style. Those mosques in Syria, N. Africa and Spain and the superb palaces such as Al Hamraa' (Alhambra) are proofs for the originality of the Islamic spirit in architecture. Is is clear to any beholder, however ignorant he might be of Islam and architecture, that this mosque or that belongs to a certain school of architecture, authentic enough to have maintained its existence through hundreds of years.

The decorations which embellish the Muslim buildings are characteristic for their typical abstract designs and motives, which are derived

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from the floral forms and geometrics, lavishly washing every nook and corner of the building, filling the spaces as to give rather a static harmony corresponding to the simple resignation of the Muslims to ALLAH, the One God. There is nothing in the mosque of such images or personified forms as one sees in churches or pagan shrines.

As the Muslims moved west and eastwards to Spain and China, they lived with different nations having older cultures and artistic traditions. But they did not play the vandals, and instead, they learned them and assimilated them. Every building or object susceptible to artistic modification was branded by this Islamic spirit and austerity, without robbing it of its local characteristics or national personality.

The Saracens of Byzantium have inherited the Heilenic sense of beauty and the Indians have had their own art. After conversion to Islam, the Indians, dit not produce any more of those idols or godly figures depicting Hindu mythologies, but a kind of art manifesting itself in mosques and other works of applied arts, which while preserving the Indian style and personality, showed a strong Islamic influence. The same phenomenon could be traced also everywhere, where Islam ruled the hearts of the people.

The role of Islam, however, exerted on art, is exclusively spiritual, for it did not introduce a new element in the form, as much as it imposed radical modification of style and motives. The advent of Islam in such countries as India and Persia meant the end to such personified forms and idols. Hence we would rather say that the artistic flux in artisanship was by no means handicapped by the new faith, but it underwent a new path relevant to it, with the inclination to abstraction and geometrical decoration. This type of decoration and art is known in the West by the name of Arabesque. Briefly, we can say that architecture and Arabesque applied on objects or minor art were the medium through which the Muslims could, implicitly and unintentionally, express the principles and conceptions of their religion. This expression is quite different from that experienced in other religions. Whereas the Christians tend to objectify Christ and the saints and angels in statues or images, sometimes inevitably essential for devotion, Islam has nothing to do with art except in

so far as it exerted the directive power and defining imperative, uniting different tendencies in a certain integral style. In case of architecture, Islam has certainly created such architectural styles never known before, and stamped all Muslim edifices without exception, with its spirit.

What could be called Christian art is really so called because it borrows its objects and pictorial elements from Christian mythology. But this art has no definite style or method attributable to the religion. The case of the churches is, however, similar to the case of the mosques. In Christianity, we observe that Christian art, and also to some extent the Christian rituals, are assimilated by the conceptions of the converts. While we see that the madonna in Africa is represented as a Negro woman, or as a Japanese lady in Japan etc, we notice that the pagodas and pagan objects melted together in Islamic abstractions and decorations. But as we have stressed already, the national character and personality survive the change in the background. In short, Islamic art could only be justifiably recognized with the allegorical example of the bees.

The swarm of bees collect the saps of different flowers, but the working-bees ferment the saps in their stomachs and assimilate them in order to reproduce those different saps in the form of honey, and this honey possesses nothing of the nature of the individual flowers except perhaps in what concerns the aroma. That is Islamic art.

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