

THE PLACE OF SUNNAH

THE VOICE OF ISLAM

Vol. 10, No. 4,

Jan 1962

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[The following letter was written to the Editor, Daily Dawn Karachi, but it could not find a place in the columns thereof. It is being published below for the benefit of our readers—Editor]

IT is most unfortunate that a certain section of our people is trying to sow the seeds of dissention and controversy at a critical moment of our national existence when unity and solidarity are of immense importance. Constitution-making has now re-entered its- final phase and the need of the hour is that the basic principles on which the vast majority of our people, rather almost all of them, are agreed, should form the foundation for our Fundamental Law. It is a basic article of faith with the Muslims that the Message of God and the life example of His Prophet (Peace be upon him), the Qur'an and the Sunnah, are the original sources of Islam. Throughout the long vista of Islamic history the entire ummah has scrupulously upheld this view and has never tolerated any deviation from this classic stand. Muslims of Pakistan, too, firmly believe that the Qur'an and the Sunnah are the sources of their ideology and the Muslim society, in fact, takes its foundation on this very basis. The demand for discarding Sunnah is a demand to re-open settled questions and is bound, to spread confusion and chaos. Any attempt to force the nation into a new-fangled controversy will only go to disrupt the intellectual and social fabric of our life and to sabotage the movement for the realisation of the Islamic ideology.

During the last century of disintegration there appeared a very small group of the Munkireen-i-Hadith who refused to accept the- Sunnah as a source of the Shariah. But this group forms a microscopic minority. Is it really in the fitness of things that at this juncture of our national life when every endeavour is being made to minimise the sectarian differences and to shed all sectarian controversies in the best interests of the nation, a certain person or group should be allowed to fan the fire at these very controversies in more menacing a way? Mr. Justice Shall is no doubt a highly-placed dignitary but no person can be allowed to play with the beliefs of the people and to thrust upon them his own sectarian views and plunge the nation, into controversies which have no genuine basis whatsoever. After this word of caution, let us try to understand the position of the Sunnah in Islamic Shariah and to assess the validity of the objections raised by Mr. Justice Shafi.

God has revealed His Law through His Prophets, the last of whom was Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This being the Divine Way, the basic sources of guidance for man are the Word of God and the life-example of the Holy Prophet. The Qur'an says; "Verily in the (life of the) Prophet of God you have the ideal exemplar." (XXXIII: 21).

The mission of a prophet of God is not merely to deliver the Book of God, but to explain and interpret it, and to establish it as a Code of Life for the individual as well as the society so as to provide the human race with an ideal and a model. According to the Qur'an "Allah verily hath shown grace to the believers by sending unto them a Messenger from among themselves who recites unto them His revelations, and purifies them (i. e. reforms their morals), and teaches them the Scripture and Wisdom," (111:164). Also: "And we have revealed unto it he? (O Muhammad) the Remembrance (i.e. the Qur'an) that thou may est explain to mankind that which hath been revealed for them." (xvi:44). Thus the function of a prophet is not that of a postman (God forbid) whose mission ended with the delivery of the letter, may it be from the Lord. A Prophet's mission

is also to explain and interpret that Revelation and to fashion the Individual and the social life in accordance with the Scripture and the wisdom revealed to him. He is a teacher, a preacher, a leader, a ruler and a guide.

3. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the last prophet and, therefore, his authoritative position is to remain, effective for the entire human race and for a!! time, to come. Says the Qur'an: "Say (O' Muhammad): O mankind! Verily I am the messenger of Allah to you all" (VII : 158). And: "We have not sent thee (O Muhammad) save as a bringer of glad tidings and a warner unto all mankind." (XXXIV: 28). Thus, his authority is to hold good for ever.

4. The Qur'an has made it obligatory on all Muslims to follow the Prophet in letter and spirit and to submit to his commands willingly and joyfully, as he is the representative of Allah, (a) "Who obeys the messenger, obeys Allah" (VI: 80). (b) "We never sent any Messenger, but for the sole purpose that he should be obeyed under the sanction of Allah." (IV: 64). (c) "And adopt whatever the Messenger commands you and abstain from whatever he forbids." (LIV: 7). (d) "By thy Lord (O Muhammad!) they will not be believers until they accept Thee as the final arbitrator in ? all their disputes and submit to thy decision whole-heartedly without any heartache." (IV: 65). (e) "It is not for believing a man or a believing woman to have a say in any affair when it has been decided by Allah and His Messenger; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he goes astray manifestly." (XXXIII: 36). This, according to the Qur'an, is the position and the status of the Prophet. His words are Law for the Muslims and his actions are the norms for their behaviour. His commands and his actions (i.e. the Sunnah) are an original source of the Shariah and are binding on Muslims for all time to come.

Ahadeeth (Traditions) are a record of the saying or the actions of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) or of the acts which he permitted. They present the Sunnah of the Prophet and constitute the second primary source of Islamic Law. They have come down to us through unparalleled authenticity and are reliable in every respect. Strictly speaking, even the Qur'an has come to us through a hadith, for it is on the authority of the word of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that we accept it as the Message of God.

The learned Judge's observations on the authenticity of the hadith are most unfortunate and are a strange commentary on our educational system of which even the most enlightened products betray such pitiable lapses in their knowledge of religion and history that one is simply amazed.

He says: "All Muslim doctors are agreed that as time passed a great body of forged traditions grew into a valid source, of the law of Islam Nothing can be farther from the truth than this. Traditions were forged by unscrupulous elements but not a single Muslim jurist or scholar can be quoted who accepted forged tradition as "a valid source of the law of Islam."

He says "Imam Bukhari selected 9,000 out of 6 lakh ahadith as genuine." Any one conversant with the science of hadith can see the fallacy in the argument. It is correct that the compilation of Imam Bukhari contains nearly 9000 ahadith which he selected from out of six lakh ahadith which he remembered. But in the terminology of the science of hadith, every chain of narration of hadith means one hadith. For instance the famous saying, of the Prophet:

(men will be rewarded for their actions according to their motives) was reported to him through nine hundred different chains of narration (اسناد). This fact is construed, in the terminology of the

science, as amounting to nine hundred ahadith. Naturally Imam Bukhari selected only one chain and left out the remaining eight hundred and ninety nine. It is from this fact that the ignorant have derived the incorrect conclusion that the ahadith which Imam Bukhari left out were non-genuine.

Moreover, Imam Bukhari himself said that he had not included all the authentic ahadith in his compilation. He wrote: "In my book. I have not entered any hadith which is not authentic, but have left out many which are authentic simply for the reason that the book may not become unwieldy."

Another relevant point is that the word "sahib" which the learned judge has translated as "genuine" is again a technical term. This word is not used, in the hadith literature, as synonymous with "correct" or "genuine". It is used only for those ahadith which satisfy a certain test as to the authenticity of the narrators. A hadith which is not sahih is not necessarily Za'eef (weak) what to say of its being false or concocted. Za'eef, again, is a technical term and does not stand for 'nongenuine' or 'unreliable.' I feel that if this aspect of the matter had been known to the learned judge he might have hesitated to pronounce such an injudicious verdict against hadith.

He says, "I do not think that it can be denied that as was done in the case of the Holy Qur'an any attempt was made to preserve the traditions during the life-time of the Holy Prophet." If our learned speaker had taken some pains to read the history of the codification of hadith, he would not have made this tall claim. The fact is that the history of the collection, the writing and the condification of hadith goes back to the days of the holy prophet himself.

He says that Hazrat 'Umar "discouraged and even stopped the reporting of traditions." This again is based on faulty reading of history. Hazrat 'Umar regarded Sunnah as an inviolable source of law. On his election as head of the state he vowed to "follow the way of the Prophet" and in his state-letters he commanded his Chief Justice (Qazi Shuraih) to decide cases in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

I have referred only to a few of the points raised by the learned judge. The fact is that his statement is most unfortunate and injudicious and will do anyone little good.

In the end let me also say a word about: the letter of Mr. Nuruddin Ahmad. He says that renunciation of ahadeeth will not "in the least detract from our love and veneration for the Holy Prophet; for no Muslim worth his salt will be lacking in love and veneration for his Prophet. The Qur'an, however, has taught us that the best way to express our veneration and love for our Prophet is to shower on Him salutations and blessings in a fitting manner." Let this "lover" of the Prophet know that the Qur'an asks us not only to shower salutations on the Prophet but also to obey him and to follow his commands in all walks of life, as we have shown above. Does he believe that all that the Muslims need do is to shower salutations on the Prophet and for the rest to do whatever they like? This, indeed, would be a very shortcut to salvation.

Mr. Nuruddin has also spoken about the love and veneration that Muslims must have for their Prophet. But is he not aware that in the code of love, disregard for even the whims of the beloved accords ill with protestations of love. The lover always eager to seek the pleasure of the beloved and strain his every nerve to follow the beloved in every respect. It would perhaps be an altogether new type of love in which the lover will only shower salutations and will not care a whit for the sayings and the doings of the beloved.
