CHAPTER - I

THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT OF ISLAM

(i) ITS SIGNIFICANCE

(ii) ITS STATUS

(iii) STABILITY - ELEMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR
The Religious Spirit of Islam

The thrust for religious belonging is one of the inevitable needs of humanity. It is easy to study the anthropology and its observations. Interestingly enough, man has always clung to some object in order to feel himself secure amidst the strange world, which he attempted to understand step by step. Ancient man bowed down before the Unseen Power, be it a totem or any powerful creature that signified superiority, or generated a feeling of awe. By and by, with the advancement of his own knowledge, Man's attitude to nature began taking a definite shape. His refinement cultivated different groups and each large group emerged as a religion. Often this phenomenon was headed by a human being, who claimed superior knowledge, gifted to him from above. Thus, there were revealed religions. There is only one surviving religion that allots its origin to the impersonal scriptures which the 'seers' of truth gathered. This religion is Hinduism. Rest of the religions may be broadly classified under Semitic and the non-Semitic religions. The three Semitic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Chronologically this order may be accepted. Islam, being the later revelation, may be traced to the old Testament revealed to Moses and the New Testament of Christianity. However, such a phenomenon would just be natural with any doctrine which follows some earlier doctrines. Islam, of course, had its typical origin under special circumstances and hence its independent status and influence is not ruled out. Practically speaking, it has engulfed the majority of humanity despite its obvious
similarity with the same principles of Judaism and Christianity. Hence, there need be proper understanding regarding those specific characters of Islam, which has rendered its survival and spread, possible. These factors, strangely enough, are not easy to distinguish from the total factors which constitute a religion. Chance factor is not ruled out either. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to imagine that a religion has such unsure foundations for its glory. Amongst other factors such as the strictness it has spelt out, it is also hailed for the simplicity of its rites and rituals. The commands it gives, and the path it traces out are quite practicable and within human limits.

There are some other non-semitic religions such as Buddhism and stricter still, Jainism where the followers have to strip off almost all their personal feelings and enter into a state of total self annihilation. Islam has saner means to offer to its disciple. Apart from the positive aspects that this religion may express, there are quite a number of thinkers especially from West who allot its popularity to the general lack of enlightenment amongst its followers. Now this charge if true, will have to be accepted in the right spirit of academic challenge and met with accordingly. Even otherwise, enlightenment amongst muslim population has remained these days, a concerned topic. But, if this charge is misplaced, it remains for Islam to lay open, its superior factors that has led to its numerical success. There has been a constant appeal on the part of the religious
leaders, not to judge the status of any particular religion by the number it carries. On the contrary, a single-sincere devout must truly outnumber thousands of hypocrites. Islam will have to map out its spread all over the world, not by the sway of terror or coercion that history letters, but by the touch of love and peace, which truly is its message.¹

A historic assessment of Islam is a totally dispassionate manner which would go a long way in helping Islam secure the place which is due to it. No doubt, it must inculcate within its structure, all the modern changes that is the consequence of the technical age. The fibre of Islam has been flexible, given the challenge. This fact will have to be observed in the context of today, when the entire world at large is passing through the period of crises in values. Religion is one such value or the sum-total of values, as per the nature and nationality of the followers, whereas it is fashionable to adopt religion, especially the rituals, as one of the other values of life, there still remains a formidable class of masses which considers religion as the sum-total of all values. It is this class, which has often forgotten the cause of religion. Islam is not free from such disciples. On the contrary it abounds in them.

¹ This religion, unlike most others named after their founder has the distinct appellation 'Islam'. Salam (Salama), in its primary sense, means to be tranquil, at rest, to have done one's duty, to have paid up, to be at perfect peace.
The urge to the followers of Islam today is not to under-rate the importance of enlightenment, and also, to have a deep foresight regarding the future. Mere observance of Islamic precepts would not be sufficient in order to procure their own dignified position as the citizen of the changing world. They will have to adopt themselves through proper understanding of Islam. Their interpretation will have to be faithful, and rational. It is the followers of the religion who degrade or elevate a religion. Islam too, has been struggling to keep its own esteemed place in the atmosphere so polluted by technical waste, just like any other religion. However, its plight is increased due to some elements of aversion to adopt anything experimental on the parts of its followers. It is through experiment that any doctrine survives in the long run. Religion is no exception. Change has been forced upon it, whether we like it or not. The current development can no longer be bypassed on the sheer grounds of material aspect. Their concrete existence is a reality, fully staring us right in face. It is the religion which will have to be benevolent and bestow its accommodative spirit, which is its very fibre. Dogmatism has always been looked down upon the religion. Islam too has shown maximum catholicism which only has to be understood in the right spirit. It will have to find interpretation in this new context and retain the graceful dimension that only a religion could afford to give to the humanity. For the society, which is a religious, has not found proper atmosphere to breathe in.
Such societies crop up like mushrooms, and are as short-lived. History is full of such beliefs and even similar one where often a temporary totem was worshipped. The factors which help a religion to survive with consolidation are interestingly common amongst the present major religions of the world. The principle factors are (1) The founder (if any), (2) The scripture and (3) Worship.

Rest of the titles are just the combinations of these in different proportions. Wherever a disproportionate stress on one of these factors, to that extent a religion becomes more or less ritualistic, spiritual or ethical.

When the character and personality of the founder is emphasised, the religion becomes too narrow, and fails to cast a spell upon the masses in large number. Only that specific class, strictly in relation and close contact with the founder or his ways, are attracted to the religion. Nevertheless, spread of religion is no indication of its holy impact either; often, a religion spreads through sheer chance of its followers being an ignorant lot. They have no power to discriminate but to succumb to that which is powerful. They are overpowered by the tyrants, often by coercion than their own free will. Such criticism and severe still has often blotted spread of a religion. Islam too has been a regular victim of it.

The religion which has emphasised scriptures either due to the probable non-existence of the founder as in Hinduism,
or due to the glory of the scriptures themselves as in many religions form an important class of religion. With Islam, however, there is no distinction between the religion as a divine experience of the founder and the religion as a code of conduct for the welfare of the humanity. These concepts have created a great deal of controversy so much so, that some major religion of today emphasise the code of conduct alone, notwithstanding its origin. It is important for them to respect truth, beauty and goodness in day-to-day life rather than spend hours of devotional worship at a mosque/or a Church. Fidelity to nation is held in the highest esteem, and so is individual. Citizenship to the welfare society is a coveted aim that is comparatively more appealing than the teachings of a religion. Civic sense is appreciated even in the total absence of any religious foundings of its political system. Apart from the desirability of such a system, it may be observed without doubt, that Islam has left no room for a life which is just ethical, apart from its existence as a religious one. On the contrary, there is only one way of living, and that way is prescribed in Quran. Worship too, is interwoven with it, and it cannot be mentioned separately or emphasised to the slight of any of the other prescriptions. Worship has been highlightened by some religions may be inadvertently, and then the scriptures are found decaying in a state of total diapallation. These
state of affairs, if unchecked, has often been responsible for the unwanted noise about the rites and rituals. Every sect straight away adopts its form of worship from its ancestor without caring to interpret the prescriptions of the scriptures. Most of the mischief is due to this negligence. Consequently, religion as a whole is the direct victim of it.
(ii) Its Status

The Muslim community (Ummat-i-Islami) is the bearer of the Last Message which controls all its deeds and actions. Its place is to guide, lead and to supervise the mission of Islam. The Quran has reminded the Muslims that "Ye are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and Ye believe in Allah".\(^2\)

"Thus we have appointed you a middle nation that Ye may witness against mankind".\(^3\)

However, it cannot be overemphasized. Muslims today have proved far from the promise that the prophet cherished for them. The main reasons that the religion has been found in the bad books of some renowned western thinkers is due to the lacunea, not so much in the revealed religion, but the masses who followed it. Instead of hailing the highlights of Islam they fell into unpardonable fanaticism and plundered in the name of religion. Whereas their situation may have remained a passing phase today, there is another part of the picture. Today the Muslims have chosen to resign themselves to the subversion and invitation of the western glare. Basically, the Muslim attitude towards material world is characteristic of East, and not of West. The Muslims are by faith, spiritually oriented community, who fear the Master alone, and keep him as witness in all their worldly dealings. It is a happy sign

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\(^2\) Quran, iii:110
\(^3\) Ibid, ii:143
that even to this date, it is hard for a true Muslim to accept deceit in the name of religion. Even when other religions deal in business under the religious symbol such as the Swastika, the entire transaction is without question accepted to be totally fair, because the person has kept Lord as witness through his particular symbol. This narration is a recent fact in one of the Arab countries, where the judgement in favour of an Indian merchant was passed simply by the sight of the divine symbol of Swastika on the front page of his accounts.  

So, when such an implicit faith forms the very foundation of the Muslim life, it is really a painful sight the way this community is aping the West in all that is rejected, dejected and shameful. For the West, it may have been the only way to live, in the absence of proper guidance and true knowledge. But, those who claim to be the decendents of such a noble person such as the Prophet and those who receive the light of East from all around, have no such excuse.

However, inspite of the numerous drawbacks of this community, it carries with it, some rare qualities of huminity, not found elsewhere so abundantly. Islam has definitely gifted it with the vital religious feelings, the readiness to suffer in the cause of God and the spirit of earnestness, fidelity and love that have become extinct among the materialistic nations of the West. Inspite of their prominent ignorance and

4 Times of India, 3 June 1982.
backwardness, Muslim community will provide the raw material from which the finest model of humanity can be made.\(^5\)

Today, Islam exists along with the other religions of the world. Being spread over a vast number of people over a short span of time, it deserves the expert attention of the educated, as to the reasons for its spread. Doubtless, its rapid spread and remarkable hold over the multitudes has been awe awakening. However, intellectuals all over the world are rather slow to appreciate its basic role in uplifting humanity and placing them all equal. Rather the specks of its religious works, the ignorance of the Muslim people, lack of general enlightenment, fanaticism, neglected reason and such negative concepts have been held to be responsible for the spread of Islam. The circumstances under which Islam is accepted, are not happy ones. On the contrary, the religion as a whole was held with suspicion by some thinkers, leave alone its advocate and his authenticity. Inspite of its feable rationale and ideas, Islam occupies a definite place in the world religion which will have to be fortified by the review of its historic development. Islam today, has been influenced by various other forces, of other religions, cultures and, of course, western technology. Needless to emphasize the impact of Hinduism on the Islam, particularly in India. Some varied customs, not exactly the idol worship but such other gestures as kissing the

\(^5\) Nadvi S.A. Hasan Ali, Western Civilization, Islam and Muslims, P-211.
tomb, offering veriminals and burning the incence etc, have been followed at times. Such non-Islamic practices have tarnished the image of Islam of the 6th century.

Apart from the religious change, Islam has been perturbed at other fronts too. Strictly speaking, it is the sincere observance of the principles which mark a Muslim. They are Tawhid (assertion of Divine Unity) the belief in one God, Salat (Prayer), Saum (Fast), Zakat (Alms-giving) and Hajj (Pilgrimage). With variations in emphasis, every Muslim must live by this five standards in general. There is no other alternative, for example, that of substituting prayer by a good deed, or alms-giving by postponing till a convenient date. A Muslim has no excuse, except on health grounds, and economically weak position in society, where holy travel is concerned. Otherwise some part of income must be laid aside for the needy, no matter how meagre one earns. It is now obvious that such excellent norm was enforced so that a balanced social order automatically emerges. But, the questioning mind of the Muslims has conveniently dropped all that was disciplinary in Islam, and has retained only that which requires no special sacrifice, such as the belief in the unity of God; or the more affluent amongst them may be benevolent some times, by giving some donations. Even, they may perform Hajj. But, when it is mandatory to follow all five principles in the true spirit, often, Hajj has come to stay awfully merchantile. As regards prayers and fast, there is no inner drive to perform them
faithfully and often, under the pretense of ill health, they are
avoided. Such is the attitude of modern Muslim towards Islam.
He does not respect the word of Quran any more than he trusts
his own instincts. His instincts and the baser aspects of
his personality crave for ease comfort and luxury in place
of the strict following of Islam. So to say, Islam is much
milder a religion to follow than most other religions, like
Jainism, and at times, even Buddhism. Herein, personal annihi-
lation is high-lightened to such an apex, that the sight
becomes pathetically unbearable to the onlooker. Now, Islam
has just shown some plain ethical rules, which are practicable
and easy to follow, without inflicting any physical agony as
such. And there is so much fuss regarding its strictness. It
is the lax age through which humanity as a whole is passing.
All standards of life are diluted, and little heeded are the
awes of religious consequences. No one is seriously concerned
with one's fate after death. At least, death is the solitary
phenomenon which no human being can sanely challenge. After
death, the soul meets its end according to its deed here on this
earth. Now, it is the very concept of life after, which is
forgotten in modern times. We are so busy improving our lives
here on earth materially that we find it hard to give its
pursuit for something non-material and that too, after we are
no more in this form. To be honest with ourselves, how many
of us faithfully accept our soul as different independent
principle, which will have to persist even when this body
parishes? If there was a genuine field work carried out, the results would be alarming. Baffled as we are today confused as we are, facing all sorts of dilemma more than we ever did before, the question is, whether Islam as a religion will henceforth continue in its original form/is, just on its own credentials.

**Stability:** The elements responsible for

The greatness and nobility of a religion lies in the benevolence of its outlook so as not to deny the claims and authority of other religion to Truth. On the contrary, a sense of respect and tolerance raises a religion to loftier heights. Islam has these qualities. This faith is constituted of a line of Prophethood. The claim of any religion or Prophet to the vision of truth is denied. Nevertheless, it is believed that later followers adulterated that Truth by their own inventions. That is why God sent Prophet Muhammad (S.A.) to purify God's religion. Each religion manifests some aspect of the main Truth, but the emphasis may differ according to the need of Man of that period or age or race. Islam is the religion that has message most relevant for the entire mankind. This characteristic of universality of appeal for all times, is an important fact that constituted to its stability. Despite a long line of prophethood, the religion continued to throb in the very structure of the society, which speaks a great deal of the stabilising factors.
Again, the lineage of Islam is remarkable. Islam is in the line of all religions whose prophets belonged to the family of Abraham. The Jew tradition which had its roots in Abraham's son Ishaq (Isaac) found its culmination with Christ, who was the last prophet in that family tree. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.) was the descendant of the other son of Abraham, Ishmael. Prophets in other lines among the descendants of Adam have been hinted at, but not referred to except Noah, as examples in Quran. However, just because Quran mentions the widespread impact of Islam allegorically, other traditions and other religions cannot be denied their existence. All that Islam contends to indicate is the adulteration of that Truth; the continuous addition of human word, to the word of God. It is difficult to discriminate the authenticity of any revealed religion in its original form, from the form it has come to acquire with the passage of time.*

An important factor that consolidates a religion is the life and personality of the founder. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.)*s life had been exemplary in the then prevailing conditions. He lived a pure and simple life of an average respectable citizen. He was honest, upright and truthful. However, he was spectacularly a meditative type of person who spent hours together in secluded caves of Hira, in the Mount Nur. It was

* Of course, the authenticity of Quran is unquestionable.
here that in his fortieth year, he received his first revelation and direction to preach. He was severely persecuted by his people. When his execution was plotted at Mecca, he received divine instructions to migrate to Madina where the first Muslim State was established. Upon his death in 632 A.C., he conquered the entire Arabia religiously, and Islam emerged as an established religion. Then after, there were controversies between the Islamic states and the Byzantine and Persians. This revolutionary wave of spread through Arabia and crossed its outskirts. The earlier four Caliphs has the practical and spiritual visions of the religion. They conquered the Byzantine and Persia and gradually spread upto India, China, Morocco, Spain and Sicily. Recent records show the chart that there are 750 million Muslims in the world; 550 Muslims in 50 Muslim states, or countries with Muslim majority and around 200 millions in the rest of the world. Europe too can claim 25 to 30 million muslims.

As in past, so in present day context of conflict and afflictions in moral, cultural and religious dimensions of social life, Islam has proved an ace of crises. Its principles and simple code of conduct has appealed to majority, ever since its inception. Even without any coersion or threat, modern men of the West, men of science and technology, antagonists and atheists, hail the magnitude of this faith with much

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6 12th of Rabi I., II A.H. - 8th June 632 A.C. Ibn-Hisham, P-1109.
* While the latest gazette reads 1 billion.
esteem. The strength of any religion may not be judged by the quantity, but certainly by the quality. The enduring allurement of this faith has been due to some such universal factors of human interest at large.

There is the perpetual faith in the message of this religion. If at all the religions have lost relevance in modern times, it is because their important factor, the very essence of religion, is ruled out. This age of science and technology has held in high esteem, the human capacity and his intelligence, no doubt. But it has been overdone, to the serious neglect of religious spirit. Not that Islam has become irrelevant, it is the followers of Islam who have become antagonists. Too much obsession with modernization and western life style has inflated their minds, so as puff off the last modicum of religion. Most Muslims bear the name merely because they have been born to the faith of Islam. Nothing else discriminates them from the atheists or antagonists. They do not carry any glorious bearings, nor do they pride their heritage in manner or conduct.

The nature of revealed religion, in itself, is a consolidating factor which adds to its stability. The life and teachings of revealed religion do constitute the grounds for its stability, much so in case of Islam. It was the emphasis with which Prophet Muhammad (S.A.) hailed the authenticity of the divine message. Thus, Quran is not the whimsical product of the prophet's thinking and imagination, as some western
scholars have belittlingly mentioned. Rather, every utterance of that book is the word of God which was communicated to him through the Gabriel. Being the revealed word of God, it imparts knowledge which is immune to doubts, on the part of the followers. When the scriptures are accepted with such dedication and subjugation, the respect it commands is multiplied, unvitiated by the shallow and worthless arguments. There is no room for any attack on the faith and hence less chances of the religion being shaken at the roots. Faith is the foundation of the religion, and deeper its roots, stabler is the religion.

There are other factors which have persistently kept Islam in its full stature on religious rostrum. The idea of communal brotherhood and universal fraternity is substantiated by the modern concept of humanism. Those non-confirmist or tired of traditional taboos have no hesitation in following those essential and practical teachings of Quranic text. And hence, even if there is nothing else to distinguish a Muslim from others, he still carries on his person, the gratification of belonging to the faith of Islam, due to some fundamental teachings of human relevance, which he has assimilated with his own person. Added to this, is the idea of communal prayer. It is a suggestion to rise above one's own petty wants, and consider the benefit and welfare of the community at large. Other religions like Christianity too emphasise communal prayers. However, the sincerity in its attendance and the seriousness
with which this particular stricture is accepted, is quite peculiar to Islam. It is not the social apprehension, but the very form of Islamic teaching.

Sir T.W. Arnold remarks that the supreme importance in the missionary history of Islam is its ordain of an yearly gathering of believers of different caste, creed and nationality. Whether in praying in public or privately, their faces are set towards the same direction. The religious genius of the propounder is excellent. It impresses upon the mind of the faithful, a sense of their common life and of their brotherhood in the bonds of faith. Men living poles apart, are in common bondage, and thus, they are sympathetic towards each other.7

Also the institutions of pilgrimage and the payment of legal alms perpetually remind the Muslims that 'the faithful are brothers. This religious theory is strikingly realized in Muslim society, though it may also have experienced slight regressions due to changing economic conditions in general.

Even as change of perspectives has brought about a general change in Old and New Testaments, not so with Quran.

Even from the point of view of a piece of library work, Quran is regarded as the specimen of the purest Arabic; it is an admixture of prose and poetry and the combination shows

aesthetic acumen, and practical craftsmanship. F.F. Arbuthnot opines that Arabic Literature has yet to produce a work parallel to the standards of Quran. Quran was compiled in 632 A.D., that is, twenty years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). Till this date, it has remained unchanged. A changing religious text often disturbs the stability of religion. Islam could keep its initial form, despite the enthusiastic attempts by the interpreters and critics, to alter it. However, this is not the case with the epics of other religions, like Judaism and Christianity.8 Scriptures thus gathering the opinions and commentaries, ages after ages, do achieve historical and cultural value. But then, in such cases, for example, Hinduism and its related religions and even Christianity, it is difficult to discriminate between the initial religious teachings and mythologies. Where the religion and politics are indistinguishable, there is an example of the sovereignty in the name of divinity. Islam has legalistic outlook. As in law, so in religions, there are sanctions, taboos and orders. An action leads to definite consequences and practical punishment, if there is any breach. Islam has adopted the legislature of Quranic teachings. According to its commands and decrees, any breach in the action denotes wrong attitude to God and false pride. It may lead a man to generating practices of irreligious life, or even to atheism. However, such waywardness is acquired

and not inherited. Hence it speaks volumes about the unflinchable principles of this religion. It indicates the unshakable foundations upon which this religion is based.

Islam has inculcated a feeling of general contentment in its followers. All possibilities of complaints mingle in the unquestionable will of Allah. As such, religious stability has found spontaneous ground to steadfast itself. It is discontentment and unfulfilment which often leads to turbulence in religion. In contact with other religions like Christianity which has undergone constant change.

Quran is a text which has abundant moral fragrants. Each fragmentary verse is rich in meaning. The dictates are such that they appeal equally, to the sage and the commonest of the man. Instead of elaborate and complicated codes of conduct, at times, even terminating into rituals, it is the very matter of facts, relevant and practical rules which stand the test of time. Such an account of religious teachings with universal appeal has fortified this religion. Philosophers, scientists, politicians and laymen, all stand on common platform to hold in high esteem, this simple religion. Its simplicity is its greatest asset. Even though Quran may be read and re-read, there is no weariness about it. Rather, it becomes lucid and charming with every repetition. It shakes the deepest of the

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cores, even of the one who listens to it. It gives rise to a profound feeling of awe and respect. Hence it was neither violence or coercion nor any missionary institution that resulted in the rapid spread of Islam and its stability, but it was through the message of The Book. It is remarkably down to earth in its discussion of the good life. This practical instruction, combined with dedication to one God, makes Islam unique. Moreover, Islam is proclaimed as the first religion to have practiced practical democracy. It is a magnificent sight of the democratic attitude par excellence, when the king and the servant kneel side by side and proclaim "God alone is great". It is this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man distinctively a brother, whatever be their caste, creed or position in life.

Its humanistic approach is heartening. No other society has such a record of successes in uniting in an equality or status, of opportunity and of endeavour, so many and so various races of mankind. The great Muslim communities of Africa, India and Indonesia and the small Muslim community of Japan show that Islam does possess the power to reconcile apparently irreconcilable elements of race and tradition. It has survived and quite firmly the severe criticism, attacking its very

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10 Introduction to The Kuran by George Sale (London), PP-V-Vii E Denison Ross

11 Lectures on "The Ideals of Islam vide Speeches' and Writings of Sarojini Naidu (Madras-1918), P-169.

genuineness, and labelling it as fraud and fanatic. Had it been so it would have met subsequent end after Prophet's death. On the contrary, it emerged as a religion for the society, for the well-being and disciplined conduct of man. It did not feign lofty metaphysical ideals like identity with God, being God-like etc. It simply ordained man to live like a human being. While Christianity, very recently, and very many religions and a religious institutions have been able to articulate this concept under the label of humanism, Islam had defined it from the very beginning.

The statements of Quran, strongly enough, confirm to modern scientific phenomenon in all respects. There is no contradiction between the observed fact and the statement of Quran, as is the case with Old Testament and the Gospels. In Old Testament, it is right in the first book, the Genesis, where some statements are totally in contradiction with scientific facts. Quran does not contain a single statement that is vulnerable from the modern scientific point of view.

In this age of spiritual void, Islam has yet to say meaningful thing to its people. This spiritual expression is found to have converted the lives of many a wayward. It has stabilized the life of the shaky, it has pacified the afflicted. The essential spirit of Islam will be re-captured thought

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13 The Bible, The Kuran and Science, P-15 by Dr. Maurice Bucaille.
when not stray incidents, but humanity at large will realize the malign effects of sheer material mode of life. Only religion can accomplish what law can never enforce. The sanctions are deeper. They are internal, not external.