Members of the *Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islām* (Lahore - West Pakistan) believe that:

— After the holy Prophet Muḥammad (Peace be upon him), God has barred the appearance of any prophet, new or old.

— Angel Gabriel cannot bring ‘prophetic revelation’ to any person as this would contradict the two complementary verses: “This day have I perfected for you your religion” (5:3), “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the prophets” (33:40). It would otherwise violate the sanctity of finality of prophethood in Islam.

— All the Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*aṣḥāb*) and all the spiritual leaders (*iḥām*) are venerable.

— It is incumbent to believe in the missions of all reformers (*muḥaddid*).

— He who believes that “there is no God but Allāh and Muḥammad is His Prophet” (*kalimah*) cannot be regarded an unbeliever or infidel (*kājir*).

— No verse of the holy Quran has been, or shall ever be, abrogated.
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Qur'anic View of Human Freedom

I

It was the Holy Qur'an which for the first time preached the gospel of human freedom with such zeal and emphasis that the whole world woke up, as it were, from deep sleep. Men and women, high and low now know their rights and privileges and realise that freedom is the birthright of everyone.

The modern Western nations may claim for them whatever they like. They may boast of their sense of freedom, and the Hindu, following in their footsteps, may also criticise and find fault with Islam, but the truth is that the freedom that Islam gave mankind thirteen centuries ago is unsurpassed. Europe and America have not given those rights to the coloured nations, nor have the Hindus granted any privileges to the untouchables. They are loud in their denunciation of slavery and bondage, but at the same time keep vast masses of people smarting under their heels. One cannot think of a worse form of slavery than the treatment meted out to the dark races by the white people and to the
untouchables by the Hindus. In the West, we find
the rights of the labourer being trampled upon by
the capitalists. Again, we find men ignoring the
rights of women. But Islam proclaimed sovereign
remedies for all these evils centuries ago.

The Qur’anic Standard of Freedom

The truth is that the Holy Qur’an has preach-
ed complete freedom and equality, and has tried to
place mankind on the highest pinnacle of indepen-
dence. Thus in the earliest revelations, the Qur’an
emphasises this fact in the following words:

 فلا اقتتحم العقبة وما ادراك ما العقبة فك رقبة

“But he would not attempt the uphill road;
and what will make you comprehend what the
uphill road is? (It is) the setting free of a slave”
(xc. 11-13).

The uphill road which man had not so far attem-
ted to climb, and was described by the Holy Qur’an
as a goal of virtue and climax of nobility which
every Muslim must aspire to attain, was the libera-
tion of slaves.

At present I cannot deal with this subject at
length, but shall try to explain briefly how the
Holy Qur’an frees mankind even from the last
vestige of slavery. It says:

ويسع عليهم اصرهم والاغلال التي كانت عليهم

“And (the Prophet) removes from them their
burden and the shackles which were upon them” (vii. 157).

The First Call for Freedom

The Holy Qur’an announced its high and noble mission at a time when the world was quite ignorant even of the idea of independence. It was the first Divine Call that had come to wipe off all kinds of slavery. And the proof of its being a Divine message is that it was delivered at a time when the world was wallowing in the quaqmire of bondage. True human freedom could not have stemmed up from the seeds of slavery that were scattered all over the world. Thus it was a heavenly seed which the Prophet Muhammad had sown broadcast in the desert of Arabia. It was a tree of which the Qur’an (xiv. 24) speaks: “Its roots struck fast into the earth and its branches spread all over the world” [the fruits of which now the whole world enjoys].

The Modern Champions of Freedom

One is simply amazed at the man who, in the modern age when the world has fully realised the blessings of freedom offered by Islam, stands up to preach anew the gospel of freedom and calls it a heavenly boon as if the world had not received already. This is the age in which everybody is clamouring for freedom and independence, and
even though one may shout as loudly as one can, one cannot call it a heavenly voice, but an echo of these very earthly voices; for Divine messages come only when the world needs them. Such guidance is given when the world is sunk deep in vice and misery, when ظهر الفساد في البرد البحر [“corruption appears in the land and the sea”(xxx. 41)] and when there is darkness enveloping the world. Thus the voice for freedom ought to have been raised at a time when there was no freedom in this world which presented a scene of human bondage. But now man has grown wise and is fully aware of his requirements. So a teacher now playing upon the same tunes as the world at large is playing cannot be called to have said or brought anything extraordinary or unknown to the world. But the Holy Prophet Muhammad raised his voice at a time when slavery was considered to be no sin and was regarded as an emblem of might and splendour. That indeed, was the appropriate time to teach the lesson of freedom.

*Every form of Bondage Abolished*

The Holy Qur’an stands for complete independence of humanity as a whole and preaches equality between man and man. Let us discuss a few cases of freedom.
(a) Man, the Lord of creation. The Holy Qur'an first frees man from the yoke of all false deities, and makes him the supreme head of all creatures and the vicegerent of Allah on this earth [إِفَ جَاهِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً (ii. 30)]. Human beings who in the past used to worship the sun, the moon, fire, water, trees and creatures, now began to rule and govern these objects. The Holy Qur'an raised the dignity of man so high that not only these false deities were dethroned but even the angels, which are the spirits underlying all powers in Nature, had to make obeisance to him, and all that was in the heavens and the earth was to be made subservient to him.

(b) Equality among mankind. The next step taken by the Holy Qur'an is that it establishes equality among mankind, by declaring that all men are created by One God and are the offsprings of one pair. Thus it has removed all the barriers of national and tribal distinctions, and of caste, colour and creed, and of the so-called superiority of birth, and has destroyed slavery root and branch. All men, says the Holy Qur'an, whether rich or poor, high or low, white or black, of the East or the West, are the sons of the same parents and creatures of the same Creator. As such they possess equal rights and owe
equal obligations to one another.

"O people! be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two many men and women; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watches over you" (iv. 1).

In this way the Holy Qur'an establishes freedom, equality and enjoins protection of individual rights. When one realises that all men are the creatures of the same Being, one will help one's fellowmen at a pinch, considering it to be a duty towards the Lord. Thus God has favoured mankind by including the service of fellowmen as an act of worship and adoration.

It must be remembered that —"by Whom you demand one of another"— does not carry the sense of begging, even though it be in the name of God. But what is implied is that men are interdependent and stand in need of mutual help. If a king needs subjects the subjects need a king; the rich stand in need of the poor and vice versa;
women depend upon men and men seek the company of women, and a child needs a father and a father yearns for a child. These mutual needs and reciprocal help result in the formation of civilisation and culture. The more systematic a nation is in helping each other, the higher its standard of civilisation. Generally, we find that some nations are bound with one another by tribal ties or blood relations as a result of which they deal with nations not related to them with partiality and contempt and would at any time usurp their rights. But the teachings of Islam, that aim at creating love, union, independence and equality, have made these tribal ties or blood relations only secondary. What they primarily emphasise is the great basic relation that all men are the creatures of one God. They further make us understand that the needs for which a man requires the help of another are from God. Thus fulfilling these requirements means obedience to the will of God, Who has created us such. Therefore those who do not mind their duties and obligations and who, instead of helping their fellow-beings, toy with their rights, must know that they are disobeying their Lord. Thus when doing injustice to the rights of others is considered disobedience of God and incurs His displeasure, human rights
will be as safe as anything. It will also widen the area of human sympathy and brotherhood.

Common Origin

Next to the relationship as creatures of the same Creator, the Holy Qur’an also draws upon blood-relationship. But it has so widened the scope of this relationship as to include the whole humanity. It does not recognise any petty divisions of tribes and families, which men have fabricated, but regards all mankind as belonging to one and the same family, as the descendants of Adam and Eve. There remains, therefore, no scope for the white man to claim superiority over the black, nor for the rich to abhor the poor, nor for men to look down upon women. The Holy Qur’an establishes so close a relationship between mankind that they are all united into a single whole, and all distinctions are wiped out. Says the Qur’an:

"O you men! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honourable of you with Allah is the one..."
among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware” (xlix. 13).

The only mark of distinction according to this verse is that of one’s piety and goodness. The more one acts in accordance with the commandments of Allah and does good to mankind, the more is one elevated and raised to a position of respect and distinction, no matter what one’s social status, caste, colour or creed may be. Hence, according to Islam, all men are equal and free, being children of one pair. None can claim any racial, tribal, religious or national superiority. The only way of surpassing others and nearing Allah is the way of piety and righteousness.

(c) Freedom from political bondage. Before the advent of Islam the world was passing through a strange time. The kings and monarchs were regarded by the people as super-human beings. They enjoyed rights and privileges which no other soul was allowed. The king had not to abide by any law, but was law unto himself. His only duty was to govern, and whatever he uttered was an inviolable law for the people. In short, a king was a personification of tyranny and oppression, and the subjects presented a most depressing picture of slavery. Islam came to free mankind from the curse of this bondage as well. It taught that the chief of
a people had to serve the people—سيدالقوم خادمهم. What the people have to obey is law, and not the sweet will of a chief or a monarch. All heads must equally bow before the law of God. So says the Holy Qur’an:

يا أيها الذين آمنوا اطيعوا الله وطيعوا الرسول وولى الأمر منكم, فأن تنازعتم في شيء فردوه إلى الله والرسول

"O you who believe! obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle" (iv. 59).

Here what is meant by Allah and His Apostle is the divine law; for the laws of Islam are derived from these two sources. Thus there is no exception in Islam as far as obedience to law is concerned; all must abide by it, both the rule and the ruled.

Now arises another question. What should be the principles on which the government must be conducted? The Holy Qur’an lays down two golden rules. First, امرهم شورى بينهم, ["Their rule must be based on mutual counsel and agreement" (xlii. 33)]. The form of government is thus suggested to be democratic. And it was the Holy Qur’an that for the first time preached democracy. Now, as to who should be entrusted with the affairs of people, the Holy Qur’an says:

ان تؤدوا الأمين إلى أهلها
"The affairs of the people are a trust and must be entrusted only to those who can faithfully discharge that trust" (iv. 58).

In other words, only those must represent the people who are fit to do so.

(d) Freedom from blind following and intellectual bondage. In the pre-Islamic times, the religious leaders, learned men and other public dignitaries used to rule the heart and mind of their followers. Whatever they uttered had to he followed without demur or delay. Reasoning was disallowed, and difference of opinion was more than a sin. To raise an objection, however valid, was an unpardonable offence and was considered to imply disrespect to the high-priests. The result of all this was that none could distinguish the lawful from the unlawful and sift virtue from vice. Whatever the learned said was law, morality and religion. Thus the people were slaves to the priests whom they blindly followed. But Islam has done away with this form of slavery also. It calls this sort of blind following a form of polytheism:

انخذوا احبارهم و رهبانهم ارباباً من دون الله

"They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah" (ix. 31).

Thus by freeing mankind from priest-worship, the
Holy Qur’an has made them the lovers of truth, virtue and independence.

(e) Freedom from social bondage. The world before the advent of Islam had forged for itself chains of various usages and customs. Blindly following in the footsteps of their forefathers and pursuing the customs prevalent in society had so shackled the people that they could hardly move along the path of moral or intellectual progress. As the Holy Qur’an puts it:

{في اعناقهم اغلالاً فهم الى الاذقان فهم متمحون}

“They have placed chains on their necks, and these reach up to their chins, so they have their heads raised aloft” (xxxvi. 8).

These chains were a barrier in the way of their progress and did not allow them to make any advancement. As regards blindly following in the footsteps of forefathers, the Holy Qur’an says:

{اولو كان آباؤهم لايعلمون شيئاً ولا يهتدون}

“What! even though their fathers knew nothing and did not follow the right way!” (v. 104). Whatever the elders do is not necessarily right. They might have mistaken a thing and moved in a wrong direction. Thus the Holy Qur’an frees man from the self-imposed chains of blind following and clears the way for man’s progress in the moral and intellectual spheres.
(f) *Freedom from sex inferiority*. The position of woman in pre-Islamic society was no better than that of a slave. She had no rights against men, nor could she claim a share in heritage. Her consent was not sought in her marriage. She was always at the mercy of her husband or guardian, who would exercise the same rights on her as a master on his slave. But the Qur’an liberated her from this slavish treatment. It announced:

لا يحل لكم أن ترثوا النساء كرها

It is not lawful for you that you should take women as heritage against (their) will” (iv. 19). Their agreement at the time of marriage is, therefore, essential without which no marriage can be called lawful. Again, she was given the right of securing divorce if she did not like to live with her husband. If a man can divorce a woman, a woman can also get divorce when she likes. Then the Holy Qur’an establishes her rights against man. Woman has as much rights as man has:

و لهن مثل الذى عليهن بالمعروف

“And they have rights similar to those against them in a just manner” (ii. 228).

Woman was also given a share in heritage and her individual rights and independence were recognised. A detailed examination of the teachings of
the Holy Qur’an will show how Islam has liberated the fair sex from slavery and has bestowed numerous favours on her.

\( g \) **Deliverance from economic bondage.** The capitalist has always tried to crush the labourer. The poor labourers, before Islam, were worse than slaves. The chains of usury and compound interest had made them awfully helpless. The Holy Qur’an declared usury to be unlawful and thus liberated the poor from the clutches of the voracious capitalists:

\[ 
\text{يا ابها الذين آسوا لا تأكلوا الربوا اضعافا مضاعفة} 
\]

“O you who believe! do not devour usury, making additions again” (iii. 129).

And **harram al-riba** [“God has made usury unlawful” (ii. 275)].

\( h \) **Freedom from obedience to the Devil and sensual desires.** Bondage to passion and sensual desires is such a mighty and alluring form of slavery that even the wisest brains and powerful kings cannot help falling a prey to it. Man, in spite of his knowledge, reason, high civilization and culture could not free himself from these chains. But the Holy Qur’an waged a regular and unceasing war against this slavery and, freeing a nation from its fetters, made it the very model of independence, freedom and chastity. The selflessness and piety of the Companions of the Holy Prophet need no
comment. It was due to the Holy Qur’an that they freed themselves from the bondage of personal desires and sensuality. The Holy Book plainly states: 

"Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his God?" (xxv. 43)]. Thus those who are captives of their low desires are the worst of slaves and are no better than polytheists, for they worship their passions. Again says the Qur’an:

"Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you should not serve the devil? Surely he is your open enemy, and that you should serve Me; this is the right way" (xxxvi. 60-61).

The Devil is thus declared to be an open enemy of man and mankind is charged not to follow him, for this is the way to real freedom.

(i) Freedom from ignorance. In pre-Islamic times, people used to believe in strange superstitions, and included every nonsense into their religious practices. Belief in the stars ruling their destinies, taking omens from the movements of birds and other creatures, faith in magic, witchcraft and other mysterious agencies had enslaved human understanding and intellect. At every step they required the help and advice of a magician, a soothsayer or an astrologer, and
possessed no sense of their own. Islam broke the chains of these misdirected and irrational beliefs, and, dragging man out of the darkness of ignorance, led him to the path of knowledge and wisdom. It laid great stress on the acquisition of knowledge and acquainted man with the fact that his superiority over all creation and even over the angels was simply due to the knowledge and learning that he possessed. The words ["He gave Adam knowledge of all the things" (ii. 31)] clearly indicate that the vicegerentship of Adam in this earth is based upon his knowledge of the things, which no other creature possesses. The Holy Qur’an has thus made the world the lover of knowledge, and the universal thirst for knowledge that we find in people to-day had its beginning in the teachings of the Holy Qur’an. Thus Islam frees mankind from the bondage of ignorance by emphasising the true value and worth of knowledge.

(j) Deliverance of the weak from the bondage of the mighty. It was the rule, before Islam came to this world, that the mighty would make the weak their slaves. They could not get rid of this slavery even till the time of their death, and often these chains of bondage were inherited among them from one generation to another. The
result of this was that these poor slaves lost possession of all the gifts given by God, such as wisdom, courage, morality, etc., and they led a life in no way better than that of animals.

The powerful nations used to attack the weaker ones. If they could stand their attack and managed to escape, they were safe, otherwise they were killed or taken slaves. The mighty ones would thus not only resort to fighting to capture their weak opponents, but would also every now and then snatch away men, women, and children from their guardians and make them their slaves for ever. Such was the unjust and unfair treatment which the strong meted out to the powerless. How did Islam liberate mankind from this slavery, is a question which must be discussed at length.

As I have already stated, the powerful people used to enslave the weak ones in two ways. First by making war, in which men and women of the weak opponent were made slaves. And, secondly, even when there was no war, the weak were carried away by the mighty, were kept as slaves and were bought and sold, and thus deprived of freedom for ever.

These two processes of enslaving people were so common that they were practised in almost
every part of the world. The mighty ones considered these to be the signs of their might and grandeur. The Holy Qur'an has laid down three injunctions for liberating mankind from this curse, and these principles have been so beautifully laid down that they leave absolutely no room for slavery.

(i) The Holy Qur'an has clearly stated that in no case shall a person lose his freedom unless he is taken prisoner in war. Thus the second way of enslaving people, i.e., catching hold of them without any justification and buying and selling them, is strictly forbidden. The Holy Qur'an says:

"It is not fit for a prophet that he should take captives unless he has fought and triumphed in the land; you desire frail goods of this world, while Allah desires (for you) the hereafter; and Allah is Mighty, Wise. Were it not for an ordinance from Allah that had already gone forth, surely there would have befallen you a great chastisement for what you had taken to" (viii. 67-68).

After the Flight, when the Meccans were busy hatching plots against the Holy Prophet and
making preparations for war, the Holy Prophet sent a small party to watch their movements and to gather necessary information. This party of the Muslims came across three unbelievers whom they attacked without the Holy Prophet’s permission. One of the three Meccans was killed and the other two were taken prisoners. When the Holy Prophet came to know of this, he showed great displeasure. He was sorry for the man killed, paid his blood-money, and set the two prisoners free. Similarly, in the Battle of Badr, some Muslims thought of attacking the Meccan caravan instead of fighting the unbelievers, and it was then that the above quoted verses were revealed. The Muslims were clearly warned in these verses that the foul ways of attacking and capturing people were prevalent only in the times of ignorance when the outlook of people was limited to worldly benefits only, and that Islam could not allow such evil practices, for it aspired not for worldly gifts but for the heavenly boons and blessings in the hereafter. Prisoners could only be taken in the time of war and any other attempt at doing so incurred God’s displeasure, which brings severe chastisement. And this injunction of His was based on sheer wisdom and sagacity and did great good to the people. So one who violates and breaks this rule,
they were told, must know that Allah is powerful and will not allow the transgressors to escape from punishment. This time, they were told, they had escaped the punishment, for it was not the way of God to punish unless a previous warning had been given. Otherwise what they had done merited dire punishment.

The words ["You desire the frail good of this world"] refer to those people who had attacked a party of the unbelievers before the battle had taken place, or who were scheming to attack the caravan. The Holy Prophet's motive is expressed in the words ["Allah desires the hereafter"], for it is always the Divine will which the Prophet brings into action, and so the Prophet also desired the hereafter and not the goods of this world.

(ii) When it was expressly laid down that none could be taken prisoner except in the time of war, the first method of enslaving people was totally stopped. But there was still scope for slavery being practised, for the stronger ones would find some pretext or other to wage war against the weaker ones. So it was necessary also to make rules about fighting. The Holy Qur'an says:

و قاتلوا في سبيل الله الذين قاتلواكم ولا تعتدوا - ان الله لا يحب
"And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits; surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits" (ii. 190).

By "exceeding the limit" is clearly meant that the Muslims are never allowed to fight those who do not fight them first. Again, if war must take place, the Muslims are asked to follow the injunction: 

وَإِنْ جَفَّحُوا الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَاجْنَبُوهُمْ

["And if they incline to peace, then incline to it" (viii. 61)]. Thus we find that Islam, in the first place, never allows waging war without a just cause, and if it is waged, the Muslims are always asked to incline towards peace, if they find a similar inclination in their opponents, and take steps to stop hostilities.

(iii) But there still remains another question. If war is waged and the Muslims have to fight, what will be the fate of those whom the Muslims may take as captives? Will they be for ever deprived of their freedom and become slaves of the conquerors, or does the Holy Qur'an teach something else? The Holy Qur'an gives a final judgement in the following words:

فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمُ الْجَاذِبِينَ كُفَّارًا فَضْرِبُوا فَرَاحَ الْرِّيْبٍ حَتَّى أَخْتِمُوهُمْ

فَشَّدُوا الْوُثُاقَ فَامْنَأُوا بَعْدَ وَإِمَامَ فَدَاءٍ

"So when you meet the disbelievers in battle, smite the necks until when you have overcome
them, make them prisoners, and afterwards either set them free as a favour or let them ransom (themselves)” (xivii. 4).

Now the whole canvas is clear. In order to save oneself from the enemy’s attack in warfare, one has either to kill one’s enemy or to take him prisoner. In the pre-Islamic times such captivity used to be lifelong and the prisoners were kept as maids and slaves. But the Holy Qur’an declares that the captivity must not last for ever but should be for a temporary period only. So the third injunction of the Holy Book is that after the war is over such prisoners should be set at liberty either in exchange for some money as ransom, or in exchange for Muslim prisoners with the enemy. But if the enemy is unable to pay ransom or if the Muslims do not need it, they are required to release their prisoners as an act of grace and mercy. In fact, the second alternative, freedom as a favour, has been put before freedom by ransom, for this is what a true believer is really expected to do. But if the believers do seek ransom, they are at liberty to do so. So this injunction of the Holy Qur’an has decided once for all that war-prisoners are prisoners only for some time, and they must be set free after the war is over either by getting ransom or as a mark of kindness.
The Holy Qur'an prevents Slavery forever

It has already been stated that, according to the plain teachings of the Holy Qur'an, no tribe or community is authorised to take away the liberty of any other community or individual, except during the war; that war must always be defensive, and that those who are taken prisoners during the war must be set free as soon as the war is over. These three injunctions have for all times solved the question of slavery, and there remains not a single opening through which slavery might regain access into human society. Thus we find that it was the Holy Qur'an which, for the first time in the history of the world, laid down such beautiful, appealing and beneficial principles and rooted the curse of slavery out. These principles, however, closed the door against slavery only for the future. What was to be done with the slaves and maids already in existence in large numbers? How could their interests be protected and how could they be delivered from tyranny and persecution? When we study the Qur'an we find that it has given injunctions for their betterment also and has not ignored their lot. From these injunctions, however, meant only for the amelioration of the lot of slaves already in existence, some superficial readers of the Qur'an have formed the
impression that the Holy Qur’an sanctions the institution of slavery. This is absolutely wrong.

Gradual Emancipation of Slaves

It is said that when Islam aimed at the abolition of slavery and left no room for its practice and always tried to secure freedom for the slaves, why did it not at once liberate all the then maids and slaves in Arabia? A little deep thinking will show that the objection is quite absurd. In the first place, it was impossible for the early Muslims to raise so much money as could buy freedom of all the slaves. Secondly, had the Muslims, somehow or other, managed to secure their freedom, where could they have accommodated those thousands of homeless people? The slaves had no homes, no land, no means of earning livelihood, and if they had been set free all at once, they would surely have resorted to plundering, outlawry, mischief and vagabondism. They would surely have disturbed the peace of the country and created confusion. Even to-day, when the world has made great progress in civilisation and culture, we find that the unemployed people have often tried to upset various governments, which cannot fulfil their requirements, nor can they control them. So one can well imagine what the consequences would have been if all those
slaves were at once set free, when the age-long slavery had made them worse than brutes and animals. Thus it was necessary that their emancipation should take place by stages. Two things were, therefore, necessary. First, that the state of the slaves be ameliorated by giving them proper education and training, and, secondly, that they be given their freedom step by step so that when finally set free they could easily stand on their own feet and fend for themselves. Now let us discuss these two points at some length.

(I) Injunctions about improving the lot of slaves.
We find the following injunctions in the teachings of Islam in which a Muslim is taught to help the slaves and try to make their life better.

(a) The Muslims are asked to look after the slaves, paying due regard to their educational and other requirements. The Holy Prophet has said:

إِيَّا رَجُلٍ كَانَتْ عَنْهُ وَلَيدَةٌ فُلْعَمَّهَا فَاحِسُنَّ تَعْلِيمَهَا وَأَدِبَّهَا فَاحِسُنَّ

“‘If a man has a salve-girl and he gives her good education, teaches her good morals and makes her well behaved, then he sets her free and lastly takes her as his wife, that man will be doubly rewarded.’”
(b) Those who possess maids and slaves are asked to treat them just as they treat themselves. They should give the same food to their slaves as they take themselves and should give them the same clothing as they wear themselves, so that the slaves may also consider themselves a member of the society, and may create and cultivate feelings of self-respect and protection of rights. The Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

ان Axو اً كم خولكم جعلهم الله تحت أيديكم فان كن أخوه تحت يده فليطعمه ما يأكل وليلسه ما يلبس ولا تكلفوهم ما يغلهيم فان كلفموهم ما يغليهم فاعينوهم -

“Verily it is your brothers who serve you, God has placed them under your hands (i.e. control and protection), so if a man is placed under any man, he should give him the same thing to eat that he himself eats and should dress him just as he dresses himself, and do not give such a heavy task to your slaves which is beyond their power to do; and if you do give them a difficult task, then also join hand with them and help them to do it.”

(c) The Holy Qur’an says:

وانكروا الا يامى منكم والصلحين من عبادكم و اماتكم

“And marry those among you who are single, and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves” (xxiv. 32).
This is how Islam has tried to uplift the slaves by marrying them with one another and, giving them the form of families, has made them a component part of society.

(d) Not only this, the Holy Qur’an has actually recommended that slaves may be married to their masters or to other free people. Can there be a more superior conception of equality than what the Holy Qur’an preaches? It says:

و لا تنكحوا المشركين حتّى يؤمنوا ولا تنكحوا المشركات حتّى يؤمنوا ولء بعبد مؤمن خير من مشرك وله اعجابكم

“And do not marry the idolatresses until they believe, and certainly a believing maid is better than an idolatrous woman, even though she should please you; and do not give (believing women) in marriage to idolaters until they believe, and certainly a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he should please you” (ii. 221).

So here the Holy Qur’an plainly teaches that Muslim male slaves can marry their mistresses and that the maids can marry their masters. There can be no better way of uplifting and honouring the slave community and making their lot better.

(2) How to effect gradual emancipation. After giving the slaves a good and respectable position in society, the Holy Qur’an suggests the ways and
means to restore them step by step to complete freedom. It adopts the following measures:

\(a\) Poor-rate or Zakat was made incumbent on every Muslim (possessing some wealth) and all these funds which amounted to millions were collected in the State Treasury بيت المال. The Holy Qur’an had set apart one-eighth of this fund to be spent on the emancipation of slaves only. Says the Holy Qur’an:

\[\text{اَبْنَةُ الصَّدَقَاتِ لِلْفَقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْأَكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَسِّسَةُ قَلَوْبِهِمْ وَقَيْلُ الْقَرَابِ وَالْخَالِقِينَ وَقَيْلُ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِنِ اللهَ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ} \]

“Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming) of slaves and those in debt and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer: an ordinance from Allah; and Allah is Knowing, Wise” (ix. 60).

\(b\) Secondly, the Holy Qur’an has made setting free of slaves a recompense of ever major sin. One who has fallen short of virtue and good deeds, is also asked to make up the deficiency by liberating slaves. A man asked the Holy Prophet to tell him about some virtuous action which might carry him nearer paradise and away from perdition. The Holy Prophet said, “It is the setting
free of slaves.” Again, we find in the Qur’an:

و لكن البر من آمن بالله ... وآتى الإبل على حبه زوي القربيئ ... و في الرقب -

“But righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and for (the emancipation of) the slaves” (ii. 177).

The result of those teachings was that the people began setting the slaves free, for they knew that it was one of the greatest virtues. And everybody realised this fact also that, whereas on the one hand the setting free of slaves was a virtue, the enslaving of the free was a very great sin.

(c) The Holy Qur’an has removed all obstacles and impediments from the way of a slave who is desirous of winning his freedom. If the master was not willing to set slave at liberty, the slave was allowed to buy his freedom by paying a certain sum in instalments and make a written agreement with the master to this effect. Such an agreement was called as مكاتبته, i.e. a writing. If a slave thus desired to buy his freedom by paying some money that he had earned through trade, labour or any other means, the master was also asked to help the slave with money, which, if he liked, he could realise from him afterwards in small instalments.
The Holy Qur'an says:

والذين يبتغون الكتاب ما ملكت إيمانكم فكاتبوهم إن علمتم فيهم خيرا وآتونهم من مال الله الذي آتكتم ولا تكرهوا فتيمكم على البقاء أن اردن تحصنا لتبغوا عرض الحيوة الدنيا ومن يكره منهم فإن الله من بعد أكرههم غفور رحيم

“And those who ask for a writing from among those whom your right hands possess, give them the writing if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of God which He has given you; and do not compel your slave-girls to prostitution, when they desire to be married and keep chaste, in order to seek the frail good of this world’s life; and whoever compels them, then after their compulsion God is Forgiving, Merciful” (xxiv. 33).

In this verse God commands that if a slave asks for a written agreement, we must give it to him or her, provided we are satisfied that there is no social harm in it and that his or her freedom will be beneficial to society. Secondly, if we find any good in them, we are enjoined to give them monetary help also, which they might use in starting some business or utilize it in any other way for making money to win their freedom. The case of the female slaves is particularly stressed. They must not be so compelled by demands of money that they may be driven to prostitution. They seek freedom
in order to lead a pure and chaste life by marrying some freeman. But when their masters insistently demand money from them and they cannot provide it, they may resort to prostitution. This is why the Holy Qur'an calls it عرض الحياة الدنيا [“frail good of this world’s life”], and enjoins that it should not be resorted to. In pre-Islamic times maids often resorted to this dirty method of earning money, but Islam strictly prohibited it, and those from among the Muslims who had been receiving such money in the days of ignorance were also consoled that since they had given up that dirty practice, Allah would forgive them and treat them mercifully.

The sum and substance of all these teachings is that there could have been only three possible ways of emancipating slaves, and that Islam has worked out all the three. First, the treasury of the Islamic State is required to set apart one-eighth of its funds to be spent on the liberation of slaves. Secondly, the general public is induced to set slaves free, declaring that it is an act of great virtue. And, thirdly, the slaves and maids are also given a chance to work hard and to earn money for buying their freedom. And at the same time the masters are asked to afford facilities to their slaves in and, if necessary, to grant them some money from their own pockets. In the case of female slaves,
the owners are particularly asked to be careful that they are not put to unnecessary trouble and dragged into evil practices.

A Challenge

This is what Islam teaches about the emancipation of slaves. Nobody can be made a slave except during a war. He cannot be imprisoned for ever, but must be released after the war is over. The slaves already existing were paid special attention to, given education and were properly looked after. They were gradually uplifted and given a respectable position in society which they had never enjoyed before.

The fact is that the Holy Qur’an was revealed to do away with every kind of slavery, and here is an open challenge to the whole world to bring a better system and a better teaching for the removal of slavery than what the Holy Book of Islam has taught.

II

An important question generally raised in connection with the discussion of slavery is whether or not Islam permits cohabitation with the girl-slave without contracting marriage. In order to arrive at some definite conclusion, we must according to the injunction of the Holy Qur’an, turn towards
the Holy Book and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet. The Qur'an says: فان تنازعتم في شيء فردوه إلى الله والرسول ["If you disagree on anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle" (iv. 59)]. The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, being thus the final authority, the saying or action of no other person whether an Imam, a priest, or a jurisconsult (faqih) can be binding on us. If some learned Ulama and fuqaha ever exercised their judgement (ijtihad) and accordingly made things lawful in good faith and the people acted upon their judgement, we can neither hold those theologians nor the people guilty; for everything was done in perfect good faith. It is an accepted principle that if one thinks that one is acting according to the law of religion (Shari'ah) and is anxious to stick to the Shari'ah, but unfortunately makes a mistake in understanding that law or makes a wrong judgement without any bad motive, one is not guilty of any religious offence. So if in the days of yore anybody kept a girl slave as wife without having actually married her and at the same time believed that he was not violating the law of religion, we cannot accuse him of any offence. Wrong judgement, provided motives are good, is certainly no sin. But when a thing becomes clear and the people definitely know the verdict of religion about
it, anyone who violates that verdict is decidedly a sinner.

_No Cohabitation without Marriage_

In the first place, the very question whether keeping of maids is lawful is absurd. For, when the Holy Qur'an puts a stop to the very practice of slavery and, according to the Qur'anic scheme of society, there remain neither slaves nor maids, how can the question of the legality of keeping female slaves at all arise? The only point that need discussion is: "What did the Holy Qur'an teach about maids who existed in Arabia at the time of the advent of Islam, and were not freed till then? "Did the Holy Qur'an make it lawful to carry on cohabitation with them without taking them into marriage, or it commanded that they must also be married as if they were the free women? On a reference to the Holy Qur'an, however, we find clear injunction therein as to the marriage of female slaves. Now, if it were lawful to keep them without marriage, there would certainly be no sense in revealing these injunctions. The very presence in the Holy Qur'an of these injunctions, therefore, shows that the Holy Qur'an does not permit the keeping of maids without marriage. Here are a few of these Qur'anic injunctions."
The First Injunction

The first injunction of the Qur’an is as follows:

و أن خفتم إلا تقاتلوا في الياة فانكحوا ما طاب لكم من النساء
مثني و ثلث و ربع فان خفتم إلا تعدلوا فواحة أو ما ملكت إيمانكم
ذالك ادلي الال تعولوا

“And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course” (iv. 3).

In order to understand this verse properly, a little change in the given construction will have to be made, so as to read it thus:

فانحكوا ما طاب لكم من النساء أو ما ملكت إيمانكم

“Marry such women as seem good to you from among the (free) women or what your right hands possess.” The conjunction أو [“or”] connects ما ملكت إيمانكم [“what your right hands possess”] with [women], which here means free women. This verse can also be read in the following way:

فانحكوا ما طاب لكم من النساء واحدة أو ما ملكت إيمانكم

Here the conjunction will connect ما ملكت إيمانكم with فواحة meaning “marry such women as seem
good to you from among the (free) women, one of them, or what your right hands possess.” It means that if you get one free woman, you can marry her, but if you cannot get one even, you may marry what your right hands possess, i.e., your slave-girls. The discussion is continued at length in the same chapter, “The Women,” from which the above verse is taken, and runs as follows.

*The Second Injunction*

و أحل لكم ما وراء ذالكم من تبنتوا بالمالكم محصنين غير مسافحين

“And lawful for you are (all women) besides those, provided that you seek (them) with your property, taking (them) in marriage, not committing fornication” (iv. 24).

Here it is made clear that the object of marriage is not the satisfying of passion of fornication, but a permanent state of wedlock. Therefore, all the matrimonial contracts that are made for a short time such as متاعه or in which the husband is not prepared to keep the tie till his death and wants to break connection after some time, are declared by the Holy Qur’an as unlawful. It is the relation secured by marriage only which is based upon chastity (إحصان); all other relations are nothing but different forms of تسافح, fornication or debauchery, hence unlawful.
Again, says the Holy Qur'an;

"And whoever among you has not within his power amleness of means to marry free believing women, then (he may marry) of those whom your right hands possess from among your believing maids; and Allah knows best your faith; you are (sprung), the one from the other; so marry them with the permission of their masters, and give them their dowries justly, they being chaste, not fornicating, nor receiving paramours" (iv. 25).

How clearly has the Holy Qur'an explained that if one has not the means of marrying a free believing woman, one may marry a believing maid, for maids are also from among us, as we have sprung one from the other, and so we should not look down upon maids or slaves. Again, if a man does not possess a maid of his own, he can get one with the permission of another man who possesses her and can marry her on the understanding that he will pay her dowry. So we find that here also the Holy Qur'an suggests only matrimonial relation with the slave-girls and that too of a permanent nature, and does in no way allow sexual relation
outside marriage whether carried overtly or covertly and denounces all this as fornication forbidden in Islam.

**The Third Injunction**

According to the clear teachings of the Holy Qur'an, one who cannot marry a free woman is advised to marry a believing maid. But it is quite possible that one may not be able to marry a slave-girl either. What should he do in that case? This is what the Holy Qur'an recommends under the circumstances:

و ليستعنف الذين لا يجدون نكاحاً حتى يغنيهم الله من فضله

“And let those who do not find a match keep chaste until Allah makes them free from want out of His grace” (xxiv. 33).

This verse decides the whole issue. Those who cannot get a woman in marriage must control themselves. Had it been lawful to keep a maid as wife without marrying her, this injunction would not have been given in this way, but should have stood thus: “Those who do not find a match nor can get a maid, should keep chaste.” But the Holy Qur'an uses one expression only, viz., *who do not find a match*, which clearly shows that cohabitation is not permissible with any woman, whether free or slave, without contracting regular marriage.
Marriage or control — these are the only two alternatives the Holy Qur’an sanctions — nothing more.

The Fourth Injunction

Those who believe in the legality of keeping maids put forth the following verse in support of their contention:

و الذين هم لفروجهم حفظون إلا على ازواجهم أو ما ملكت
ايانهم فانهم غير معلومين

"Those who guard their private parts, except before their mates, or those whom their right hands possess, for they are not blameable" (xxiii. 5-6).

In this verse they consider mates ازواج to mean "married wives," and what their right hands possess ما ملكت ايمانهم to mean unmarried slave-girls. But this is not so. The Holy Qur’an has dwelt at length upon the question of marriage with free women and maids, in the chapter, “The Women.” So wherever we find brevity in expression, we shall have to keep in view that portion in which the question has been fully discussed. In the second chapter we find:

ولا تننكروا المشركين حتى يؤمن ولله ولعبد مؤمن خير من مشرك ولا أعجبكم ولا تننكروا المشركين حتى يؤمن ولله ولعبد مؤمن خير من مشرك ولا أعجبكم
“And do not marry the idolatresses until they believe, and certainly a believing maid is better than an idolatrous woman, even though she should please you. Nor give (believing women) in marriage to idolaters until they believe, and certainly a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he please you” (ii. 221).

Now if the expression “a believing maid is better than an idolatress” means that a maid can be kept without contracting marriage, as our Ulama say, a similar interpretation will have to be put on the next clause “a believing slave is better than an idolater.” In other words, cohabitation can be had with a believing slave without having married him. But no maulvi, no priest, and no jurisconsult will ever hold it lawful. And wherever there is a mention of a woman’s connection with a slave, they always say that marriage is understood and presupposed. So if it is to be taken as understood in one case, why not in the other one also? If women cannot mate with slaves without marrying them, men also must not do the same with maids without marrying them. The Holy Qur’an contains clear injunctions to the effect that marriage must be contracted with slave-girls, otherwise cohabitation with
them will be equivalent to fornication. And the words \( \text{و ليستعنف الذين لا يجدون لكحا} \) have decided the whole thing: "Let those who do not find a match keep chaste and control themselves." No sexual relation is allowed between man and woman but through marriage. Therefore we will have to admit that marriage is presumed in the words \( \text{الأعلى ازواتهم أو ما سلكت إيمانهم} \) for the Holy Qur'an has clearly shown that cohabitation is lawful only through matrimony.

An Objection

Now arises the question: Why has the Holy Qur'an mentioned the slave-girls separately.

The answer is that at the time of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, both categories of women existed, the free ones as well as the maids. This is why the Holy Qur'an had to give in detail the injunctions about marrying both kinds of women, in the chapter "The women النساء." The free women who were taken into marriage were called azwāj ازوج. The maids or possession of the right hand, who were made free and then married were also called azwāj (ازوج) as the free women were. But those slave-girls who were taken into marriage without being freed were called سلك يمين for the sake of distinguishing them from the free women. The reason for making this distinction is
that the Holy Qur'an has given different laws in certain respects for the two classes of women. For example, in the case of adultery, the punishment for a married slave-girl is half of that for a married free woman. It was because the maids and slaves were brought up in such a low and degraded atmosphere that they were not expected to possess good qualities and high character. Consequently the Shari'ah made different laws concerning free women and maids, and gave some privileges to the slave-girls. It was necessary that the married slave-girls be called ملك يمين (maids) until they were actually set free, for marriage alone could not make them free. Hence in the verse إلا على أزواجهم (ازواج) azwaj are those who were free at the time of their marriage and ملك يمين, were those who were maids at the time of their marriage and were not set free. Until they were freed, they had to remain in the category of ملك يمين i.e., “the possession of the right hands.”

The case of Safiyya, a wife of the Holy Prophet, throws a flood of light on this point. It is narrated by Ans in the chapter on the Battle of Khyber in the Sahih of Bukhari that the Prophet on the occasion of his marriage with Safiyya halted between Madina and Khyber, and a separate tent was pitched for him. He invited the
Muslims to his marriage feast. He ordered Bilal to spread the dinner sheet, and then dates, cheese and butter were served. The Muslims then began to question one another whether that wife of the Holy Prophet would be included in the ملك يمين or ازواج (maids). It was suggested that if the Prophet asked her to put on a veil, she would be considered to be included in the امهات المؤمنين (Mothers of the Faithful), and if she went about unveiled, she would be taken to be one of the maids. When the Holy Prophet left that place to resume his journey, he made Safiyya sit behind him on his riding beast and put a veil before her.

Then the whole thing became clear. As Safiyya came from the conquered people during the battle of Khyber, she was undoubtedly a slave-girl or “the possession of th right hand.” The Holy Prophet married her and invited his friends to the marriage feast. After the feast was over, the companions of the Holy Prophet discussed the position that Safiyya was going to hold and the status that she was to be given. They asked one another whether she would be treated as one of the امهات المؤمنين or would remain a slave-girl as she was. In other words, the question was whether the Holy Prophet had married her after setting her free or had taken her as his wife without
freeing to her. In order decided the issue, they waited for the next step, whether she would go about with or without a veil. If she put on a veil she would be one of the “Mothers of the Faithful,” otherwise ملك يمين or a maid. As the Holy Prophet did not like to marry a girl without freeing her, he made it manifest to the people by putting a veil before Safiyya to show that he had married her after setting her free. Thus it is clear that the distinction of ازواج (azwāj) and ملك يمين (maids) exists even after marriage, unless the maid is first freed. Hence it is wrong to infer that azwaj are the married women and ملك يمين (maids) are those who are kept as wives without being married. Both must necessarily be married. The only difference is that ازواج (azwaj) are married as free women and ملك يمين (maids) are married as slave-girls.

Thus we should always put that interpretation on the words of the Holy Qur’an which the context demands. Wherever the words ملك يمين are used, we must take them to mean the maids who have been duly married, and none else. The Holy Qur’an has expressly prescribed marriage with them, and it does not recognise any other connection between man and woman.
The Sunnah of the Holy Prophet

Now let us turn to the Sunnah (practice) of the Holy Prophet and see how he himself acted upon these injunctions, and what sort of relation he maintained with his maids. The Holy Prophet never had any relation with a maid without having married her. He went one step further and always first emancipated the maid he was going to marry and he asked his followers to do the same. There is a saying of the Holy Prophet narrated in the collection of Bukhari: ایعالرجلکافینهدلیفةفعلهفاحسنوادههافاحسنتادههاثماعتتهاوتزوجهافلهاجرANN["Whosoever has a slave-girl, then he gives her good education, teaches her morals, then sets her free and then marries her, he will be doubly rewarded"].

The Holy Prophet lays stress on the education, good training and upbringing of the slave-girls so that they could become good wives and better mothers. Then he enjoins their emancipation and then persuades the Muslims to marry them. Not only does he enjoin upon his followers to keep the slaves and maids well, but he also orders that they should be set free. Though Islam allows complete freedom of choice in marriage engagements, and every woman, whether free or in bondage, is at liberty to accept a person for
marriage or refuse him, there is every possibility of a slave-girl’s being unduly influenced by her master and being compelled to marry a person whom she does not like. The Holy Prophet, therefore, ordered that maid should be first emancipated and then taken into marriage, so that after their emancipation they could boldly and freely choose to accept or reject a person, and thus secure not only freedom of choice but also a higher status in society.

The Example of the Companions

It is thus clear that, according to the teachings of the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, no sexual relation is lawful with a maid, except after regular marriage. The same example was followed by the Companions of the Holy Prophet. If a Companion of the Holy Prophet inclined towards a slave-girl, after these verses had been revealed, he would first set the girl free and then take her into marriage.

Previous Practice is no Religious Law

During the time when the Islamic States were at the height of their power and grandeur, some fuqāhā did express the opinion that sexual relation with slave-girls could be carried on without marrying them. But we cannot accept this
interpretation when the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet hold it unlawful. If these fuqahā base their judgement on a tradition or any other narration to the effect that some Companion of the Holy Prophet had kept a maid without having married her, we would presume that it was done before these verses were revealed. The Holy Prophet did not ever interfere in the affairs of his people nor did he ever give any judgement or another unless he was directed by his Lord to do so. There were various evil practices prevalent in Arabia which continued even after the advent of Islam and the Holy Prophet did not declare any practice unlawful unless a verse of the Holy Qur’an declared it so. The Arabs continued to drink wine even after they had embraced Islam. The practice of muta‘ (مُطْعَة) also continued and according to the old custom, the adulterers were stoned to death. But as the verses of the Qur’an continued to be revealed to the Holy Prophet, the use of liquor was banned. Muta‘ too was prohibited and a new sentence of one hundred stripes replaced the Biblical law of stoning an adulterer to death. It is an admitted fact among all the Imams and Traditionists of Islam that all such traditions and narrations referring to the use of unlawful things among the Muslims as wine and muta‘, etc., relate to the period when they were not yet declared unlawful
by the teachings of the Holy Qur’an. It is impossible to believe in the legality of a practice which the clear teachings of the Holy Qur’an declare to be unlawful. So when the Holy Qur’an enjoins upon the Muslims to contract regular marriage with slave-girls, and does not recognise any sexual relation between man and woman outside marriage, and when the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet is also in conformity with the teachings of the Holy Qur’an, we cannot attach any importance to any tradition and any narration of any Faqih and Imam. The only interpretation we can put on them is that they belong to the period prior to the revelation of laws on the point to the Holy Prophet.

The Holy Qur’an does not legalise Slavery

The Holy Qur’an having elevated the status of maids and slaves and having given them a respectable position in society, for the future put a stop to the practice of slavery. The laws relating to slavery in the Holy Qur’an were revealed for the betterment and welfare of the slaves who were already there in Arabia at the time of the birth of Islam or those with whom the Muslims came into contact in other countries. The mere fact that laws relating to slavery are found in the Holy Qur’an does not lead to the conclusion
that Islam has legalised the practice of slavery. These laws were meant to discipline the Muslims in their treatment of slaves. The Holy Qur’an was not revealed to preach slavery, but to liberate the world from all yokes of bondage, political, social or religious. Wherever the Muslims went carried with them the teachings of the Holy Qur’an, and liberated the non-Muslims even from the worst types of bondage and the oppressions of autocracy and despotism. Rather than permit the practice of slavery, the Holy Qur’an has prohibited the Muslims to indulge in this bad custom. As I have shown above, the Holy Qur’an has liberated mankind from every possible form of slavery and has blessed the world with a universal message of freedom.

The Two Ways of Reform

It is an admitted fact that the Holy Qur’an within a short time uprooted all kinds of vices, corruptions and immoralities. Within a few years, the whole of Arabia was purged of polytheism, idol-worship, adultery, murder, drinking, gambling, theft, falsehood, dishonesty and all other evil practices leaving not a trace of them. But as regards slavery, Islam adopted another course. For the future it put a stop to the practice by laying down such rules and regulation as ordain
freedom as the birthright of every individual. For those maids and slaves, however, who existed in all countries of the world, it adopted the course of gradual emancipation. Surely it would not have been a wise step either to liberate all at once millions of slaves who possessed no morals and no sense of responsibility. Such a course was bound to culminate in riots, looting and hooliganism. They possessed no homes, no profession, no means of earning their livelihood and if Islam had set them free abruptly, they must have proved a grave menace to the safety of society. The Holy Qur'an, therefore, adopted two measures to reform them — one immediate, the other gradual.

(i) The immediate reform. The immediate step taken by Islam to improve the lot of slaves was that it at once raised their position and enjoined upon the Muslims to treat them as their equals. They were to give them the same food that they themselves took, and the same clothes as they themselves used, and if the work entrusted to them was beyond their capacity, the Muslims were commanded to help them in their work and not to overtax their energy. The Muslims were so particular about their treatment of the slaves that once when a Companion of the Holy Prophet got a slave from among the war prisoners, he was urged upon
by his wife to liberate the man at once. "Why?" asked the Companion of the Holy Prophet. "Because," replied his wife, "we are unable to give him those privileges which Islam enjoins for them and we cannot fulfil the conditions and obligations of keeping a slave. Set him at liberty and safeguard against the violation of the Qur'anic dictates." Islam thus turned the curse of slavery into a blessing. The slaves received so many favours and privileges at the hands of Muslims that no dark man can ever receive at the hands of his white master, nor can an untouchable think of a similar treatment from a Brahmin. Islam raised their position, improved their lot and changed inhuman bondage into a veritable brotherhood.

The gradual reform. The second measure adopted by Islam for the betterment of slaves was that of giving them good training and making them civilised and then setting them free by paying for their freedom from the State treasury. The Muslims were so keen about their freedom and betterment that by the time of the battle of Ahzab not a single Companion of the Holy Prophet possessed a slave. The same spirit was displayed by the Muslims during the Righteous Caliphate. But with the spread of the Muslim dominions in all parts of the world and with the increase of
their power and control, this spirit gradually began to fade. Whereas the non-Muslim nations of the world have been wholesomely influenced by the teachings of Islam, the Muslims too contracted the bad qualities. Thus despotism of the non-Muslim world gradually began to take root among the Muslims, and the democratic spirit and sense of independence that Islam had created among its followers gave place to political servility, autocracy and depotism. The emancipation of slaves was also retarded, and the wrong judgement of some of the fuqaha encouraged absolutism among the big people. But all the same position of the slaves was not changed and they continued to be favourably treated by the Muslims. In spite of the power, grandeur and wealth of the Muslims, there was always a class of men present among them who upheld the teachings of Islam and spread the light of the Holy Qur'an, with the result that the seed of human freedom and liberty sown in the desert of Arabia grew into a big tree with its roots firm in the earth and branches spread all over the world.

The Testimony of History

To-day Europe may or may not admit it, but the pages of history bear a glowing testimony to the fact that whatever spirit of freedom and
independence is now noticeably in the European nations is traceable to their contact with Islam. It must, however, be added that the sort of freedom that Europe is now proud of showing to the world is but a poor imitation of what the Holy Prophet of Arabia gave through the teachings of the Holy Qur’an. It is a pale imitation, because Europe has failed to place man on that high pinnacle of freedom where the Holy Prophet had actually placed him. Though apparently slavery has been wiped off from the face of this earth and everywhere democracy is replacing absolutism yet slavery in its subtle and more dangerous form is still extant. The distinction of the white and the coloured, Western and Eastern and of high caste and low caste is still there. Europe could not do away with it. Similarly, intellectual slavery, social bondage, chains of custom and convention, economic bondage and the curse of usury — are still there, and man’s servility to Satan and subjection to low passions is at its highest.

The wave of freedom that is now spreading all over the world is a tide that emanated from the fountain of Islam thirteen centuries ago. With the lapse of time the current of that wave has no doubt slackened but it still continues to nourish the human freedom that Islam had brought with it.