CHAPTER - ONE

SALIENT FEATURES OF HINDUISM AND ISLAM

HINDUISM

Any religion need not be treated lightly, for it is not merely a point of contact between God and the individual, but also a source of inspiration for a new social order, a political pattern, a cultural ethos and all that is fine and lofty in any given society. This is as such true of Hinduism as of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

Hindu is the name given to the people of the Vedas by the ancient Iranians. This usage was followed by the Greeks, Arabs and others. But the Vedic people called themselves 'Arayas', and that is why in their own ancient texts the term 'Hindu' is nowhere to be found. It is this name coined by foreigners from which has been derived 'Hinduism', to denote the form of religion followed by a Hindu. It is too late in the day to try to dislodge the term from the meaning it has acquired. It is not necessary either, as there is no difficulty in understanding who a Hindu is. A Hindu is one who holds the Vedas as the revealed books of religion.

The Vedic people were robust in mind and body, and their relationship with their gods was friendly, based on a manly affection and not on fear. In fact, they claim to be kinsfolk of the gods, and in their

1. The origin of the name Hindu is interesting. The river Sindhu (Indus) marked the western frontier of the ancient Arya settlement in the Punjab. On the other side of the river lived the ancient Iranians. It was by the name of this river that the Iranians called the Aryas. But they could not pronounce the word Sindhu correctly; they would pronounce it as Hindu. So Hindu came to be the name by which the Iranians called the Aryas. In course of time the Aryas themselves picked up this name from their neighbours, the Iranians, and adopted it for themselves.

2. In very ancient days Hinduism was known as the Arya dharma.

3. Derived from the Sanskrit root vid which means 'to know' the word Veda came to mean 'knowledge of God'.
hymns one finds a free and frank spirit of give and take. The devotee pours a libation of butter on the sacrificial fire, and tells the king of gods, Indra, that he expects in return a copious supply of rain for his crops. These vigorous immigrants were mostly agriculturists, and rain was necessary for their very existence. Earlier in their life, possibly before they had discovered the art of cultivation and led a nomadic life, they used to worship the sun, the giver of warmth, as their chief deity. In the course of time we find that the wording and rhythm of the hymns, mantras as they were called, acquired a considerable amount of magical force and became almost as important as the meaning thereof. But the sturdy and simple nature of the Arya must have changed a great deal before this happened.

In Vedic times, we come across another term manava, derived from the name of the great Arya patriarch, Manu. It means the people of Manu, those who trace their origin from Manu and follow the 'path of Manu'. Manu was the first to establish an Arya empire on the bank of the river 'Kubha' in the region now known as Kabul. It was he who initiated the Arya worship of One God and chalked out the path from which no true Arya could deviate. This path is made up of two essential virtues — peace and unity — sham-yoh, as the sages called it.

The Vedic Aryas believed that their religion was true for all men and for all time as it determined the relationship between man and his


2. ibid., i, 114, 2.
Maker. Based, as it is, on this fundamental thought, it may well be called the religion of man. Later on, no doubt, many schools of Philosophy and diverse forms of worship arose. But these were merely developments of the original Vedic religion to suit different lines of thought and different grades of human intellect. Hinduism is not identified with any narrow dogma. Elasticity of thought and breadth of vision are its principal characteristics. It is broad-based on the fundamental religion of man as evolved in the Sruti, and justly calls itself the Sanatana Dharma or the eternal religion.

The evolution of Hindu religion and its philosophy, as we see it today, has not been a conscious process. Throughout the long centuries of ancient Indian history, one race after another entered the country from the north, each with its peculiar culture and peculiar set of ideas and contributed its quota to the growth of Indian thought. But strangely enough, while leaving its stamp on the basic Arya culture, each of these races, in its turn, lost its identity. For, who can identify and distinguish in India today its various ethnic elements the Scythian or the Hun, the Getae or the Gurjar? But these early immigrants or invaders from Central Asia do not, by any means, exhaust the sources of Hindu culture. Long before the Aryas entered India, a civilisation of a high order prevailed in this country. From the Ramayana we learn that Rama visited the death bed of his great Rakshasa antagonist, Ravana, and solicited from him

1. i.e. the Vedas.
advice on state-craft. The same epic tells us that the monkey general of Rama, Hanuman, was a wise and learned person, whose counsel on various matters was sought and accepted by his master. These legends undoubtedly indicate the existence of a pre-Arya culture of high order of whose worth the Aryas were fully cognisant. The Indo-Aryan civilisation was to a considerable extent indebted to the civilisation that had preceded it. As will be seen later on, the Hindu did not lose his elasticity, the receptive qualities of his mind, even after the Turkish conquest. He reacted in a remarkable manner to the impact of a totally different kind of alien culture and produced a long line of saintly exponents of a newer, simpler and more agile phase of Hinduism than any that India had seen for a long time. It cannot be that the spirit of Kabir and Nanak, of Chaitanya and Tukoram is dead in the India of today. So many races, so many communities, have combined to impart to the web of Hindu life its wonderful texture and richness of hue.

The Vedas recognised the four varnas or castes in accordance with the attainments or occupations of man. The Bhagavada Gita puts it very tersely: "I created four castes according to a person's occupation and mental attainments". At the head were the Brahmans, graphically described in the Vedas as having come out of the Supreme Being. It was the duty of a Brahman to study and to teach. Not that others were not permitted to cultivate thinking. That would be absurd. But the Brahman specialised in

1. Though known as early as the Rigveda period, the caste-system was not rigid in its earlier phases. Only at a later stage did it attain rigidity and the conditions of the Sudras especially became deplorable.
3. Rigveda, x, 90, 10-11-12.
4. The Brahmans claimed four privileges, namely, (i) Archa (veneration), (ii) Dana (present, gifts etc.), (iii) Ajeyayata (freedom from oppression) and (iv) Abodhyata (immunity from capital punishment). Compare, R.C. Majumdar: Corporate Life in Ancient India, p.315.
the pursuit of knowledge, just as much as the Kshatriya did in the art of war and kingship, and the Vaishya in handicraft and commerce. But the inspiration in all branches of knowledge, whether it related to life spiritual or life material, came from the Brahman. A Brahman was not to carry arms; he was not to speak in a vulgar tongue; he was to observe the rules laid down for taking food, and lastly, he was to observe chastity. It should, however, be remembered that at a later period an instinct of self-preservation gave the caste system a rigidity which deprived Hinduism of a large portion of its elasticity. When the Brahman's outlook tended to become stereotyped, it was the Kshatriya who came forward to breathe new life into society. Instances of this are, indeed, innumerable but it is enough to mention only Janaka, Krishna and Gautama Buddha.

The Hindu sages recognised very early that in the mind of the individual there is a constant clash between the worldly duties to his society and his spiritual duties towards the Creator. In order to reconcile these two, they divided the life of each man into four distinct stages or ashramas, that of the student (Brahmacharya), the householder (Garhasthya), the recluse (Vanaprastha) and the wandering spiritual teacher (Sanyasa). During the first stage a man leads a rigidly ascetic life, acquires knowledge and strength and prepares for the life of the householder; during the second stage he is called upon to discharge his

1. If the Brahmans claimed four privileges, as cited in the previous note, they had also four duties, namely, (I) Brahmanyam (purity of blood), (II) Pratirupacharya (proper way of living), (III) Yasah (fame through the study of Veda etc.) and (IV) Lokapakti (intellectual and religious training of the people, as teacher sacrificial priest and purohita). Compare, R.C. Majumdar Corporate Life in Ancient India, p.315.
2. Ibid, p.315.
3. Janaka was given the title and status of a Brahman through the teachings of Yajnavalka. R.C. Majumdar: Corporate Life in Ancient India, p.317.
4. It is to him that the text of the Bhagavada Gita owes its origin, though like Janaka and Buddha he was not a Brahman by birth.
duty to society and the State. The third stage of retreat and contemplation is likewise a preparation for the fourth stage, when he has to discharge his duty to his higher-self and to his Maker.

The two forms of division taken together make up what is called Varnashrama Dharma — the order of life according to orthodox Brahmanism. Yet deeper in its fundamentals and behind the conventions, Brahmanism provided for ample freedom of opinions and experiences. It was owing to this freedom that creeds and cults were abundantly growing up like vegetation during the rainy season, as the Mahabharata beautifully puts it.

The complete human individual can be likened to a mighty tree standing from its own roots and throwing out its branches and foliage in all directions. It can inhale nourishment from the air, if only it has roots deep down the soil. As long as a Hindu stuck to the basic truth of his life, he could receive, retain and assimilate all that the surrounding atmosphere gave him. Today well-nigh uprooted as he is, he is neither able to receive nor to give anything.

The term Dharma in the old days meant such law as governed a man in relation to himself, his family, society and State. It does not exactly mean religion, as is popularly thought. Its significance is more worldly. This meaning is clear from the fact that the Codes of Hindu Law are specifically entitled Dharmashastras. The best known of these Codes is the

Manu Samhita, based on an earlier text called the Manava Dharmashastra. These Codes derive their character from the mantras and Brahmanas of the Vedas.

The Vedas speak the truth about God, the soul and the creation. Such truths can hardly be realised by the mere exercise of brains. An appeal to a higher source is necessary in order to give us a glimpse of the Ultimate Truth. Even the highest human genius can never arrive unaided at a knowledge of the cause of things. The Vedas, therefore, are said to be revealed scriptures —— something heard, not something worked out by the human brain. Likewise, the mantras of the Vedas are things to be seen, and the sage who gives them out to the world is called the Rishi (or Seer). Be it understood, however, that neither the hearing of the Sruti, nor the seeing of the mantras, is possible for any but the illumined, those who by concentration and meditation have reached a condition in which such great truths can be received. The Vedic hymns are thus to the Hindus something very much higher than the composition of ordinary poets. The Vedic Rishis may be called poets possessed by Truth.

The Vedas are known to be the earliest literary composition of man. They were originally three in number, namely the Rigveda, the Samaveda and the Yajurveda. Of these the Rigveda was the principal. A fourth, the Atharveda by name, was added to them—later in order to meet the requirements of the Hindu society which was daily growing more and more
composite by the absorption of the pre-Aryas. Each of the four Vedas consists of two sections, namely, Samhita and Brahmana. The Samhita section contains hymns or mantras and the Brahmana section dwells on the meaning and use of these hymns.

The Rigveda has hymns to many gods in it, but there can be no doubt that the Rishi had already begun to conceive of One Supreme Spirit, One without a second (Ekam eva Advitityam). The several gods, most of them nature forces, are referred to as manifestation of this One Spirit. Here is a typical hymn:

"One only Fire is kindled manifold, one only Sun is present to one and all, one only Dawn illuminates this all: that which is only one becomes this all."

In the tenth book occurs the famous Purusha Sukta, a significant hymn addressed to the mighty Spirit pervading the whole Universe.

The Brahmanas have already been referred to. They expound the mantras and give directions with regard to rites and sacrifices. The rites relate to such sacraments as wearing the sacred thread, marriage and funeral, while the sacrifices known as yajnas consisted of lighting up the sacrificial fire and offering of the lives of various animals for a specific purpose. It was principally against these animal sacrifices that the great Gautama raised his hand of protest so successfully in the 5th century B.C.

There is one portion of the Sruti or the Vedic literature which is

1. Rigveda, viii, 58, 2.

2. The Hindus of yore did not worship gods and goddesses in images as they do now. Their worship consisted in reciting Vedic mantras and offering oblations in the "sacred" fire. This kind of worship is called yajna (sacrifice). The Brahmana sections of the Vedas describe the various kinds of yajna. The mantras contained in the Samhita sections have to be recited in the course of yajnas. From the Brahmana sections one learns when, how and which mantras have to be recited during the performance of any yajna.
better known than the rest. This portion, called the Upanishads, deals with higher spiritual thought and is more directly connected with the third or contemplative stage of man's life. The conception of God and His relationship with man that was already foreshadowed in the Rigveda has undergone a very high stage of development in these later books. Animal sacrifices find no encouragement in them. On the contrary, it is emphasized that the material adjuncts of a sacrificial rite are only for the lower grade of votaries and the real yajna is entirely an affair of the mind and spirit. A remarkable feature of the Upanishads is that they definitely stand for a harmony of intuition and intellect. They invariably go beyond reason and yet always plead for profound thinking, for knowing Him by means of clarified wisdom.

The bold speculations of the Upanishads developed in time into six well-known schools of Hindu philosophy. All these schools take a definite stand on rationalism, and one at least of them — the Samkhya — disowns a personal God. The influence of this agnostic school is traceable in the philosophy of Buddhism which went a step farther and rejected the authority of the Vedas. It speaks a great deal for the dynamic character of Hinduism that in later centuries Buddha himself was acknowledged as an incarnation of God.

While schools of philosophy were being evolved for the enlightened, a number of popular works came into being to satisfy the spiritual

1. The word Upanishad originally meant a "sitting, confidential secret sitting" and then a "secret teaching, secret doctrine". The Upanishads are many in number. Each of the four Vedas contains several Upanishads. Of these, the following may be remembered: Brihadaranyaka, Altareya, Chhandogya, Taittiriya, Isha, Kena Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya and Shwetashwatara.

2. The six schools of Hindu philosophy are: Purva Mimansa (author Jaimini), Uttra Mimansa or Vedanta (author Vyasa), Samkhya (author Kapila), Yoga (author Patanjali), Nyaya (author Gotama) and Vaisheshika (author Konada).
The cravings of the humbler folk. These, known as the Puranas, are cast in the mould of myths and legends, and present in an attractive manner, easier to comprehend, not only ethical ideas but the more obtrusive conceptions of mental philosophy. These Puranas as well as the two well-known epics—— the Ramayana (author Valmiki) and the Mahabharata (author Vyasa)——tell us a great deal about ancient kings and ancient societies in India. To the Hindus, they are something more than mere epic poetry, for the Bhagavada Gita actually forms part of one of them (i.e. the Mahabharata), while several other cantos are recited as part of the ritual on various solemn occasions.

This is in bare and rough outline the religious thoughts of the Hindus, sufficient to give us an idea of the culture with which Islam came into contact in India. But what, again, is Islam? We shall presently come to it and try to make out the meaning of Islam and the culture it represents. For we can never find the remedy for the present-day trouble between the two communities, unless we know something about the working of their minds. We are apt to misread the history of medieval India, if we have not the knowledge of the mental background of the two peoples. It is only when we have the proper perspective of their attitude of mind that we can understand the conflicts and go down to the basis of the contact underlying them. From where else could spring from time to time the creative energy to overcome all conflicts, if it were not from this

1. There are in all eighteen Puranas. Of these the names of the following may be remembered: Vishnu Purana, Padma Purana, Vayu Purana, Skanda Purana, Agni Purana, Markandeya Purana and Bhagavata. A portion of the Markandeya Purana is well-known to all Hindus as Devi Mahatmyam or Chandi. Worship of God as the Divine Mother is its theme. It is read widely by the Hindus on their sacred days.
deeper contact?

Let us see what impression Hinduism created on the best minds amongst the Muslims. We shall quote here two renowned Muslim savants of the past. They are Alberuni, who came to India with Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna in the 11th century, and Abul Fazl, who lived at the court of Akbar in the sixteenth.

Alberuni's writings give us an insight into the atmosphere of learning in Islamic countries. They also show to what extent this learning was indebted to the wisdom of the Hindus and of the Greeks. Indian mathematics, medicine, astrology, astronomy and philosophy were studied assiduously and the treatises on these subjects translated by zealous Arabic and Persian scholars. Sometimes these learned men visited India and sometimes Hindu pundits were taken to Baghdad to assist them in their researches. This cultural contact and the working of a common mental outlook is something that we should never forget. The present misunderstanding between the Hindu and the Muslim rests largely on the ignorance of each other's mental composition, as a result, in the first instance, of ignoring their cultural affinities.

In regard to the very cardinal point of faith, Alberuni finds Hinduism not much different from Islam. He says: "The Hindus believe with regard to God that He is One, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who is His sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that He does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble Him".

1. Alberuni's India, vol. 1, p.27.
Referring to the texts of Yoga, Samkhya and Bhagavada Gita, he observes: "This is what educated people believe about God. They call Him Isvara, i.e. self-sufficing, beneficient, who gives without receiving. They consider the unity of God as absolute, but that everything beside God which may appear as unity is really a plurality of things. The existence of God they consider as real-existence, because everything that exists, exists though Him".

The following remarks of Alberuni relating to Hindu idol worship deserves our notice: "Our object in mentioning all this mad raving was to teach the reader the accurate description of an idol, if he happens to see one, and to illustrate what we have said before, that such idols are erected only for uneducated low-class people of little understanding; that the Hindus never made an idol of any super-natural being, much less of God; and lastly to show how the crowd is kept in thraldom by all kinds of priestly tricks and deceipts. Therefore, the book Gita says ——. 'Many people try to approach me in their aspirations through something which is different from me; they try to insinuate themselves into my favour by giving alms, praise and prayer to something beside me. I, however, confirm, and make them attain the object of their wishes, because I am able to dispense with them'.

In spite of his appreciation of Hindu culture, Alberuni was pained at the conceit and self-sufficiency of the Hindus of his days. But he hoped, "If they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change

their minds, for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is".

Alberuni pleaded for a sympathetic exchange of learning and refinement, and looked forward to a friendship that might grow out of mutual appreciation. At the same time, as a deep critic of human nature he did not overlook the follies of his own people and their share in bringing about misunderstanding. He had little hesitation in saying: "Repugnance increased more and more when the Muslims began to make inroads into their country —— Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed wonderful exploits by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions —— This is the reason too why the Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hands cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Benares and other places".

In writing the history of Akbar's India, Abul Fazl went out of his way to depict at length the beauties of Hindustan. Coming to realise that he was digressing, he made the heart-felt confession that his anxiety proceeded from the love of his native country. Abul Fazl loved India and had a great regard for Hindus and a deep neighbourly feeling for them. It was but natural of him. To hate one's neighbour constantly is indeed a severe mental strain. He notes with admiration how the emperor, Akbar, tried his level best to convert the thorny field of enmity into a garden of

amity and friendship. Hindus and Muslims will be cured of their intolerance by listening to the message of this great humanist and historian of Mughal India: "The inhabitants of this land are religious, affectionate, hospitable, genial and frank. They are fond of scientific pursuits, inclined to austerity of life, seekers after justice, contented, industrious, capable in affairs, loyal, truthful and constant —— They are capable of mastering the difficulties of any subject in a short space of time and surpass their instructors, and to win the Divine favour they will spend body and soul and joyfully devote their lives thereunto. They one and all believe in the unity of God, and as to the reverence they pay to images of stone and wood and the like, which simpletons regard as idolatry, it is not so. The writer of these pages has exhaustively discussed the subject with many enlightened and upright men, and it became evident that these images of some chosen souls nearest in approach to the throne of God, are fashioned as aids to fix the mind and keep the thoughts from wandering, while the worship of God alone is required as indispensable".

He continues: "The godliness and self-discipline of this people (i.e. the Hindus) is such as is rarely to be found in other lands".

Earlier he asserted: "—— The commonly received opinion that Hindus associate a plurality of gods with the One Supreme Being has not the full illumination of truth, for although with regard to some points and certain conclusions, there is room for controversy, yet the worship of one God and

the profession of His Unity among this people appeared facts convincingly attested. It was indispensable in me, therefore, to bring into open evidence the system of philosophy, the degrees of self-discipline, and the gradations of rite and usage of this race in order that hostility towards them might abate and the temporal sword be stayed a while from the shedding of blood, that dissensions within and without be turned to peace and the thornbrake of strife and enmity-bloom into a garden of concord. Assemblies for the discussion of arguments might then be formed and gatherings of science suitably convened".

The faith of Islam is clear and evident. There is little difficulty in understanding it. Even a new-born baby is supposed to be able to take it straightway to its heart. The Muslim baby, when it is born, is told: "God is great. He is great, and there is none beside Him worthy of worship ——" This faith, which contains in it the good of all religions, revealed earlier, was meant for mankind. It was new only in its bearing; it was not new in the sense of being novel.

Islam means surrender to the will of God. A Muslim is one who gives himself up entirely to God to the exclusion of all others. He believes that the world of nature has no choice but to obey God's eternal decrees, and that in this obedience lies peace, prosperity, happiness and the salvation of man. Just as there is a set pattern and a meaningful design in nature, there is one for man as well which indicates how he has to behave both individually and collectively to escape destruction. By following the right way, he would attain happiness in this world and bliss in the next.

The second important belief in Islam concerns Muhammad as the messenger of God. He is the last of the long line of the Prophets, of whom he is the seal. He is the perfect man, a path finder and a teacher. As a reformer, a guide and a leader he presents a religion which has no priestly hierarchy and involves no apostolic succession. Islam is essentially a practical creed, it takes man for what he is. Its
requirements are easy and simple, it attempts to level the barriers of caste, colour and class, and takes its stand on the bedrock of love, liberalism and brotherhood. The Quran says, "O people! be fearful of God who has created you all from the same single soul". This unity of man is of great social value, it removes all discriminations in human society based on social distinction, economic exploitation, racial discrimination and subjugation of women. It enables the humblest of the humble and the lowest of the low to rise to the highest position.

The holy Prophet, who expounded a common religion for mankind in conformity with the universal sources of all religions, sent messages to numerous rulers of different countries outside Arabia. Yet Arabia was the original home of this faith of Islam, and it was here that the stage of its first action was laid out. In order to be directly applied to the needs of the people of this country, it was made to suit their understanding and habits. The religion that was given in the first place to them was such as they wanted and could work out in their daily life. It was plain enough for their untutored mind and good enough for their sophisticated soul. True to the basic need of an earnest and artless folk, Islam proved equally true to humanity at large. It could, therefore, easily and rapidly find its way into countries far and near, where people had been entangled in the meshes of complex metaphysics or elaborate rituals, and were fretting for the freedom of a simple faith. In a sense, Islam did not evolve any knotty
dogma in the beginning or at any time. The one clear cry of the religion of the Quran was: "---- There is one and only one God. He is eternally besought of all. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him".

The land of the Arabs is a vast desert. It gave them little food and less comfort. They led a nomadic life and lived amidst frequent fights between men and men, and between tribes and tribes. They knew no artificialities. So, though they used to quarrel often and drink wine oftener, they brought out of their hearts sincere good poetry. Being intensely tribal, the Arabs had naturally set up many gods. But in reality they did not obey those gods, just as they did not submit to any political masters. On the contrary, the worship of those tribal gods only produced tribal factions. While they were themselves poor and in want of peace, they used to see all around many rich countries peacefully carrying on rich trade that happened to pass through their own country. Tremendous love of personal independence clouded their visions of unity. They could not yield to their little gods; they could not come to terms with each other. They had no peace anywhere. All the while they yearned wistfully for peace and unity.

To such a people the faith of submission was brought by the holy Prophet. For, Islam means "submission to God"; it means as well the religion of peace. But they could not bow down to small things, nor would

1. The Quran, CXII, 1-4.
2. op.cit., III, 19.
they purchase peace for little consolation. Their strong love of self would not permit them to accept anything as superior, which they could reach by their knowledge or which they could measure by their sense of limited entities.

Yet from the known to the unknown there should be some connecting links. The Arabs were always in the presence of one unbroken vast Nature — the Nature of their limitless desert. They were quite at home with a reality that is visible endlessness — endless yet existent. The idea of One God, who is far, far greater than any individual, than any of their known rivals, gave actual unity to their life. Having no rival, God is One. He is awful too. For does He not hold the whole creation within Him as does the mighty and severe sky overhead hold their endless desert-country? But then, is God only a replica of Nature? Not at all. He is merciful, compassionate and gracious, notwithstanding the grim fact that He is the "King of the Day of Judgement". The Muslim rosary has ninety-nine beads corresponding to His attributes, in which the attributes of love and mercy overshadow those of might and majesty.

Recognition of the unity of God involves going out of oneself and doing one's best for the sake of others. The doctrine of social service in alleviating and helping the needy constitutes an integral part of Islamic teaching. Piety is useless in the absence of active welfare service to the needy. The Prophet once asked "Do you love your Creator? If so, love your fellow-beings first! He is only a half-Muslim who performs miracles through

1. The Quran, I, 1-3.
piety full Muslims are simple folk who earn their bread by righteous means and share it with others. The Prophet said, "He is not a Muslim who does not wish for others what he desires for himself". Islam classifies people into two categories, good and bad. Good is indicated by the term saleh or righteousness, which is a term of ethical-religious excellence. The Quran has not left us in doubt as to what constitutes good deeds. They are to worship God, to be good and kind to fellow-beings, to respect parents, to speak kindly to everyone, to help the poor, needy and the orphans, to pay alms and to practise moral concepts such as courage, fortitude, patience and generosity. Man should never do wrong to others because God never does wrong to anybody. One should try to pardon others because God Himself is always ready to forgive and be compassionate.

Through submission to Islam and oneness of God, the people of Arabia reached a unique unity. A nation grew out of this faith. It is owing to this kind of growth that the Muslims were a nation belonging not to a geographical wholeness but to a spiritual fraternity. Brotherhood of faith rather than political nationalism held together the Muslims of yore. Unity of God formed the background of the unity of the people. The pagan Arabs loved equality dearly, but in the sense that one was in no way superior to another. With Islam they started realising that they all were equal by virtue of being creatures of One God. Islam set flowing amongst them the stream of like-mindedness through the rock of individuality. Thus

1. The Quran, XLIX, 13.
Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) being the Messenger of this new religion proved to be the maker as well of a new nation.

Indeed, the religion of the nomadic people was naturally free and simple. What the people were suffering from and what remedy they needed and what they could receive — these the Prophet saw through. It was the Prophet's deep insight into human mind that caused the quick spread of Islam throughout the world. It was let in wherever people were looking for faith as the first principle of social life.

Islam proved to be a dynamic force which changed the course of human history. Its two revolutionary concepts, the unity of God and the unity of man, pushed the Arabs to the heights of intellectual glory; it made them seize the sceptre of mighty empires; it gave them sufficient strength, wisdom, vitality and insight to sustain their power for centuries, and it offered them the ideal of equality and justice that would level the barriers of caste, colour and class, and take its stand on the bedrock of humanity. Moreover it lapt before the image of their leader, the holy Prophet, whose achievements within a decade in Madina, inspired them to believe that nothing was impossible.

Being as wide as humanity, the Quran makes peace with all religions by saying that they have a common origin. It is the one religion that is sent down to man at different times and different places through different messengers; but they only carry the parts of one common religion. Islam
has thus no war with other religions as such. Likewise, the cosmopolitan character of Hindu religion and the universal approach of its philosophy always leave wide open the door for mutual understanding.

In time of war, the Quran warns, women, children, old men, monks and the whole civil population are not to be subjected to any cruelty; churches and synagogues have even to be defended by the Muslims just as they would defend mosques. The first Caliph, Abu Bakr (632-34), issued the following order to his army: "Be just; the unjust never prosper. Be valiant; die rather than yield. Be merciful; slaying neither old men nor women nor children. Destroy neither fruit trees nor grains nor cattle. Keep your word even to your enemy. Molest not those who live retired from the world".

Simplicity and devoutness marked the life of the early Islamic conquerors. The second Caliph, Umar (634-44), while entering Jerusalem went walking pulling the reins of the camel on which his slave was seated. The master and the slave were riding on the camel alternately every three miles. It just so happened, that as they were drawing near Jerusalem, it was the turn of the slave to ride, who, however, at this juncture wanted to get down in favour of the Caliph. But the Caliph insisted on the strict Islamic equality of man. This camel alone was enough to carry all his stately equipage which was made up of a small tent, a bag of corn and another of dates, a woodenbowl and a flask of leather. The invincible

general, Khalid, called "the sword of God", had during his whole life nothing more than his arms and his horse.

Soldiers of such generals could ill-afford to kill and plunder at will. On the contrary, their will must have been softened by the teachings of their faith and moulded by the examples of their generals. Besides, however powerful the army of Islam might have been, it could not have conquered, for less occupied, vast countries if the people thereof had not wished them well, even welcomed their arrival. Sometimes the army of Islam got active support from sections of the conquered people. To the simplicity of faith Islam added democracy in its social system. The world was conquered far more by these two gifts than by the sword.

The Arab conquest of kingdoms practically came to an end within about a hundred years after the passing away of the Prophet. The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) started particularly with a peace programme. Its activity was signalised by setting up the "City of Justice", as Baghdad was called. Now onwards, for about four hundred years, more glorious and memorable conquest of knowledge was made. Not occupation of territories but illumination of mind became the abiding passion of Islam. The command of Islam, "Seek knowledge even if it is found in China", guided the activities of the faithful. Rulers joined hands with scholars in the creation of the marvels of Muslim culture.

Al-Kindi (d.873), Abu Bakr Razi (865-935), Al-Farabi (870-950), Ibn Sina (980-1037) and Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) are some of the notable names
amongst the early Muslim savants. The world owes a great deal to them. Europe was in those days drowned in medieval darkness. Reason was being ruthlessly put down by the Christian Church. It was through the Muslim philosophers and scientists that the light that had been lit by the sages of ancient Greece was found and held up high. It was this flame kept burning by the Muslim that some time later on kindled the Renaissance in Europe. The heads of the Islamic States and religion not only patronised the scholars on their own, but also gave shelter to such persecuted Western thinkers as were still trying to feed the fire of their ancient freedom of thought. Not only the Muslim savants but also the Caliphs and Sultans were upholders of Reason. The devotion to rationalism continued till about five hundred years after the Prophet. With Ibn Rushd \(^1\) (1126-1198) we come to the last and greatest of Muslim rationalists. He held that by reason alone could one reach the truth. Here is a typical saying of his: "The religion peculiar to philosophers is the study of that which is, for no sublimer worship can be given to God than the knowledge of Him and His reality. That is the noblest action in His eyes; the vilest is taxing, as error as error and vain presumption, the efforts of those who practise this worship, and who in this religion have the purest of religions".

The Islamic social order follows the trend of the religious. The bond of brotherhood in religion is kept alive all through the other spheres of life. The State becomes a democratic organisation. Because an ordinary human being could not be superior to others, the head of the State is there

\(^1\) This Spanish philosopher is famous for his Commentaries on Aristotle.
as the vicegerent of God. Both with Hinduism and Islam ultimate sovereignty lies with God. And in a godly kingdom there must be peace for all. The State is, therefore, to see that every Muslim has the means to live equally. The State is to give every Muslim either work or charity. The legal alms, called Zakat, were first collected by the Prophet himself generally for the relief of the poor and mainly for the maintenance of the army. His successors followed the practice till, in the process of times, other taxes and tributes were levied for the working of the government. The paying of alms was then left to private piety and social goodwill. As all the Muslims are equal, they cannot be governed by any man-made law. God alone is supreme over all. The law that would be worth obeying could come from Him and Him alone. Thus it is that Muslim life — individual, social and political, is ruled by the Divine law. The course of events in the material world too is determined by and must respond to the Divine law. The desire to know the law of God operating in Nature led to scientific investigation and the growth of scientific knowledge. It made the people of Islam the father of modern science. It was from the Muslims that Europe imbibed the true scientific spirit and learnt from them their first lessons in the physical sciences.

Muslim jurists, however masterly, could not make or alter this law. Laws being made by God, the jurists could but find out which law was applicable to any particular case. When later, it became evident that human affairs could not all be explained or controlled directly by the verses of
the Quran, supplementary laws were framed out of the events of the Prophet's life and his comments on men and matters. The Prophet's talk to his associates and his observations on sundry affairs were collected with great labour and care, and given the title of Hadis or Traditions. The Shariat or the Code of Traditions sought to cover the field not directly touched by the Quranic laws. Further development of law was embodied in the "Analogies" and the Ijma. The former were deducted from the Quran and the Hadis, while the latter included points of law established by common consent.

Islam spread rapidly. It was the momentum of a new faith that brought about its phenomenal advance. The whole of the Near East, the upper half of Africa and a large part of southern Europe came under its sway in the course of three quarters of a century, though it took three centuries before a foundation could be laid in Northern India. All of a sudden the Islamic polity expanded from a single City State of Madina to a vast empire scattered over three continents. The Turkish and Afghan Muslims, who came to India as representatives of conquering Islam, did not like the Arabs, and the Persians represented its cultural aspect. The generous humanism of the early Caliphs was replaced by the adventurous militarism of the Ghaznavids, Ghorids and some of the early Sultans of Delhi. Islam in Arabia itself was rather a spent force by the time the conquering Turkish Amirs poured into India. For a while these adventures were carried forward by their rugged and virile life-spring. No doubt,

1. Muhammad Ali: Translation of the Holy Quran, Chapter on "Relation to Sunnah".
even in the midst of destruction, they sowed far and wide certain seeds of construction. But these seeds took time to germinate. Consequently, the first period of big conquests passed in an atmosphere of animosity and suspicion. It was but human. For, the process of conquest always leaves some open wounds both on the conquerors and the conquered, and there can be no rapprochement till time has healed these wounds. It is only after the wounds have healed that mutual suspicion begins to abate and it becomes possible to create a new order on a newer and broader basis.

Sheer military zeal ceased to dominate the Muslims when they were no longer content with raiding India from outside but chose to settle down as children of the soil. Slowly they woke up to the realities of the situation, and as rulers increasingly felt the vital need of a better understanding with their Hindu subjects. The Sultans, the Sheikhs and the Ustads in their several spheres did whatever was possible in the circumstances to bring about a synthesis. This synthesis grew richer in its colour and deeper in its penetration through ages. The result is, there is hardly any aspect of the living Indian civilisation of today in which the original angularities of the different races have not been considerably rounded off.