

Islam and Muslim Societies

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A SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL

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2006

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ISLAM AND MUSLIM SOCIETIES

A SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL

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Islam and Muslim Societies is primarily a forum for scholars across the disciplines of Sociology/Social Anthropology, Economics, History, Political Science, Law, Philosophy and other related streams and provides open space for research and dialogue on Islam (except theological debates/issues) and Muslim societies across the globe.

The Journal invites contributions in the form of original articles- theoretical, empirical and policy analysis- short notes, review articles, book reviews, news relating to research and academic/professional fora and communications. A detailed note for contributors is given on the back cover.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S PEN

The first issue of the 2nd volume is before you. When we launched the journal in year 2005 even friends and well wishers were apprehensive about the viability and credibility of the journal. It is so heart warming that the journal has been taken with warmth and enthusiasm not only in India but also abroad.

The friends and well wishers while expressing their apprehensions were of the view that it was very difficult to sustain such a specialized journal mainly because of the reason that there were not many scholars in Social Sciences who were working on Islam and Muslim societies and it was an uphill task to sustain a new journal of this size- producing 250 pages of reasonably good literature per issue, is not an easy task. I am deeply indebted to the members of our editorial advisory board and senior scholars who reposed faith in me and the journal and helped sustain it in the most crucial period of a research journal's life.

We have received a number of letters and e mails from scholars of different disciplines providing us their free and frank opinions and feedback. This has greatly encouraged and enthused us. I also wish to thank the authors for their contributions and the publisher, Mr. S.K. Jha, for his untiring efforts because of which all the issues have come on time so far. Following are some of the observations and comments, out of the many which we received, made by scholars of different social science disciplines about the journal.

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& Professor of International Relations
American University, Washington DC, USA.

“.... Congratulations for filling up this gap of knowledge by publishing the first social science journal devoted to Islamic anthropology and allied disciplines.”

Dr. Shibani Roy

Anthropological Survey of India
Nagpur, India

We believe that with the continued cooperation of the contributors and readers the nascent journal would not only continue to survive but would also emerge as a much needed and significant academic venture in the coming years.

ISLAM AND MUSLIM SOCIETIES

Editor

NADEEM HASNAIN

Volume 2

Number 1

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CLASH OR DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS?

Akbar S. Ahmed

Abstract: *Ever since Huntington advanced his thesis of 'Clash of Civilizations' the entire intellectual world has been engaged in this intellectual exercise with varying ideological orientations. The present paper deals with this issue from a different perspective. It puts 'dialogue of civilizations' on a higher pedestal rather than 'clash of civilization'. Oriented towards South Asia it examines the importance and relevance of dialogue between India and Pakistan with Hindu-Muslim perspective. This discussion becomes immediately relevant because of the fact that almost one fifth of the humanity lives in this region. Moreover, in South Asia, Islam and Hinduism have met each other in an entirely different cultural background. The composite and syncretic cultures of South Asia bears testimony to this fact.*

I intend to explore some urgent and relevant questions concerning all of us, i.e., whether there will be a clash of civilizations or a dialogue of civilizations in the 21st Century? And what can the historical experiences of South Asia bring to this debate.

And why is this Discussion Relevant or Important in the 21st Century?

There are good signs of [India-Pakistan] dialogue from South Asia in the news recently although I will take the long term view based in history).

The discussion is relevant because we are talking of [South Asia] a region of the world which has a population of about one and a half billion people; one-fifth of humanity. And there have been three wars between India and Pakistan and both are now nuclear and there is always the danger that the confrontation could lead to a nuclear exchange which would affect millions and millions of people in a barbaric and mindless exchange of nuclear violence, more tragic at a time when millions live in dire poverty.

In exploring these questions I will present two main ideas and I hope we will be able to further explore them. I will try to simplify my discussion so as to make sense of complicated historical sequences and different cultures.

Akbar S. Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and Professor of International Relations at American University in Washington DC. He is also former High Commissioner of Pakistan to Britain.

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1. First: Islam's response to the South Asian context created a strong tradition of inclusivism in the [South Asian] subcontinent based in tolerant universalist mysticism—a development which has theological, political and cultural ramifications.
2. Secondly: Islam's response to modernity created a viable democratic Muslim model of political leadership which involved women's rights, minority rights and human rights.

Both ideas challenge some of the stereotypes in our post-9/11 world. In the media today, Islam is often reduced to terrorism or extremism. Indeed, when commentators ask are democracy and Islam compatible they dismiss the idea of a tolerant and democratic tradition within Islam. Obviously they have little idea of South Asian Islam.

As to my first point: When Islam emerged from the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century and first engaged the peoples of what is now the Middle East, North Africa and Spain, it interacted with populations that were largely Jewish or Christian. In short, it was interacting with peoples who were still within the Abrahamic traditions—the idea of an invisible omnipotent God, of common prophets and of a list of commandments were familiar. Within this tradition some figures were shared like Abraham who was considered as both patriarch and prophet. In spite of their differences, the Abrahamic faiths had remarkable similarities and points of contact.

But in South Asia, Islam met Hinduism, a completely different religious system. Not only was the notion of the divine very different and it took very different forms but here was a civilization which was both ancient and sophisticated. It was a civilization which had already created great works of architecture, art and literature. Everything was inspired by religion and yet everything was cultural. Even the name, Hinduism, was not a religious name, but derived from the river Indus and the word itself goes back to the time when invaders who came to the subcontinent arrived at the river Indus—or Ind—and called the people “Hindi” or the people of the Indus.

Confronted with a religion and civilization that was not only older but had a greater population, the philosophers of both Muslims and Hindus began a process of mutual understanding. There were points of theological, cultural and intellectual contact, and even synthesis. Genuine learning from both while respecting each other's integrity and identity was not only possible, but allowed the co-existence of communities. This was possible because within Islam there is a theological mechanism to allow Muslim societies to adjust to change. It is called *ijtehad*.

The Muslim response came in two different forms: inclusivist and exclusivist. This inner tension between exclusivists and inclusivists created a dynamics which has existed throughout Muslim history in South Asia. The greater the threat to Islam the greater the falling back to exclusivist leaders. Among the inclusivists were figures like Amir Khusro, Moin-uddin Chisti, Dara Shikoh and other luminaries. Their philosophy rested in the famous Sufi saying, “sulh-i-kul” or “peace with all.”

Conversions to Islam took place because of these Muslim scholars and saints. With compassion went knowledge which is so highly valued in Islam. As an anthropologist, I always give the example of Al-Beruni who, a thousand years ago, came to India studied

Sanskrit and Hindu society, and wrote his renowned book *Kitab-al-Hind* or the Book of India, which is still the standard source for that time of Indian history.

The Mughal emperor Akbar, who inspired my father to name me after him, provides us another remarkable example—remarkable because it would certainly challenge those today who think of Islam as fanatical and extremist. If you go to Fatehpur Sikri and I recommend you doing it when you are next in India, enter the grand Baland Darwaza and on the right hand side you will see a quotation. There is a line which says: “This world is a bridge—build not your house upon it but pass lightly over it—thus sayeth our Lord Jesus, peace be upon him.” And I often think to myself that here was this mighty Muslim emperor one of the most powerful in the world ruling an empire that took in what is today India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh and when he built his new city—which was doomed to failure due to the shortage of water but that is another story—he quoted in the main entrance in the place of honor, not [Muhammad] the Prophet of [Allah (God)] but Jesus. And he not only quoted Jesus, but selected a quotation which reflects on the ephemeral nature of life and therefore points us towards compassion and humility and understanding. Akbar asked his governors to spend their free time reading the great Muslim mystic Maulana Rumi—the quintessential poet of peace and love.

In contrast were the exclusivists and one of the earliest was Mahmud of Ghazni. For him the Hindu deities were to be smashed and their temples looted. Islam’s exclusivist expression was tangled with rapacious generals with an eye on plunder. Unfortunately, the image of Islam that dominates in the world media and discourse is inspired by the exclusivists and has become the stereotype of Islam itself.

The tension between the two is dramatically reflected in the 17th century at the high noon of the Mughal Empire. Two sons of the Emperor Shah Jehan presented us again the two distinct models of South Asian Islam: Dara Shikoh, the inclusivist par excellence, and Aurangzeb, the exclusivist par excellence. Dara Shikoh was a mystic who spent his time with Sufis and Yogis, who enjoyed devotional music and who oversaw the translation of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads. He wore a ring that was inscribed with Allah on one side and Prabhu on the other. Always a good Muslim, he never wished to abandon Islam but to expand its boundaries. Aurangzeb on the other hand drew the boundaries tightly around Islam. His was a formal literal and orthodox Islam and he lived in austerity. He spent his spare time reading the Quran. For all his piety he was a shrewd and successful ruler, and the Mughal empire expanded to its furthest boundaries however weak it had become inside.

The clash between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb, and the total victory of Aurangzeb, would cast shadows on Muslim society into the future. The next centuries saw the depletion of compassion, vitality and learning in Muslim society.

The middle of the 19th century and the advent of Western imperialism presented a major crisis for Muslim society. In 1857, uprisings against the British resulted in the last remnants of the Mughal Empire being terminated and Muslim power being both symbolically and substantially finished. One important part of Muslim history in South Asia was over.

Muslims responded to the new realities in two characteristic ways: inclusivism and exclusivism. The two famous educational institutions that were created at Aligarh and Deoband represent the two responses. Aligarh University founded by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan was based on Cambridge University and its students wore blazers, ties, played cricket, but also wore the Fez and said their Muslim prayers. Sir Sayyid was recognized by the British and given a knighthood for his services. Deoband drew boundaries around Islam perceiving Islam under threat. Its founders fought the British in a *jehad*.

The inclusivist Muslim response created a remarkable Muslim renaissance through the late 19th and early 20th century: Allama Iqbal, Hali, Amir Ali and Mohammad Ali Jinnah—these were extraordinary figures who represented a modern, confident Islam with a capacity to respect women, minorities and uphold human rights within the tradition of Islam itself. Jinnah in time inherited the Muslim leadership and it is significant that while he was Quaid-i-Azam or the great leader [of Pakistan] to the inclusivists, he was the *Kafir-i-Azam*, the great unbeliever, to the exclusivists. But what the Quaid presented was vision of a modern, democratic, Muslim nation based in human rights, women's rights and minority rights, and respect for the law.

It is in this context that I find the relationship of Quaid-i-Azam and the person who symbolizes inclusion, [Indian] Mahatma [Mohandas Karamchand] Gandhi, a fascinating one. Both about the same age and both dying in the same year, both from similar backgrounds in Gujarat, both educated in law colleges in London, both attacked by fanatics from their own community—Gandhi in fact losing his life to a Hindu fundamentalist who thought he was too soft on Muslims—and what is not well known, both had a great deal of mutual respect for each other. They were extra-ordinary leaders of vision, integrity and intelligence, and sharp humor. Recall their meeting when Gandhi said to Jinnah: “You have mesmerized the Muslims.” Quick as a flash, Jinnah replied: “And you have hypnotized the Hindus.” There is something charmingly boyish in this bantering alliteration.

Both Quaid-i-Azam and the Mahatma reflect the inclusivist traditions of South Asia and neither saw 1947 as the creation of two states which would remain in permanent confrontation and enmity. [Pakistan's founder] Quaid-i-Azam [Mohammad Ali Jinnah] after all was given the title of ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. His first and perhaps most important speech in Pakistan on August 11, 1947, to the [first] Constituent Assembly clearly outlines his modern, democratic, open-minded and humanist vision for Pakistan in which he exhorted Hindus to worship in their temples and Muslims in their mosques with freedom. Recall his story in Karachi about wanting to be the “Protector-General” of Hindus when he was the “Governor-General” of Pakistan. As for the Mahatma, we know that he began his prayer meetings by reading the Quran and the Bible. We know that he fasted when there were riots against Muslims in order to prevent them. And we know he was on his way to Pakistan in friendship after the creation of Pakistan—no doubt to the relief of some [Indian] Congress leaders who were finding his presence burdensome—and Quaid-i-Azam was prepared to welcome him there when he was assassinated.

In the light of the ideas of inclusivism we have discussed, we need to ask ourselves which is the way ahead in the 21st century. I suggest three steps. First we need to read and

learn about each other. I find that the tragedy of South Asia is that few in Pakistan appreciate Mahatma Gandhi's inclusiveness and few in India appreciate Quaid-i-Azam's inclusiveness. In Pakistan, we need to know much more about figures like Mahatma Gandhi. In India, people need to read and know more about Quaid-i-Azam. When I began to do my project on Quaid-i-Azam, which is called the Jinnah Quartet (a feature film "Jinnah," a documentary, a book and a graphic novel), I began to read on and discover Quaid-i-Azam but also Mahatma Gandhi. I consciously maintained Gandhi's position with dignity and honor—I did not respond (as many people wanted me to) to Attenborough's film "Gandhi" in which he had made Quaid-i-Azam into a caricature. I ignored the calls to take "revenge." Yet the passions and prejudices are so strong that even before the filming of "Jinnah" I was attacked in India because commentators thought I would project Jinnah too favorably and Gandhi not favorably enough. I was also attacked in Pakistan because some thought Jinnah was not being projected favorably enough and Gandhi too favorably, which leads me to a connected point. We need to understand the importance of honor or *izzat* in South Asia to our societies. My new book is titled, "Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World." As an anthropologist, I underline the importance of honor in our part of the world. We need to appreciate that if we can treat each other with honor and respect we will be able to solve problems where politicians have failed. This is true even of Kashmir.

Indeed, if they were looking down at South Asia I am sure things would pain both the Quaid and the Mahatma. The Quaid would be dismayed among other things to learn churches have been bombed and a Bishop shot himself in despair in Pakistan; that a young American journalist had his throat slit and was forced to say: "I am a Jew." But not only non-Muslims are targets of hate: 60 Muslims were killed in a mosque in Pakistan. The Mahatma would be broken hearted to confront the rape and murder and arson of Muslims in Gujarat [India], his own home state. Both would be broken hearted at the endless cycle of violence in Kashmir. Both would wonder whether "sulh-i-kul," peace with all, has now been replaced with "jang-i-kul," war with all.

Finally, I would suggest that we think of the future in a positive and upbeat manner by taking inspiration from our common history—and what a rich history it is. Just take some examples of the inclusivists—starting from Buddha, Asoka and going through history Moinuddin Chisti, Hujwiri, Guru Nanak, Dara Shikoh, Allama Iqbal, Quaid-i-Azam, Mahatma Gandhi—these are extraordinary world figures and they provide enough common ground for us to begin rediscovering our common roots. For anyone who doubts the existence of the inclusivist model—and there are challenges to it regularly—I would suggest a visit to Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan [India]. Every time I have been there I have been struck by the sense of inclusiveness.

Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs all come to pay homage to the philosophy of "sulh-i-kul" or peace with all; or visit Datta Sahib in Lahore to see "sulh-i-kul" in Pakistan. And if you think that international borders can block the message of "sulh-i-kul," then let me remind you that the great mystic poet Bulleh Shah is revered in India among Sikhs and the great Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is popular among Hindus. That I believe is the great contribution of Islam in South Asia.

But “sulh-i-kul” [peace with all] in South Asia will be under challenge in the 21st century from the scourge of global violence or terrorism; from poverty and injustice; from ethnic and religious prejudice and lack of education; from closed minds that exclude compassion and forgiveness; and from the real threats to our global environment.

NOTE

This paper is based on the lecture delivered in 2004 at the Gandhi Memorial Centre of Washington D.C. as the inaugural lecture under Fellowship of Peace Annual Lecture Series.

RISE AND FALL OF THE MUSLIM EMPIRES

Ranjit Sau

Abstract: *Analysis of the course of Muslim empires, spread as they were over vast swathes of lands across continents embracing a variety of cultures and customs, can shed light on their strength and weakness in relation to social stability and progress. Keeping such a perspective in view, this essay scrutinizes the dynamics of two of them, namely, the Arab and the Ottoman empires. It proposes two hypotheses.¹*

First, to the extent conquering territory became part of the imperial ethos in the wake of the theocratic partition of the world into Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb, it turned into a factor of instability. In the absence of proportionate economic florescence at home, sustaining the empire with external resources necessitated continuing repeated military campaigns abroad. Under the circumstances, one major defeat in the battlefield on foreign shores could irrevocably throw the system off balance.

Second, by the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had reached a stage comparable to the Renaissance, then sweeping the European continent. But why did not, then, the empire proceed further towards the next phase, namely, the Enlightenment? This essay acknowledges that the recognition of universal human dignity and freedom was an integral feature of the Enlightenment; people's freedom had to be achieved through a process of class struggle. Success was, evidently, contingent upon how the agrarian question is settled. The Ottoman military theocracy, animated by the principle that every labour was servile except the profession of arms, offered no space for the classes that could play the historic role.

Today, immersed deep in a crisis of internal cleavage and external challenge, the realm of Islam might tend to seek instructions from its own history of mighty empires of the yore, in

Ranjit Sau is a well known scholar who retired from Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

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their rise and fall. But history does not repeat itself; the outside world, in particular, takes long irrevocable strides. However, the Muslim imperial experience is so variegated as to offer a template of several experiments as it were, in varying contexts of space and time. From those disparate narratives one can possibly glean a few common threads of imperial vicissitude. With this expectation we concentrate upon two episodes, namely, the Arab Empire (c600-1000), and the Turkish (Ottoman) Empire (c1300-1922) — the two so unlike in speed of movement and style, yet so akin in their soul.

Analytics: Historically, human life is spread over three distinct but interconnected spheres, namely, society, economy, and polity. Society, being a complex network of human relationships, is relatively slow to move over time or in response to shocks; whereas the economy, sustained by knowledge and technology, harbours an urge for change. Polity is essentially an instrument to establish a concord between economy's inherent drive and society's inclination to rest.

In the early history, it was common for society to be the mainstay, taking the economy and polity on tow. At a certain stage, in the West, the economy surged ahead accompanied by an incipient awareness of human dignity. It was this blend of economy-ism and humanism that helped the West move in the direction of modernity.

Islam had not yet approached such a turning point. Medieval history had witnessed its deficit of economic strength and the absence of recognition of universal freedom, these two factors would explain, to a large measure, the fall of Muslim empires (as also of other empires). This would beg the question as to why and how that happened, to which we shall return in due course. Suffice it to say here that of the infinite desires of man the chief, in our view, are the desires for accumulation of wealth and for the exercise of power. Much like the twin basic concepts of energy and matter in physics, in the domain of history wealth and power are the two primary forces. The caliph's bid for accumulation of wealth and the ulema's grip over the believers would in effect account for the fluctuating contours of empires. This caliph-ulema contest looks somewhat similar to the state-church confrontation that would convulse medieval Europe, but with dissimilar consequences.

Arab Empire: The Dawn

'The power of a community depends not only upon its numbers and its economic resources and its technical capacity, but also upon its beliefs,' writes Bertrand Russell (1938:117). 'Mohammad added nothing ... to the material resources of the Arabs, and yet within a few years of his death they had acquired a large empire defeating their most powerful neighbours. Undoubtedly the religion founded by the prophet was an essential element in the success of his nation.' But how did that belief come to grip the Arabs?

It is a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human. But is this failing constantly present, or are there circumstances that, more than others, make the textual attitude likely to prevail? Two situations seem to favour a textual attitude. One is when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening. The other is when success appears (Said 1978:93). Seventh century Arabia was ripe with all this.

Mohammad ibn Abdallah, of the family of Hashem, had long been worried by what he perceived to be a crisis in Arab society. His tribe, the Quraysh, had in recent decades become rich by trading in the neighbouring countries. Makka had become a thriving mercantile city, but in the aggressive stampede for wealth some of the old tribal values had been lost.

There was also spiritual restlessness in Makka and throughout the peninsula. Arabs knew, with a sense of indignity, that Judaism and Christianity, which were practiced in nearby Byzantine and Persian empires, were more sophisticated than their own pagan traditions. Some had come to notice that the High God of their pantheon, al-Lah (whose name simply meant 'the God'), was the deity worshiped by the Christians and the Jews, but He had sent the Arabs no prophet and no scripture in their own language—they had been left out of the divine plan (Armstrong 2002:3).

That changed on the night of 17 Ramadan, AD 610, when Mohammad, meditating in a cave on the summit of Mount Hira just outside Makka, felt himself overpowered by a divine presence, which squeezed him tightly until he heard the first words of a new Arab's scripture pouring from his lips. For the first two years, he kept quiet about this experience. He had new revelations, but confided only in his wife Khadija and her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal. Both were convinced that these revelations came from the heaven, but it was only two years later that Mohammad was empowered to preach, and gradually gained converts: his cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, his friend Abu Bakr, and the young merchant Uthman ibn Affan from the influential Umayyad family. The holy Koran thus came to Arabia and fulfilled a spiritual longing.

Mohammad founded the first Muslim nation, ummah, in Madina, in AD 622. Ten years later, at the prophet's death, Abu Bakr came to be the first caliph: the title is a transliteration of the Arabic word khalifah which means successor or representative. The original full title was 'Khalifat rasul Allah', i.e. successor to the prophet of God, in short, khalif. The first four caliphs are considered 'rightly guided', or *rashidun*: Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn Abi Talib. At personal relationship, the first two were Mohammad's fathers-in-law, the last two sons-in-law. Their rule was followed by the Umayyad dynasty and the Abbasid dynasty that fell in the early tenth century.

From this point, the caliphs no longer wield temporal power, but remain a symbolic authority. Real power now resides with the local rulers, variously known as sultan, amir, pasha, etc., who establish respective dynasties. Most of them acknowledge the suzerainty of Abbasid caliphs.

The first three centuries of Arab rule will be called here the Arab Empire. The period was tumultuous with wars of apostasy, assassinations, and civil wars. Abu Bakr's reign was short but crucial. He was chiefly preoccupied with the so-called wars of riddah (apostasy). Most of the bedouin tribes who had entered the ummah under Mohammad now prepared to secede. It was, however, significant that many of them felt impelled to give their revolts a religious justification; the leaders often claimed to be prophets and produced Koran-style revelations. Abu Bakr quelled the uprising by inducing the recalcitrant with the prospect of taking part in the lucrative ghazu raids, i.e. ambush, upon non-Muslim

lands. The ghazu campaigns would get dramatic momentum under the rule of the second caliph, Umar. These raids were a response to a problem that had arisen from the new Islamic peace in the peninsula.

For centuries, the Arabs had eked out their inadequate resources by means of the ghazu, but Islam had put a stop to this practice because the tribes of the ummah were not permitted to attack one another. What would replace the ghazu which had enabled Muslims to scratch out a meager living? Umar realized that the ummah needed order. The unity of the ummah would be preserved by an outwardly directed offensive. Under Umar's leadership the Arabs burst into Iraq, Syria and Egypt, achieving a series of astounding victories. Umar thus perhaps unwittingly inaugurated an unprecedented episode of Muslim conquest: ghazu, an age-old desert venture that Abu Bakr had used to divert rebels' attention away from the ummah, now turned into a state policy of empire building. Soon, the Islamic law, sharia, would come to bestow upon it religious sanctity.

The last three of the rashidun quartet would meet, one by one, unnatural end at the hands of assassins or rivals. Similar fate would await many a caliph thereafter. The Arab Empire was not a monolith of one blind faith; like elsewhere, it had plenty of violence, but what was unique here is that personal ambition would always be cast in religious terms of a variety of suitable interpretations. Yet, during the first millennium the Arab Empire extended far and wide.

Islam literally means submission. Millions of believers have made the submission reciting the Koran. The two conditions favourable to textual attitude, cited above, were amply there: the Arabs had for long a spiritual yearn for a prophet with the scripture in their own language, and the miraculous success of Muslims in battlefields were read as signs of divine approval.

Ulema: The early caliphs assumed for themselves the authority to rule in all matters not specified in the Koran; after all, they were the 'Khalifat rasul Allah', successor to the prophet of God. They donned the mantle of spiritual and temporal leadership of Islam, a shade short of claiming prophethood, and insisted that obedience to the caliph in all things was the hallmark of the good Muslim.

This pretension of the caliphs was challenged by the growing strength of ulema—a class of scholars, clerics, and religion specialists. Now the ulema asserted their jurisdiction to determine what was legal and orthodox. The proper Muslim leader, in the ulema's opinion, was a leader who enforced the ruling of the ulema, rather than making rulings of his own. Conflict between the caliph (or his vice-regent like amir, sultan or pasha) and the ulema would be a recurrent theme of history.

Over one hundred and fifty years after the death of Mohammad, the legendary Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid, encouraged systematic anthology of the traditions set by the prophet and his companions, which were to be emulated by the believers in order to acquire the interior attitude of perfect submission. This literature is given the name of the hadith and the sunna. The Koran together with the hadith and the sunna would enable the formation of a coherent body of Islamic law, sharia. By the tenth century, in the closing years of the Arab Empire, the composition of sharia was over. Islamic law would no longer require

further elaboration of fresh principles and rules, or so it was proclaimed by the ulema. This event is remembered as the closing of the gates of *ijtihad*, i.e. the suspension of independent juristic reasoning. The gates have remained closed ever since.

With an exclusive hold over the exegesis of scripture and the tools of controlling society, economy and polity at their hand, the ulema left for the caliph the singular burden of pushing the frontiers of empire. The sharia solemnly partitioned the world into the Dar al-Islam (the House of Islam), which was ordained to be in hostility with the Dar al-Harb (the House of War). Ghazu raids upon infidels were thereby sanctified. Moreover, drawing the actual line of demarcation between the two houses remained a privilege of the caliph and his rivals. Through this system of theocratic cartography sectarian combats could easily pass wearing an honourable badge of piety. This binary criterion of judging countries in terms of either the Dar al-Islam or the Dar al-Harb recognized none in between, for example, potential friends or allies who might profess another faith. Such a worldview was constrictive, if not misleading, in any case self-fulfilling.²

There was another type of classification, this time relating to individual human beings. The scripture has harsh words on the infidel, but all that is about his afterlife. In respect of the present, the Koran consistently displays toleration: 'Unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship' (109:1-5). Here the word 'ever' signifies the absence of any intention in favour of conversion ever. Rather it hints positively at a contemplation of peaceful religious coexistence, which is made explicit as the sura closes with this sentence: 'You have your religion, and I have mine' (109:6).

It was not until after about one century from the date of the prophet's death that conversion started, under the exigency of imperial war. Umayyad caliph, Umar II, had made a daring attempt to capture Constantinople, but that adventure brought him a disastrous defeat with a heavy loss of troops. The caliph was now under pressure to replenish his army. Infidels were offered monetary incentive to embrace Islam. Application of force was not excluded, under pain of death, despite the clear Koranic injunction to the contrary: 'There shall be no compulsion in religion' (2:256).

First it was ghazu raids that ransacked non-Muslim homelands outside the ummah, and then came conversion within the ummah—these two in combination marked a watershed of departure from the essence of Koran's universal spirituality. Where men are discriminated by their faith, humanism cannot flourish, society and polity cannot function. And how far can the ghazu mode of production carry the empire?

The extension of ghazu abroad as a means of buying domestic peace has its own peril. As a source of financing imperial expeditions, it has a limit. Once launched, it tends to press for its own continuance; then, if stopped, the empire would fall into economic crisis. In the absence of the cultivation of internal economic provision, the imperial momentum may not run for long. Each annexation of territory brings in its trail further commitment of expenditure—new troops are to be recruited, trained, stationed in distant garrison towns, and provided with supply; hence more ghazu abroad. It is compulsively a self-repeating project, subject to a forced termination only by a decisive failure at the battlefield on foreign shores.

Caliph al-Walid of the Umayyad dynasty had continued the march in North Africa and established a kingdom in Spain. Little was he aware that the empire had reached its limit of western expansion. The defeat of his successor, Umar II, in his Constantinople campaign delivered the message that it was time for paying greater attention to internal economic expansion—a message that was heeded, at least in part, by the next dynasty, the Abbasids.

In this story of self-compelling nature of the ghazu regime, students of economics might have seen a sort of multiplier-accelerator process at work. Let Y denote the territorial size of the empire, C the consumption demand for subjects' subsistence and maintenance of the military, and I the investment demand on account of the military, all measured in territorial unit. And a , and m are parameters. The model has three equations:

$$(1) Y = C + I$$

$$(2) C = aY$$

$$(3) I = m \cdot (\text{annual change in } Y).$$

It generates an exponential growth path of Y at a constant rate over time which shows the dynamic equilibrium of the empire. The system will decline and fall as soon as it hits a constraint on the supply-side, i.e. the ghazu campaign to capture territory is defeated.³

Ottoman Empire: The Sunset

The Arabian ghazu had inspired a popular movement of whose offspring were the 'ghazis', holy warriors of the faith. Recruited from the mixed crowd of volunteers, often vagabonds, fugitives, malcontents, and unemployed persons seeking subsistence, their preferred task was to fight infidel, and their predominant motive was plunder. Traditionally, they fought as mercenaries, carrying out raids beyond the frontiers of Islam. In the eleventh century, a group of nomads, known as Turkmans, came to operate as ghazis on the fluid borders between the Seljuk and the Byzantine empires in Asia Minor.

In 1243, the Mongols overran the Seljuk army in Anatolia, but the Mongol power itself proved ephemeral, lasting in Asia Minor for a mere generation, leaving an opening for the Turkmans. Fighting among themselves the tribal leaders established and ruled over some ten ghazi principalities. One of these, the principality of Osman, was destined to grow into a great power, the Ottoman Empire founded in 1299, to endure under his dynasty for more than six centuries.

The accession of Suleiman to the Ottoman caliphate in 1520 coincided with a turning point in the history of the European civilization. The darkness of the late Middle Ages, with its dying feudal institutions, was giving place to the golden lights of the Renaissance, to be followed by the sweep of the Enlightenment.

Suleiman had been acknowledged with manifold appellations: the lawgiver, the magnificent, the Ottoman Prince of the Renaissance. He was himself an enlightened caliph-sultan, yet he could not take his empire to the road towards Enlightenment. If Europe's successful journey in that direction has been propelled by humanism and economy-ism, what precisely did the project of Suleiman fall short of?

Military Theocracy: The Turkmans had shared with the Mongols the same wilderness of Mongolia, wherefrom they migrated west. Between the two tribes, a lot more was common: descent, manners, and ethos. The law code of the Mongol Empire, *Yasa*, was attributed to Genghis Khan himself. It was a narrow military system. The Turkish Ottoman state adopted the Mongol *Yasa*.

The military spirit pervaded all spheres of the empire: economic, social, political. 'Every labour was servile except the profession of arms' (Gibbon 2005:1333). Agriculture, industry, commerce were unbecoming of Muslim pride, hence meant for inferior others, the infidel.

The Ottomans adhered to the ethos of their old ideal, seeing themselves as manning a frontier state, dedicated to the jihad against the enemies of Islam. As the dominions inevitably approached their limits, addition of territory slowed, the soldiers missed their pays, the economy collapsed, as if in an encore of the Arabs' fate, formalized above in the three-equation Harrod-Domar model.

This military theocracy guided itself by the principle of 'government by God', much as it was with the Byzantine Empire. Over it, through the medium of a highly organized bureaucracy, the sultan exercised his absolute rule. As one appointed by the Almighty, he and he alone was the supreme temporal and spiritual authority. The Janissaries, being converted slaves, were outsiders with no landed interests, became an independent force solidly behind the sultan. Their fortune too would fluctuate with imperial procurement of territory.

At the beginning, since Osman's times, Muslims alone were obliged to join the army, and thus were alone eligible for the tenure of land. It was distributed as a reward for service and provided a source of recruitment in the form of military fiefs, free of taxes.

Feudal though it was, this Ottoman system of land tenure through military fiefs differed essentially from the feudal structure of Europe, in that land holdings were small and above all seldom hereditary. For all land was the property of the state. Thus at this stage, there was to arise in Ottoman dominions no landed nobility, such as prevailed throughout Europe. The sultans retained absolute ownership of the soil they had conquered. Moreover, as they continued to conquer, more holdings became available as rewards for more soldiers. Within the framework of this system Orkhan organized a regular standing army, a professional military force on a permanent war footing, of a kind not to be found in Europe for a further two centuries. The Ottoman army was now ever ready, never to be caught by surprise.

For long the distribution of land had remained decentralized, administered by provincial governors. This led to abuses in the form of frequent and irresponsible changes in the ownership of land, which had already become a general practice. This in turn infringed the prerogative of the sultan, who in theory, as God's representative, was the owner of it all.

Suleiman centralized the transfer of large fiefs, that must be now referred for approval to the central government in Istanbul—otherwise to the sultan himself. Local governors, however, retained their assignment to handle the cases of small fiefs only. The flaw in Suleiman's land reforms would soon become evident. As time passed, the allocation of large fiefs depended less on the justice of claims to them than on palace intrigues and corrupt dispense of favours. There grew up a new class of big landlords who were often

officials, courtiers, and servants of the palace and indeed often from outside it, moreover as a rule absentees living in the cities. By corrupt means it became possible for a single person to accumulate any number of fiefs, and build up a big landed property (Kinross 1977:280).

These absentee landlords promptly ran their private estates as ranch for raising horses and livestock, and thus drastically altered the traditional agrarian pattern of land use throughout Anatolia. Peasants lost land, in desperation flocked to the cities for a living. Famine stalked the land. The economy faltered.

Suleiman would be remembered as a magnificent lawgiver. He sought not to create a new legal structure, but to bring the old up-to-date, adapting the laws generally in line with the new conditions of new times, and an immensely enlarged empire. He at once specified, codified, and simplified a confused system of custom and practice. This he did building still on the two main foundations of Ottoman government: (a) the ruling institution, namely, the secular and executive establishment; and (b) the Muslim institution, namely, the religious and legislative establishment. United beneath the apex of the sultan's absolute rule, they represented, in terms of their functions, a rough equivalent of the Western distinction between the state and the church.

Suleiman skillfully got the ulema co-opted into the fold of his administration. Sharia received a more exalted status than in any previous Muslim state, and it became the official law of the land for all Muslims. The sharia courts were given a regular form. The ulema thus turned into an official government corps, creating a moral and religious link between the sultan and his subjects. As government officials, the sultan could, and did, control them by threatening to withdraw their subsidies. Thus, under the Ottoman Empire, the ulema would become emasculated; deprived of their political edge, they became conservative and opposed any change. The ulema's influence with the people coloured major sectors of Ottoman society, making them resistant to the idea of change at a time when change was inevitable.

After Suleiman's reign, the curriculum of the madrasas became narrower: the study of Falsafah was dropped in favour of greater concentration on *fiqh* (Armstrong 2002:134). While the caliph's court was still open to new ideas coming from Europe, the madrasas became the centre of opposition to any experimentation that had derived from European infidels. The ulema opposed, for example, the use of printing for Islamic books. Left behind in the old framework, the ulema would become unable to help the people when Western modernity swept the shores of the Muslim world.

After the death of Suleiman in 1566, the Ottoman Empire would limp on for over three centuries to be a casualty at the rampart of World War I. Well before that tragic finale, in the Arabian peninsula, Mohammada ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92) managed to break away from Istanbul and establish a state in central Arabia and the Persian Gulf. He was a radical reformer in the tradition of Ibn Taymiyyah. He believed that the Ottoman crisis was best met by a fundamental return to the Koran and the sunna, and by a militant rejection of all later accretions. Because the sultans did not conform to his vision of true Islam, Abd al-Wahhab declared them sinners of apostasy worthy of death. And he tried to create an enclave of pure faith, based on his view of the first ummah of the seventh century. His

aggressive techniques would be used by some fundamentalists since the twentieth century. Wahhabism is the form of Islam that is still the state religion in Saudi Arabia, a puritan faith based on a strictly literal interpretation of the scripture and early Muslim tradition (Armstrong 2002:134-35).

Enlightenment?

The economy has a natural tendency to make progress, for it is capable of absorbing the benefits of growing knowledge and technology. But evidently social inhibitions can thwart this positive propensity: in the Arab Empire, the inclination for internal economic development was swamped by the call for external expansion of dominions of the faith; while in the Ottoman Empire, the military theocracy rendered economic activities beneath the dignity of the believer. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the Koran has given definite signs to encourage economic progress through measurable investment (Sau 2005). The two empires—the Arab and the Ottoman—had missed this Koranic instruction.

‘Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought’ (Rawls 1999:3). Demand for justice has been the battle-cry of humanity since antiquity. The fundamental element of human being is ‘dignity’: it is from the human dignity that the content of justice flows. Humanism is the recognition of human dignity: man is a rational and moral being, who creates history.⁴

Justice is the cornerstone of social stability, injustice sooner or later brings down the social edifice. The dignity of the individual is under stress from two sides: exploitation by society and economy, and oppression by the political state. In the West, a ‘civil society’ had emerged in the eighteenth century as a structural institution to defend people’s rights and promote their interests. Such organization had been rare in Muslim communities.

Serif Mardin (1995) observes: ‘The Muslim *telos* [dream] was one which appeared at three levels. The most profound level of the dream was the idea that the Muslim would only bow to the political obligations set by the Koran. The second level was that he would accept as an equivalent the Koranic verisimilitudes of the Koran’s commentators. Third, because neither of these systems were able to assert themselves unequivocally, the Muslim dream shifted to the ideal of a social equilibrium created under the aegis of a just prince.’

Two distinguishing characteristics of this dream may be highlighted. First, it relied on the charismatic authority of a leader to fill the cracks of a compromised, unrealized system of justice, a feature which in Europe was minimized by the rationalization of legal practice and self-referral aspect of law. Second, once anchored in Islam, the dream precluded the adoption of a concept concerning the gradual perfectibility of man through man’s making his own history: that is, man ceased to be a point of reference if he ever was. ‘The dream of a just prince was therefore linked with the primal time, with a yearning for a return of a golden age.’

To continue with a just prince, why was not the putative Ottoman Prince of the Renaissance, caliph Suleiman, followed by an Ottoman Prince of the Enlightenment? ‘Have courage to use your own understanding!—that is the motto of enlightenment,’ exhorted Immanuel Kant (1784:41). ‘Nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except

freedom; and the freedom in question is ... the freedom to use freedom *publicly* in all matters.' This freedom, experience shows, has to be acquired by the people through class struggle.

In Europe it had taken centuries to achieve people's freedom. Barrington Moore (1966:4) describes the story of England, for instance. 'The social struggle that erupted in the English Civil War of the seventeenth century have their origins in a complicated process of change that began several centuries ago.' A modern and secular society was slowly pushing its way up through the vigorous and much tangled overgrowth of the feudal and ecclesiastical order. More specifically, from the fourteenth century onward there were several indicators pointing toward the increasing importance of commerce in both the countryside and the towns, the dismantling of feudalism and its replacement by England's relatively weak version of royal absolutism, both carried on within the framework of an increasingly bitter religious tension that was partly reflection and partly cause of the anxieties and bitterness that necessarily accompany the decline of one kind of civilization and the rise of a new one. The convergence between the landed and urban upper classes in England before the Civil War in such a way as to favour the cause of freedom was, among the major countries, a unique configuration.

The agrarian system and the military temper of the Ottoman Empire had not allowed the rise of landed and urban classes to uphold universal human dignity and freedom, thus foreclosing the prospect of the Enlightenment.

NOTES

1. The first hypothesis was suggested in a note, with the same title as of the present article, published in the weekly, *Frontier*, May 2006, Kolkata. The current essay is an extended version of that note, now adding explicitly the second hypothesis.
2. Tariq Ramadan (2001:27 and 224), in effect, proposes a third 'House', the Dar al-Shahada. He argues: 'according to Islam, there is in every man an aspiration, an energy, which orients him towards the Creator. This 'tendency' is part of man and of his condition; it is a natural testimony (*shahada*).' 'There exists, therefore, at the heart of each man's consciousness, essentially and deeply, an intuition and acknowledgement of the Creator's presence. Just as the sun, clouds, wind, birds and all the animals naturally express their submission, so does the human being have in himself an almost instinctive aspiration towards Transcendence. This is the idea of *fitra* that has aroused numerous theological commentaries, because it is so central to the Islamic concept of the sacred.'

Monotheism, the central core of Islam, is not a creed that is exclusive to any one religion; it is to be found also in Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, among others. If faith in monism or monotheism is the necessary and sufficient criterion of an acknowledged religion, then one can contemplate the existence of a third sphere, Dar al-Shahada (the House of Faith), which encompasses the Dar al-Islam entirely and possibly a part of the so-called Dar al-Harb to the extent it includes believers in religion. If so, a large segment of the world including parts of Europe and America could come within the precinct of the Dar al-Shahada.

3. Let subscript t stand for time. The three equations of the model can be rewritten as follows: $Y_t = C_t + I_t$; $C_t = aY_t$; and $I_t = m \cdot (Y_t - Y_{t-1})$. Growth rate is defined as: $g = (Y_t - Y_{t-1})/Y_{t-1}$. From these