

ISLAM AND THE SECULAR MIND

FOREWORD

Published in 'Islam and the Secular Mind (IRA) I

05, Oct, 2007

PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD



FOREWORD

Muslim Ummah is passing through a critical phase of its history. This is not something new as its entire history is characterized by challenges and responses, crisis and re-emergence; relapse and revival. In a sense, this was inevitable. A message as universal and eternal as Islam can neither avoid crisis situations nor can it escape from phases of depression and renewal, and in some cases even dis-integration and re-consolidation. In fact, it is unavoidable in view of the Divine arrangement for humans, which is characterized by endowment of freedom and discretion. Built in the Islamic scheme are elements that are unchangeable, and as such, they constitute reference points for the system in all times. Along with these are elements that are flexible and changeable while still remaining within the Divinely laid ethos of the system.

Today's situation has many similarities with the scenario at the beginning of the twentieth century, albeit with some significant differences. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Muslim Ummah, which had played a distinguished role as a world power for over a millennium, was then totally overwhelmed by the forces of decay within and the onslaughts of European imperialisms from abroad. The power-equation changed to the utter disadvantage of the Muslim World. It had far reaching consequences for the entire realm of Muslim civilization. Western Imperial powers represented a new civilizational paradigm. The expansionist role of the tutelary powers that vitiated its hold on social dynamics defined its predicament: it lost its leading edge over knowledge and technology, its economy went into shambles, its political power eclipsed. Even morally, culturally and intellectually it went into a tailspin. The lowest point was the abolition in 1924 of what was left of the symbolic khilafah.

This was the context in which a number of Muslim luminaries all over the world addressed themselves to the crucial questions of what had gone wrong with the Muslim Ummah? Had Islam become irrelevant or was something wrong with the Muslim approach to Islam, its role in history making, in short the way the Muslims were treating the Divine guidance? And finally how the Ummah could reset itself along the path to revival and reconstruction? Jamal al-din Afghani, Amir Shakib Arsalan, Prince Halim Pasha, Said Nuresi, Muhammad Iqbal, Rashid Rada, Muhammad 'Abduh, Hasan al-Banna, Abul Kalam Azad, Abu'l A'la Mawdudi, Malik bin Nabi and a host of intellectuals and reformers reflected on these questions and came up with positive responses to steer the Ummah out of decay. In this galaxy of thinkers and reformers, Mawdudi occupies a distinct position. Hardly seventeen, he put his shoulders to the task of rebuilding the Muslim Ummah in 1920. After ten years of journalistic encounters, he decided to begin his endeavour to reconstruct Muslim thought and to spell out Islam as a world view and a way of life. His aim was to develop a roadmap for the ummah's revival as a blessing for humanity. The publication of *al-Jihad fi al-Islam* (law of War and Peace in Islam) in 1929 was his first such major contribution. And ever since, until his death on September 22, 1979, he authored over 140 books and tracts on Islam, covering almost every aspect of its thought. His greatest work is a six-volume exegesis of the Qur'an - *Tafhim al-Qur'an* - spanning several thousands pages. Besides articulation and the reconstruction of Islamic thought, he developed a critique of the Muslim society, identifying the causes and how they got congealed into decay. He also came up with a powerful critique of the Western civilization, the main player in the contemporary onslaught on Islam. He was not oblivious to the achievements of the Western civilization and the ideologies it had spun, but at the same time, he was critical of its intellectual confusion, its moral deprivations, its political and cultural

deformities and its economic injustices and exploitation. His thought has influenced three generations of Muslims. Small wonder he is considered as one of the chief architects of contemporary Islamic revival.

The need for translating Mawdudi's essential writings into the English language has now become pressing. The translations I did in the 1960s and those that Br. Khurram Murad did in the 1980s cover hardly twenty percent of his work. The World of Islam Trust, Islamabad, The Islamic Research Academy Karachi and the Islamic Foundation, Leicester have now agreed to co-sponsor English translations of his essential works. The manuscripts would be prepared under my general supervision and editorship, assisted by Dr. Anis Ahmad, Dr. Manazir Ahsan and Dr. A.R. Kidwai. Brother Tarik Jan and Shafaq Hashemi would do the major work of translation. Other good translators would also be involved in this project. The Al-Madinah Trust, Peterborough, and the Sarwar Jehan Charitable Foundation, Leicester, U.K. are also extending some limited financial support for the project.

Our vision is that except those of Mawdudi's writings, which were of local or very contemporaneous concern, the remainder of his work should be available to English readers followed by translations in other languages of the world. Except the Arabic, Persian, Hindi, and Bengali versions, which were largely prepared from the original Urdu text, the other translations in over twenty languages were made from their English and Arabic versions. The idea is that what Mawdudi ('rahimahuaalha) did in the twentieth century should be made available to the Ummah for its guidance in the twenty-first century, at least as a window on the Islamic revivalist movement of the twentieth century and as a searchlight for the vista of the twenty-first century. This work may also provide an opportunity to others for further development and adaptation of Islamic concepts and strategies in view of the changing circumstances and new challenges. Every human being, however great, has his limitations. Yet what Mawdudi wrote over a period of sixty years remains of everlasting relevance to the issues and problems of Islamic resurgence and reconstruction of Muslim Society and culture in the face of new challenges. The works of Mawdudi are important both in view of their thought content as well as a way of looking at the message and meaning of Islam in view of changing circumstances. His contribution is relevant as datum as well as methodology. We hope to complete the project in fifteen or more volumes. A tentative list of themes for these volumes is given below:

- **Vol. 1** - Islam: Message and Movement - This should cover selected chapters from Islami nizam-i zindgi.
- **Vol. 2** - Islam: Faith as the Basis of Culture - Translation of Islami tehzib aur uskay usul au mabddi.
- **Vol. 3** - Four Major Concepts of the Quran - Translation of Qur'an ki char bunyadi istalahayri and other relevant articles.
- **Vol. 4** - Islamic Movement - Selected articles on the concept of Islamic movement, its methodology and strategy for change.
- **Vol. 5** - Islamic Movement Sources of Spirituality - Covering the field of 'ibadat and tazkiyyah.
- **Vol. 6** - Islam and the Secular Mind - Selections from Tanqihat and Tafhimat.
- **Vol. 7** - Islamic Law.
- **Vol. 8** - Islamic State.
- **Vol. 9** - Islamic Economics.

- **Vol. 10** - Islamic Culture and Society.
- **Vol. 11** - Revival and Renovation in Islam: Concept and History.
- **Vol. 12** - Caliphate and Monarchy in Islamic History: Translation of Khilafat au malukiyat.
- **Vol. 13** - Law of War and Peace in Islam.
- **Vol. 14** - Islamic Thought and Practice: Selected chapters from Tafhimat (all the five volumes).
- **Vol. 15** - Islamic Discourses: Selection from Rasa'il au masail and interviews and speeches 'dealing with contemporary civilizational issues.

These volumes are not planned to appear in the preceding sequence. Nor is it suggested that the volumes would necessarily have the titles given above. Nevertheless, this framework is being sketched to give readers an idea of the scope of this work and the richness of the themes expected to be covered. The volumes could appear, as and when they are ready. The volume we are now in a position to offer in the series is Islam and the Secular Mind, which is very ably translated and edited by my colleague Br. Tarik Jan. I wish him the best of rewards for his labour of love.

Islam and the Secular Mind is a collection of those articles of Mawlana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi, which he wrote during 1930s and 1940s in order to challenge the concept of separation of religion and society, divine guidance and state, secular and sacred.

Secularism represents an important politico- historical movement, which has changed the basis and character of the socio-political order developed in Europe and America over the last three centuries. It was in the wake of the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire that a new thinking emerged for re-ordering the entire political, economic, social and legal system exclusively on the basis of human reason and experience, to the total disregard of the religious and divine guidance. If religion had to play any role it could only be in and through the personal life of the individual — man and woman. It had no role in setting the rules of the game and major contours of policies to be pursued in the socio-political and economic dimensions of human life and society. This is the real substance of secularism as a cardinal principle, yet, the role of secularism is more varied and many dimensional. As such it may be useful to clearly spell out at least three aspects in respect of which the role and contribution of secularism is of critical importance.

First whatever be the historical relevance of religion under the religious experience of Europe during the era of the hegemony of the Church, the Christian world view remained entrenched in the idea of division of life into holy and mundane, sacred and secular. 'Give unto God what was God's and to Caesar what were Caesars' represented a vision in which the concern of religion was primarily directed towards the spiritual dimension of human life — of God- man relationship. The entire realm of the secular life was left to the worldly people concerned about mundane affairs. In other words neglect of the secular by the men of religion was a reality. Their obsession with the other-world and equating holiness with dislike for the worldly life and approach that the worldly life began the hallmark of the religious ethos. Asceticism and monasticism were the natural result of this one-dimensional approach. The worldly realm was looked upon as less than holy, un-becoming of the men of God.

The Renaissance and Enlightenment challenged this view and focused on the demands of the body - the physical domain of human life. This led to a shift of focus from religion or other worldliness to the concerns of this world. Mankind and not God, this world and not the World-to-come were now

looked upon as the proper fields of study and action. The secular movement represents the triumph of this worldly concerns over the other worldly ones. Consequently there was a new thrust-away from the spiritual to the worldly problems and affairs of the human society.

Secondly, the medieval religious regimes in Europe became characterized by religious and denominational persecution, intolerance and rising tide of ex-communications. This brought a bad name to religion in power. Wholesale migration of populations from Europe to America was a result of these regimes of religious intolerance. There was utter disillusionment from the misuse of religion by the political system. In this context the secular movement expounded the principle of plurality of religions and denominational diversity, and to exclusion of their role in politics. This was achieved at the cost of the exclusion of religion and moral and spiritual values based on religion from politics. Separation of Church and State became the order of the day.

Thirdly the secular movement did not stop at these two major civilizational changes. It further established a new paradigm in which God became irrelevant as far as political and social issues are concerned. A new interpretation of cosmos and laws of nature was developed which excluded God as the real force behind all that exists. It is epitomized in Newton's response to the French Monarch who reflecting on his mechanical interpretation of universe asked why there is no mention of God in his formulation. Newton simply said: Your Majesty! I do not need God to explain the mechanical world.

This was not confined to the so-called mechanical explanation of the universe, it was also extended to the entire human realm. It was claimed that human reason and experience were enough to guide human beings to live their lives on the planet. The only concession made was that if people wanted to believe in God they may do so in their personal life. As far as the problems of society, economy and politics were concerned they would be resolved on the basis of the wishes of the people, guided only by their intellect and experience. Sovereignty of man became the new guiding principle and human reason and experience were looked upon as the ultimate source for all values needed for the evolution of human society.

Vergilius Fern captured the substance of the movement for secularism in his conceptual summing up on Renaissance, Enlightenment and Secularism:-

"A wave of intellectual and aesthetic awakening and of secular culture which may be thought of as originating in Italy in the 14th century" Whether for better or for worse, the renaissance certainly had the character of a revolution. Its key note was a secular humanism implying recognition of human and mundane values as having validity unconditioned by theological consideration or ecclesiastical approval.

(An Encyclopedia of Religion by Vergilius Fern, the philosophical library, New York, p.655-656)

"The Enlightenment: The name of the movement which characterizes the general atmosphere of the 18th century. Its origin is to be sought in the mental climate of age and spiritual emancipation of man in Renaissance era, which with its materialistic and individualistic tendencies evoke in the minds of people a proud consciousness of the autonomy of reason. As a historic phenomenon, the Enlightenment movement represents the effort of applying the role of reason to actual life."

(Ibid (p.250)

"Secularism: Specifically a variety of utilitarian social ethic (named and formulated by G.J. Holy oak, 1817-1906) which seeks human improvement without reference to religion and exclusively by means of human reason, science and social organization".
(Page-700)

The Social Science Encyclopedia underlines the real ethos of secularism and secularization as follows:

"Secularization: — refers to a displacement of religious beliefs, ritual and sense of community from the moral life of society. Every day experience in 'secularized' society tends to be carried on without routine invocation of the sacred It was, however, the philosophy of Enlightenment that provided the pivotal impetus towards thorough going secularization... They proposed that society should be founded 4 on the moral principles devised by rational enquiries into the universal nature of human social life..... The rational principles of social organization were often presented as antithetical to religious traditions resting on faith.
(**"Secularization"**, in **The Social Science Encyclopedia**, p.737)

The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World brings home the same message:

"The term secularism signifies that which is not religious. It is rooted in the Latin word saeculum, which initially meant 'age' 'generation' in the sense of temporal time. It later became associated with matters of this world, as distinct from those of the spirit directed towards attainment of paradise Secularism or secularization process derives from the European historical experience. It meant a gradual separation of almost all aspects of life and thought from religious association and ecclesiastical direction," (**The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World/edited by John Esposito, Oxford University Press, Vol: IV, p.20**)

Islam has no real quarrel with the ethos of secular movement, although the way Islam handles them is distinctive and unique. However, one real difference relates to the role of religion in society and state. Islam does not divide life into compartments of spirit and matter, holy and mundane, sacred and profane. It believes in the unity of life. The secular world is as much a concern of Islam as the spiritual world. This attitude of Islam is summed up in the Qur'anic prayer:

"O our Lord! Give us the best of this world and the best of the Hereafter and save us from the torment of fire." (**Al-Quran 2:201**)

This world and the world to come are linked together. They represent continuity. Islam is concerned about the worldly and mundane issues of life in the same way as it is concerned with the spiritual and moral dimensions. The two are sides of the same coin, each depending on the other and strengthening each other. As such, neglect of the secular dimensions of life by some religions or men of religion is regarded by Islam as a failure. Islam is seized of these issues and regard mankind as its manor domain of action and justice among all human beings is its worldly objective. As such there is no need for any alleged enlightenment to discuss their relevance. The whole secular realm has been spiritualized and the spiritual expression and actualizes itself in the secular dimensions of life, individual and collective. The Prophet of Islam, (blessing and peace be

upon him), has said that the whole landscape of the earth is like a mosque. It does not merely mean that one can pray anywhere in the world. It also means that secular is very much intertwined with the spiritual.

Islam has also clearly and boldly affirmed the principles of freedom of choice and plurality of religions and cultures. This is a natural corollary of the concept of Khilafah rooted in the principle of human freedom and discretion. God Himself has given this freedom to every human being to pursue whatever faith one chooses. *La ikraha fi al Din* — there is no compulsion in religion (The Quran II:—) is the charter of religious freedom. The acceptance of plurality of faiths as authentic and a natural phenomenon is part of the Islamic framework. Muslims are also human beings and there may have been lapses in their behaviour but Islam is very clear on this fundamental principle of freedom of religions and beliefs. The judgment on this count lies in the Akhirah and not in this world. Every person has a right to believe and practice according to his/her own faith. Religious plurality and cultural co-existence are integral to the political order of Islam.

So basically on these two counts there is no fundamental clash between Islam and secularism. The real difference lies in respect of the third dimension, where secularism stands for separation of religion and state and faith and society. Islam regards as an aberration and not the natural state of human life. The Islamic paradigm is God-centered as much as it is man-centered. The Divine guidance is directed towards the welfare and well being of the humans here and hereafter. The establishment of a just society and building of relationships between human beings, amongst individuals and institutions on the basis of equality and fellow-feeling are as much the concern of Islam as seeking excellence in matters spiritual and moral. This is the fundamental difference that makes the Islamic paradigm diametrically different from the secular paradigm.

Sayyid Mawdudi's articles collected in this volume bring into sharp focus this distinctive aspect of Islam in contradistinction to the secular approach to life and its problems. Although more than half a century has passed over these writings the issues remain fresh and relevant, despite some changes in the language of the debate. The question however, is not of rhetoric but substance and approach. Mawdudi's critique of secularism and its offshoots may look to some as too strong but when you are challenging a dominant paradigm there is no other way but to take the bull by the horns. And this is what Sayyid Mawdudi has done. His primary audience were the Muslims in the Indo-Pak Sub-Continent and subsequently the rest of the world. As the issues and challenges remain relevant for all human beings in other parts of the world, it is hoped the publication of this book at the beginning of the twenty-first century would provide serious food for thought to the new generations. It is in this context that this collection is being published not merely because of its historical value, but also because the challenge of secularism on the moral and ideological plane is as relevant today as it was in the 1930s. The editor has added some valuable notes to bring the discussion up-to-date. The edited notes may also help the reader to have a better grasp over the issues that confront us today.

I would also like to place on record my appreciation for the support received from my brothers and colleagues Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Dr. Anis Ahmad, Dr. Muhammad Manazir Ahsen, Khalid Rahman and Ziaul Hasan for this support in enabling the project to see the light of the day. May Allah reward them for their efforts in His cause.
