

Islam and Socialism

BY

KHWAJA NAZIR AHMAD

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سُبْحَانَكَ يَا مُحَمَّدُ

Islam and Socialism

LECTURE DELIVERED BY

KHWAJA NAZIR AHMAD AT THE MOSQUE, WOKING,
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I MUST tender an apology at the very outset. The subject is very vast in itself, and it is impossible for me to do justice to it in such a short time as is at my disposal. I hope to be excused if I have to jump from one conclusion to another, and that you will follow the chain of my reasoning very carefully. The complexity of the subject demands this courtesy. I propose first of all to deal with Socialism as known to the West, and shall try to point out its disadvantages. I will then go back to the early days of Islam, and shall venture to show the superiority of the Socialism as brought about by Muhammad, of blessed memory, to the other which is the invention of various Western thinkers.

All down the centuries poverty, like a tragic spectre, has haunted humanity. In ancient days

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poets sang of a Golden Age when peace and plenty reigned. The Golden Age soon gave way to a time of storm and stress, when society became divided into the Haves and Have-nots, as an outcome of class conflict. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle set themselves to solve the problem by framing political institutions. Theories, however, proved impotent against the innate selfishness of man. Greece under Democracy, as under Monarchism and Aristocracy, failed to secure social peace on the lines of equal distribution of wealth. Under Roman rule, the same problem presented itself. Thus we find the struggle between the Haves and Have-nots, forming one of the most sordid chapters in the history of human race. As time wore on, the gulf between the rich and poor became wider and wider. We, however, find some consolation in the words of Isaiah, the Prophet. Then came Jesus. His teachings to a certain extent came with a message of hope for the poor; but with the degeneracy of the Church, the gulf still yawned. For centuries the Church persuaded the working classes that it was the ordination of God, that they should remain in the station in which it had pleased Him to place them. The clergy denied all knowledge to the poor; and when little fires kindled in the corners of a dark world, spread and blazed out, armies were raised to extinguish them with torrents of blood; and such saints as Dominic, with crucifix in one hand and sword in the other, instigated the troops to the utmost barbarity. Until the Reformation the Church of Rome was maintained merely by force. Thus fear of mind withered the Christian religion, and it became a profession or trade, and the adulteration of the creed followed as a matter of course. As a direct result of the partial attitude of the clergy social discontent became prevalent, but still it could not find any organized outlook. Not till the eighteenth century did popular

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discontent, aggravated as it was by poverty and destitution, caused by the misgovernment in France, find any dramatic expression. The hour had come, and the man, who was no other than Rousseau, came forward as the leader of a new crusade—a crusade, the watchword of which was the *Rights of Man*. Poverty and destitution he declared to be no part of nature. They were, he said, the products of man's selfishness and injustice. He was against the system of private property, and advocated the subjugation of the individual will to the general will of the community. Rousseau would have won the day but for the foreign interference which resulted in the despotism of Napoleon. State Socialism having thus failed, a struggle for Industrial Socialism became evident. Men like Saint Simon in France and Robert Owen in this country began to work. As an employer Owen was exemplary, and had his example been followed, the question of capital and labour would have disappeared in the latter pages of history.

Now we turn another page of history, and come to that great International Materialist, Karl Marx. In his masterpiece the *Capital*, he states his belief in impersonal force. According to him, Industrialism grew out of Feudalism, and tended towards domestic industry. This gave way to the factory system. The worker, now no longer his own master, had to accept the new conditions of dependence or starve. Capital was supreme, and the worker in complete subjugation. Thus Marx evolves the theory of exploitation of labour, believing labour to be the cause of wealth. According to him industrial evolution made rich, richer and poor, poorer. The only solution put forward by him was the nationalization of industry. With him labour and wealth were relative terms. But from an economic point of view, labour is not the chief thing, and the question of supply and demand

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comes into prominence. Marx tries to dodge this question by explaining that no object created by labour has any value unless it is useful, but how a distinction can be made and further the usefulness of an object again involves the question of supply and demand.

Coming to the present time, and keeping the social conditions of Russia in view, the conclusion is forced on us that the fittest survives. The workers, call them soldiers or peasants, if you will, are determined to secure the largest possible share of the national wealth, regardless of the disadvantages to the brain-workers. In due course the latter will disappear to a great extent, if not all together.

Now the question which concerns us most is the attitude of Socialism towards religion. On this point Socialists are not unanimous. Many of them object to ecclesiasticism, others who are opportunists identify it with Christianity. Marx advocates positive abolition of religion. Unfortunately a majority adheres to his views. But I submit that all the Western Socialists, when dealing with this question, had only Christianity in view. Of course, the ideals of Christianity and Socialism are not the same, and men like Blatchford, Bax, Schaffle, Brutton and many others were disgusted with Christianity, and had to declare it to be in essential antagonism to Socialism. That Christianity has proved to be the obstacle in the path of progress is a patent fact of history.

To sum up, Western Socialism demands liberty, equality, fraternity and individualism to merge into State control; every person to have a direct voice in the government of the country, or in other words, abolition of bureaucracy; none to live at the expense of the other; distinction of class, colour or creed to be done away with, and abolition of dukedoms, hereditary kingships, and private property. Islam is in accord with all of these principles excepting

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the last mentioned, i.e. the abolition of private property.

But before dealing with the early days of Islam, I would like to say a few words as to the drawbacks of the Western Socialism. We know Democracy to be sometimes the direct result of Individualism, and Socialism a development of Democracy. But intensified Individualism leads to Egotism. If this is the case in the very beginning, then no society is formed, because Egotism is destructive to society. Unless the mind of the people is trained, Democracy or Socialism is bound to revert at the very time of its perfection to that disruptive basis. Meanness and self-assertion follow, and the result is disorder and anarchy as is at present in Russia. I venture to submit that it is in human nature to worship the Ego, and the only remedy is religion. *Religion and Socialism, to my mind, are inseparable.* Without religious control and guidance of the actions and aspirations of individuals, Socialism will always lead to *class-wars* and end in disaster. Materialism teaches selfishness and Egotism. *To one who has nothing to look to beyond this world, sacrifice conveys no meaning.* Socialism can only be perfect when every individual lives *not* for himself, but for others ; and without some great incentive, no human being can practise self-sacrifice.

Another mistake that the modern Socialists commit is that they begin their socializing endeavours from the top and not from the bottom. They leave the individual out of consideration altogether, and go to the reform of the State. But the mere fact of the transfer of land and capital to the State cannot make the administration of the State Socialistic. Is not all the land in India the property of the Government of India ? Are not all the telegraphs, telephones, post offices, irrigation canals and most of the railways the property of the State ? But neither the State landlordism nor State industrial-

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ism in India has done anything to create a model Socialistic State. For real Socialism what is essentially required is not only the nationalization of the land and capital, but also of the State itself. To apply Socialism at an unripe stage of society is bound to prove ruinous. Instead of making people more free, Socialism proves more burdensome and oppressive to individual ambition, initiative and property. It might even have a deterrent effect on individual skill and genius; it might lead to the deterioration of the whole race. Under a Socialistic system it would be necessary to see that the whole population is at the highest water-mark in education, morality and intellect. Turning our attention to the abolition of private property, it is quite evident that with it private enterprise will disappear, and consequently it would tell badly on the trade of the country, and the whole machinery of the government would come to a standstill.

Let us now go back thirteen hundred years and find the state of affairs existing when Muhammad flourished. We find him elevating human minds to such a pitch that they were not only able to receive but to live up to Socialistic principles. The beauty of his Socialism was that it did not interfere with private enterprise, nor with individual initiative; yet it made it almost impossible for an individual to rob another, or to get rich at the expense of his fellow-citizen. Muhammad did not use force in extending Socialism. He waged no *class-war*. His first and foremost care was to elevate the individual character, and thus to purge automatically society of all its vices. The basis of Muslim Socialism was religion. The nationality of Muslims was their religion, which obliterated the man-made boundaries of colour, race or creed. Their object of life and death was one, and they were free from the clutches of Egotism and self-aggression. They were all under the control of One, the Almighty, and acted only as trustees.

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It is nothing short of a miracle that Muhammad should have succeeded in imbuing every individual with the same lofty notions. He showed, in a practical manner, how extreme Socialism can not only work but work well. He evolved the system of government, and put it into practice. The system, however, reached its fullest development under the master hands of Omar, the Second Caliph, who built a magnificent Socialistic Empire on the foundations laid down by the Holy Prophet. Under their rule all people had equal rights, and each had the responsibility of protecting and helping his weaker and destitute countryman. Free education was introduced. Students in the State colleges were supported. Old people, and those who were otherwise disabled and could not work for a living, were looked after. Children were provided for, and substantial funds were raised for the families and wives of such soldiers as died in wars. A citizen army instead of a mercenary one was introduced, while such citizens as could pay for their expenses, meals and outfit, received no pecuniary assistance even in times of war, and had to support themselves like other citizens. No high salary was offered by the State to anyone, and only a small allowance was granted to the Presidents and those who devoted themselves entirely to the services of the State. All matters of State were decided after a general consultation. The Presidents of the Commonwealth had no power of veto. Bureaucracy was unknown. There were no ministers or portfolios. The legislation was not in the hands of any cabinet or parliament, but came from the Almighty God Himself, who could not but be impartial to all His creatures. The interpretation of the laws was left to the whole community and not to any individuals. Islamic laws could sometimes be better interpreted by an old woman than a mighty Caliph like Omar. Land became the property of

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the State, and Omar introduced into this world the revenue system. By the judicious Laws of Inheritance, Muhammad made the existence of dukedoms or lines of millionaires impossible. Every property of a deceased Muslim was divided up into parts, and so the underpropriatorship of property extended to a greater number generation after generation. No person could devise more than one-third to any one else. But endowments to the State or public charities of the whole property were allowed. The main object in view was, of course, the equal distribution of wealth. Islam made it legally incumbent upon the rich to give over to the national funds or the deserving poor at least two and a half per cent. of their annual income. Thus the poor were made rich at the expense of the rich. The Holy Prophet, when questioned on this subject, said : " Zakat is the institution to enrich poor at the discount of the rich." Socialism in Islam was even carried to this extreme, that if a person left his field fallow for some time, his neighbours acquired the right to cultivate it as a public property.

On the principle that all human beings are brethren and should help one another in need, Islam interdicted usury or interest of any kind. This stimulated the spirit of commerce, industry, labour and thrift, and discouraged hoarding of money in banks, and made the existence of Shylocks impossible. It also served as a set-back to Capitalism, when no private individual even was allowed to lend money and thus become a capitalist. Islam had strictly forbidden its adherents to gamble or indulge in any games of chance. Here again, the underlying idea was to make it impossible for any individual to get rich at the expense of others less fortunate. Monopoly of every kind was condemned. Poverty was made a virtue.

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Now let us consider the three main features of Socialism—liberty, equality and fraternity. Every Muslim enjoyed the most perfect liberty. He feared none but God. “There is no support and no strength but from Allah,” says the Holy Qur-án. In our daily prayers we repeat and assert that we worship none but God and ask help of none but the Almighty. As far as equality and fraternity are concerned, Muslim Brotherhood is an everlasting monument of glory to Islam. The Muslims will always be members of one great family. Their feelings of affection for one another will be ever like those of real brothers. The Holy Qur-án says that God Himself put love and affection in the heart of every Muslim towards his brother Muslim.¹

To them grades of society and class distinction conveyed no meaning. By saying: “I am only a man like unto you,”² Muhammad (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) took the lead and set a wonderful example for his followers.

Even in religious ceremonials Muhammad did not lose sight of these democratic principles. Our meetings in the Mosques, may they be for daily prayers, Fridays, or on our Eid gatherings, bear an ample testimony to the fact. Our very salutations are based on Socialistic lines.

It may be interesting to know the attitude of Islam towards labour, and I cannot do better but to read to you some of the sayings of Muhammad on the subject :

1. Pray to God morning and evening, and spend the day in your pursuits.
2. He who neither works for himself, nor for others, will not receive the reward of God.
3. Whoso is able and fit, and does not work for himself or for others, God is not kind to him.
4. O God, keep me from inability and laziness.
5. Those who earn an honest living are the beloved of God.

¹ The Holy Qur-án, xlvi. 29.

² The Holy Qur-án, xviii. 110.

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6. God is gracious to him that earneth his living by his own labour and not by begging.

7. Pay the workman his wages before his perspiration dries up.¹

Even Muslim Emperors like Mahmood Shah of Delhi and Aurangzeb, the great Moughal Emperor, had to do laborious work to earn their living.

The success of Muhammad's Socialism was due to the fact that he socialized the people first, and the State afterwards. He had won a complete victory over individualism, and Ali only demonstrated that, by following the noble example of Muhammad, he, too, like many others, was not far behind. It is related of him that while fighting for the people he was about to sever the head of one of the enemies, when the latter spat at him to show his personal disrespect for the son-in-law of the Prophet. Ali merely sheathed his sword and walked away, saying that he was not there to avenge his personal wrongs. I doubt if Christ even could have followed such a course.

As I have already pointed out, every member of the Muslim Commonwealth was regarded as a trustee in one form or another. Every one of them was given a ruling authority, and was accountable to God for the use or abuse of that authority, as the following sayings of the Holy Prophet show :

You must one day appear before Allah to give an account of your doings.

Every one of you is a trustee, and every one of you will have to give an account. Every Imam is a trustee, and he will have to give an account. Every man is a trustee of his family, and he will have to give an account. Every woman is a trustee of the household, and she will have to give an account. Every servant is a trustee of his master's things, and he will have to give an account. So all of you are trustees, and all of you will have to give an account.

In short, Socialistic principles in the extremest sense were applied successfully. The Muslims of

¹ *Sayings of Muhammad*, by Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din.

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the days of Muhammad and Omar did not require a police force to restrain them from crime, because they knew from the Holy Qur-án, that whether they manifested what was in their mind or hid it, Allah will call them to account according to it.¹ They did not commit robbery nor did they misappropriate trust property—not because of the fear of their fellowmen, but because they dared not displease the All-powerful and Omnipresent God. They spoke the truth, protected orphans, helped destitutes, sacrificed their interests for others simply because they loved to win the favour of the Almighty God. Thus the whole Muslim community became one body with one ideal. The State was conducted by selfless and God-fearing men, and as long as that belief was the guiding and controlling power, Egotism remained suppressed and Socialism in its truest sense triumphed.

SPIRITUALITY.

From all that I have said, it is evident that the lines on which the West has worked out Socialism are not only faulty, but are bound to result in chaos and the utter disintegration of Society. Socialism in its present form can never achieve its ultimate goal unless some higher motive is kept in view. If perfect Socialism aims at the equality of man and requires of us that we should live for others, it is surely futile to socialize the State without some attempt at least at socializing the individual mind as well. This, however, will require some high incentive, for it is obvious that self-sacrifice—in any sense of the word—can hardly be practised by one who has nothing to look to beyond this world, and so, as I have submitted, religion is the only remedy. Socialization of mind must lead to spiritualization of mind. Religion strives for that end. It enables us to live up to and obey the Divine Laws and to

¹ The Holy Qur-án, ii. 284.

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walk humbly with the Lord, for there is, inherent in us, some semblance of the Divine Attributes, though enshrouded in carnal coverings. Religion not only helps us to shake off these coverings, but also teaches us to live up to the innate potentialities which they conceal, leading us ever on to the highest peak of spirituality which, beyond a doubt, consists in imbuing ourselves, so far as our humanity is able, with the Divine attributes.

Let us put Islam to this test, and see how far she has carried the evolution of the human mind—how far succeeded in developing the spirituality of her adherents. I have already said enough to establish that Islam did discipline and elevate the individual mind to such a pitch that socialistic principles in their extremest sense were successfully applied in the early days of the Muslim Commonwealth; and again we find Islam to be the one religion which points out unhesitatingly that the height of spirituality lies in the cultivation of the Divine attributes. “Receive the colouring of Allah,”¹ says the Holy Qur-án. Muhammad (may blessings of Allah be upon him!) is the only Prophet of God who said: “Imbue yourselves with the Divine attributes,” that is, “Work out and bring to full fruition all of Divine that is in you.” Now, in this connection Islam has summed up the Divine attributes in the following three words: *Málik*, *Rahím* and *Rahmán*. It is not necessary here to go into a lengthy discourse to explain their significance. It will suffice to say that the blessings of the Almighty, though manifold, may be classified under three main headings. First, those that come to us as our due deserts; secondly, those that we receive in greater abundance than we deserve (more than our due deserts); and, finally, those that are showered on us without any effort on our part, in other words, those blessings which are not our due deserts at all.

¹ The Holy Qur-án, ii. 138.

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These munificences are from the Almighty, Who is *Málik, Rahím and Rahmán*. Unfortunately, the English language is not rich enough to convey their full import, and I am compelled to render these as *Master, Merciful and Beneficent*.

If we consider humanity at large from the Socialistic point of view, we find that it may be divided into three, and only three, grades. First, those who can earn enough for their requirements; secondly, those who do not receive substantial value for their labours or cannot earn sufficient for their maintenance; and, thirdly, those who cannot earn their living or are, in some way or other, disabled from doing so. Modern Socialists cannot point to any class of Society that does not fall under one of these categories. While the so-called Socialists of to-day have failed to meet the situation and have done nothing for its betterment, no true religion can afford to overlook it. Islam, and Islam alone, has come to the rescue. How? We are taught to "imbue ourselves with the Divine attributes." Thus, if we wish to worship *Málik*, we must give others their due; if we wish to be the votaries of *Rahím*, we must be merciful and give others more than their due; and, finally, if we wish to be dipped in the colour of *Rahmán*, we must be beneficent and charitable to others, even without dreaming of compensation or reward from them.

Islam has worked out these principles to a further extent still. We are exhorted in the Friday sermon from the pulpit of the Mosque :

To do justice and to do good to others and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion; He admonishes you that you may be mindful.¹

Thus we are reminded of our duty every Friday to give one his due justly; to be generous in our dealings with another; and, to a third, to be even beneficent, without any consideration of return from

¹ The Holy Qur-án, xvi. 90.

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him—just as we do in the case of our own kith and kin. These ordinances run in an exact parallel with the Divine Attributes of *Málik*, *Rahím* and *Rahmán*. So it will be seen that, according to Islam, the ideal of Socialism and the height of Spirituality are simply to be imbued with the Divine Attributes of *Rahmán*, i.e. to show beneficence to His creatures, regardless of desert or otherwise. This is the stage at which, when we have reached it, we are at one with the Almighty and can have direct communion with Him. As the Holy Qur-án says : “ The *Rahmán* taught the Qur-án,”¹ or, in other words, God only speaks to those who acquire the attribute of being beneficent. What a wonderful difference between the Muslim standard of life and that of the modern Socialist, who, in spite of the advancement he claims, has only just realized the duty laid upon him to be just.

In short, perfect Socialism can only be established through spirituality, and spirituality can only be achieved by good actions and piety, which without charity amounts to nothing. This can be substantiated by many verses from the Holy Qur-án, but I will only draw your attention to the following :—

O you who believe ! spend (benevolently) of the good things that you earn and of what We have brought forth for you out of the earth, and do not aim at what is bad that you may spend (in alms) of it, while you would not take it yourselves unless you *have its price lowered*, and know that Allah is Self-sufficient, Praiseworthy.

(As for) those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.—The Holy Qur-án, ii. 267 and 274.

By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love ; and whatever thing you spend, Allah surely knows it.—The Holy Qur-án, iii. 91.

Have you considered him who calls the judgment a lie ?

¹ The Holy Qur-án, lv. 1-2.

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That is the one who treats the orphan with harshness, and does not urge (others) to feed the poor. So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayers, who do (good) to be seen, and withhold alms.—The Holy Qur-án, cvii. 1-7.

The same theme is amply borne out by all the Five Principles of Islam. The Unity of God, Prayer, Fasting, Alms-giving and the Pilgrimage—all point to the one ultimate goal. If self-abnegation consists in a man's denying himself his own possessions of value, the spirit could not have better occasion for thriving than that which comes to a Muslim in the performance of the aforesaid five Pillars of Faith. Time, wealth, eating and drinking, the companionship of the sexes, the homeland—in short, everything that we strive after and that might destroy the spirit of self-effacement in us—is to be sacrificed and overthrown to please the Great Unseen. We fast, not to starve ourselves, but to learn the lesson of doing without food and drink and the companionship of our mates, though law and society permit of their enjoyment. We have to pay a certain tax on our annual savings, which, with the manifold other charities enjoined on us, give occasion for parting with our wealth. In performing our pilgrimage we separate ourselves from our homes and the company of those near and dear to us. Time is money, and yet we have to sacrifice it five times on hearing the call for prayers. One may willingly part with everything, but it is difficult to give way in matters of opinion, and yet in bearing testimony to the First Pillar of Faith, we have to bow before the Almighty. Thus it is evident that all these actions, which were seemingly ordained to uplift spirituality, become the chief factor of our socialization.

Further, the institution of marriage, as laid down by the Holy Qur-án, extends the sphere of our interest with its new ties, new affections, new responsibilities, all tending to the exclusion of self;

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and Islam has made selflessness and self-abnegation the bases of our uplifting and progress.

To sum up, the human mind must be socialized first, and Egotism destroyed. Individual consciousness should evolve a social or communal consciousness. I, therefore, venture to submit that he alone can be the true ideal of humanity who said: "Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for the cause of the Creator and Nourisher of the worlds."¹ Unfortunately, he was centuries ahead of the time, and it has required 1,300 years—and perhaps will require still more—for humanity to understand and appreciate his teachings.

Friends, let our Socialism, like the Christian ideal of charity, begin at home. Let us be socialized ourselves, and go back to the ideals of Muhammad. He himself practised them and triumphed over his enemies, and I can assure you that if we follow in his footsteps it will not be long ere the day will be ours, and we too shall triumph over the enemies of Islam.

¹ The Holy Qur-án, vi. 168.