

**ISLAMIC HISTORY AT A GLANCE:  
CAUSES OF THE RISE AND DECLINE  
OF THE MUSLIM NATION**

**The Umayyads**

The Caliphate underwent some fundamental changes in its character when the Umayyad Dynasty established itself into power and ruled over the Islamic State for about a century (661-750). They introduced the un-Islamic system of hereditary succession, thus impairing the essentially democratic and traditional character of the Caliphate. Moreover, the undefined system of hereditary succession naturally brought about degeneration among the future successors and often led to civil war between the various competitors for the Caliphate. To make matters worse, the Umayyads alienated the sympathies of the new converts who counted by millions, by not according them equal treatment along with the Arabs in social cultural and political fields. This un-Islamic conduct on the part of the Umayyads also alienated the sympathies of the Ulema (learned scholars) who wielded a great influence among the masses. However, the Umayyads with all these shortcomings succeeded in extending the boundaries of the Muslim Empire to the farthest limits. During their period, the Muslim Empire reached its greatest expansion stretching from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenees to the Indus and the confines of China, an extent hardly rivalled in ancient times and surpassed in recent times only by the British and Russian Empires.

The closeness of the period of the Jahiliyah age, its numerous wars, civil and foreign, and the unsettled social and economic conditions of the Muslim world – all these hampered intellectual development during the Umayyad period. But the seed was then sown and the tree of knowledge that blossomed under the succeeding dynasty, the Abbasid period in Baghdad, had its roots in the preceding period. The Umayyad age, therefore, was in general one of incubation. Nevertheless, broad-mindedness and adaptability and the capacity to assimilate elements from foreign cultures, which have characterised Islamic culture in the greater part of the fourteen centuries of Islamic history, were becoming evident during the

Umayyad period when Muslims had started to adopt the useful and healthy elements from Persian, Greek and Syrian sources.

While the real age of Muslim cultural and material attainments was to follow, the Muslims during the Umayyad period eagerly applied themselves to religious sciences, to lexicography and grammar, and to history-writing and thus laid the foundation of their later intellectual achievements. Among non-religious sciences, medicine was particularly patronized by the government which undertook the translation from the Greek and other languages into Arabic. Another important achievement of this period was changing the language of public registers from Greek to Arabic in Damascus, and from Pahlavi to Arabic in al Iraq and Persia, as also the creation of Arabic coinage.

Turning to the material aspect of life, industry received a powerful impetus during the Umayyad period and trade relations between Muslims and a number of Eastern and Western lands were established.

All these material successes were possible for the Umayyads, inspite of their shortcomings at home, as they still practised some of the fundamentals of Islam, i.e., equality before law, freedom of expression, liberty of conscience and above all toleration towards the members of other faiths. Their vast conquests on four fronts simultaneously cannot be explained but by one fact alone, that the conquered races welcomed them as they fully realized that they were better off under the Umayyad rule than under their own co-religionist rulers.

Although the Umayyad rulers were regarded as the liberators of subject races outside their own country, yet at home they were regarded as the advocates of an Arab kingdom as against the Islamic State, owing to their above mentioned shortcomings. Hence all sections of Muslim community joined opposition against them and as a consequence of this, the apparently powerful Umayyad dynasty fell like a pack of cards before the united opposition of the people within a century of their existence. They were succeeded in the office of the Caliphate by the Abbasids, the descendants of the uncle of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, namely Abbas.

### **The Abbasids**

With the rise into power of the Abbasids in 750 A.D. began the

process of the division of the Muslim world first into two parts, and later into ever-increasing number of parts. Andalusia (Spain) declared its independence under the Umayyad prince Abd al Rahman. The same happened in Africa where in the tenth century a rival Caliphate of the Shiites, and a very powerful one, was established.

In general, the five centuries of the Abbasid Caliphate have not seen any remarkable military conquests. This, however, was more than compensated for by the Abbasid victories of peace. The Abbasid rulers established an efficient, honest and vigorous administration. Their main concern was to ensure justice and the well-being of the populace, a purpose which animated their governmental institutions. Special steps were taken to prevent the officials from levying extortionate taxes or oppressing the subjects. Similarly, good care was taken to restrain the commercial class from fleecing the common man by means of exorbitant prices.

Another feature of the Abbasid Government had been the emancipation of the new converts by according them equal treatment along with the Arabs in all spheres of life. The Abbasid policy with regard to non-Muslims was the same in spirit as in the times of Pious Caliphate. Their relations with the Caliphate were governed by the explicit injunction of the Holy Quran, "No compulsion in matters of faith."

The Abbasid period was also a period of great material prosperity and industrial progress. Regular trade was conducted with such far off lands as China and the Malaya Archipelago, and as recent researches show, with the Scandinavian countries of Europe. What, however, has rendered the period especially illustrious in world annals is the fact that it witnessed the most momentous intellectual awakening in the history of thought and culture. Muslims of this period were given over completely to a frenzied passion of the acquirement of knowledge from every possible source. The Muslims started their intellectual adventure with a vast amount of translation of Persian, Sanskrit, Syriac and Greek works. Starting with very little of science, philosophy or literature, the Arabian Muslim who had brought with him from the desert a keen sense of intellectual curiosity, soon became the beneficiary and heir of the older and more cultured peoples whom he conquered and encountered. During the translation phase which lasted roughly from 750-850 A.D., the work was carried on so diligently that by mid-ninth century, the Arabic speaking

world was already in possession of the chief philosophical works of Aristotle, of the leading Neo-Platonic commentators, and of most of the medical writings of Galen, as well as of Persian and Indian scientific works. "In only a few decades," observes Hitti, "the Arabs assimilated what had taken the Greeks centuries to develop." It is to be noted, as Hitti observes, that "all this took place while Europe was almost totally ignorant of Greek thought and science. For while al Rashid and al Mamun, the two celebrated Caliphs of the Abbasid period, were delving into Greek and Persian philosophy, their contemporaries in the West, Charlemagne and his lords, were reportedly dabbling in the art of writing their names."

In mid-ninth century the Muslims started a period of original contributions to the various branches of learning. It goes to their credit that within a few centuries they produced some of the most illustrious scientists, philosophers, historians and jurists of human history. The additions made by Muslims to the common treasure of human knowledge is too rich and varied to be described here. It is sufficient to quote the thoughtful historian, Sedillot. He says, "The vast literature which existed during this period, the multi-farious production of genius, the precious inventions all . . . attest to a marvellous activity of intellect and justify the opinion that the Arabs were our masters in everything. They furnished us, on the one hand, with inestimable materials for the history of the Middle Ages, with travels, with the happy idea of biographical dictionaries; on the other, an industry without equal, architecture magnificent in execution and thought, and important discoveries in art."

In short, during this period Muslims were the most advanced people of the world; their lands were glowing centres of culture, civilization and enlightenment. Muslim progress, prosperity, and the overall attitude of toleration presented a sharp contrast to the backwardness, poverty and fanaticism which held Europe in their grip.

The Abbasid period, however, was not without blemishes. They also maintained the undefined system of hereditary succession which not only brought about degeneration among the successors but also led to wars of succession among the various the Arabs themselves, the patronage given to the Persians in preference to their own race, i.e., the Arabs, and the introduction of Turkish element in the military further weakened the Central Government with the con-

sequent result that outlying provinces assumed independence and stopped the payment of all revenues to the Caliphate. After a lapse of about two centuries, the Caliphate was reduced to a mere farce, and even their capital, Baghdad, was occupied by a Shiite Persian dynasty. Under the circumstances, the Caliphs were allowed to function only because it was impressed on the public mind that the Caliphate must belong to the Abbasid house.

However, when Baghdad was again conquered by the Sunnite Seljuqs by the middle of the eleventh century, the Caliphs themselves delegated all their temporal authority to them by recognizing them as Sultans. Henceforward, it was these Sultans who ruled the Muslim Empire. However, by their vigorous and efficient rule, they unified the Abbasid Caliphate by annexing all those territories which were lost to it and also warded off all the attacks of the Crusaders from Europe.

But as the *dejure* sovereignty was still vested in the Caliphs, the latter always tried to regain their independence from the Sultans. And when the Caliphs succeeded in carving out an independent kingdom for themselves in Arab Iraq by expelling the Seljuqids from their capital, they were confronted with a more formidable foe in Khwarazmshahs who had replaced the Seljuqs in Persia. These new Sultans naturally coveted the same official position in relation with the Caliphate, which was enjoyed by their predecessors. And when the Caliphate refused to accord them the same position, the latter waged a relentless war against their own religious head. Thus the Muslim Empire was further weakened by their mutual political rivalry. The result was that both the Sultanate in Persia and the Caliphate at Baghdad were destroyed by the Mongols by 1258 A.D. The Mongol invasion not only deprived the Muslims of all their centuries old accumulated culture and civilization. In 1258 A.D. it seemed as if Islam would be wiped off the Universe, but through God's grace, the descendants of the Mongols themselves embraced Islam and thus restored the power and prestige of Islam in Persia.

### **Umayyads in Spain**

The conquest of Spain by the Muslims in the beginning of the 8th century opened a glorious chapter in the history of Islam.

After the fall of the Umayyad Dynasty in the East in 750 A.D.,

the latter established themselves in Spain, and declared themselves independent of the Caliphate. Spain under Muslim rule for nearly eight centuries, as Professor Hitti observes, "wrote one of the brightest chapters in the intellectual history of Medieval Europe." During the first few hundred years, culture of a high standard naturally flowed into Spain from the Muslim East. Poets, musicians, artists, theologians, professors, scientists and administrators were lured into Spain by the rich gifts and munificence of the kings and nobles. Muslim scholars of Spain, often under royal patronage travelled to Madina, Baghdad, Damascus and elsewhere in the East even to Transoxiana and China in quest of learning. In the tenth century A.D. when Cordova (the Umayyad Capital of Spain) began to rival Baghdad, the tide of the flow of culture and learning was turned. During the subsequent centuries increasingly more students from the Muslim East and the Christian Europe flocked at the Universities of Cordova, Toledo, Granada and Seville to drink deep from the wells of learning that flowed there in abundance. Especially, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the current of this flow became so strong that it overflowed Europe with newer amenities of life ranging from higher Philosophy down to the playing of Chess, and above all, with that scientific spirit of observation and research which set in motion those intellectual forces in Europe that were responsible for bringing about the Reformation and Renaissance and for ultimately heralding our modern scientific age.

Spain had attained to the highest glory during the tenth century A.D. At that time, their capital city, Cordova, shone like a brilliant light in the dark continent of Europe. The extent of its culture and prosperity can be gauged by the fact that the city contained 113,000 houses, 21 suburbs, 70 libraries, 700 mosques and 700 public baths, and paved streets illuminated by lights. The University of Cordova, housed in the principal mosque, contained 400,000 books. This was a time when the people of Europe had not yet learnt the use of paper and looked upon bathing as a heathen custom. J.D. Draper remarks "that even seven hundred years after this time there was not so much as one public lamp in London."

The contribution of the Spanish Muslims towards intellectual progress, scientific research and cultural refinement proved as a potent factor for the advancement of human civilization. There is no dispute among the historians that from the 8th till the 12th

century, the Muslim people were the torch bearers of culture and civilization throughout the World; and after they reached their zenith, their culture was transmitted to Europe mainly through the channels of Spain and Sicily which cast deep influence on almost every aspect of European life and thought. As a medium of this transmission Spain's role was also very significant.

But, alas, after building such a magnificent State and contributing so much towards human civilization, they also began to decline from the beginning of the Twelfth century A.D. It seems that the Umayyads refused to take any lesson from their past history as they committed the same political blunders which had cost them their Empire in the East. They still clung tenaciously to the un-Islamic and undefined system of hereditary succession which as usual brought about degeneration among the future successors, and also often led to wars of succession among the various competitors. Moreover, they also brought with them their ancestral tribal jealousy in a foreign land and did not accord equal treatment to the new converts. All these factors brought about disunity among the ranks of the Muslims themselves. To make matters worse, they neglected the promotion of the cause of their own religion and thus remained in a minority in a foreign country where Christians constituted the majority. The very Christian subjects whom they had accorded such a liberal and generous treatment were easily won over by their Christian rulers who had been in perpetual warfare with the Muslims from the very beginning. All these numerous causes operated against them and consequently the Christian rulers of Spain succeeded in dismantling this citadel of Muslim power and glory in the fifteenth century. In a country which had seen about eight hundred years' brilliant Muslim rule — the only brilliant epoch in its history — not a single Muslim remained on account of the unparalleled persecution, wholesale conversion and banishment at the hands of those very Christians whom they had so generously treated and nourished for about eight centuries.

### **The Ottomans**

The thirteenth century of the Christian calendar is regarded by the Muslims as the most ominous insofar as their centuries-old Caliphate was destroyed and Baghdad, their centre of culture and

civilization, sacked by the Barbarian hordes from China. But the closing years of this century saw the rise of a new power – the Ottoman Turks in Asia Minor. These Ottoman Turks were destined to carry the flag of Islam in Europe for about seven centuries. Aflame with the desire to expand the domains of Islam, the Ottomans reached the zenith of their power in the 16th century when they had reached the walls of Vienna and thus had threatened the whole of Europe. In those days, the Ottoman Empire stretched in Europe as far as Austria, in North Africa as far as Algeria, and in Asia from Georgia to Yemen passing in between through Mesopotamia, Arabia and Asia Minor. Besides these conquests, the Ottomans in their heyday also built an efficient and honest administration and practised a good measure of social and economic justice. They developed fine socio-economic and political institutions, which were largely in line with those found in the Abbasid Caliphate. These institutions furnished the basic framework for ensuring the Islamic ideals of equality, fraternity, liberty, social justice and toleration towards the members of other faiths.

The Ottomans generally kept themselves pre-occupied with conquests and their age is not noted for any significant intellectual contributions. Moreover, the Ottomans, unlike their predecessors, did not display much creative genius. They followed more or less the fixed patterns they had inherited from the past. However, they remained a formidable power, a challenge to the neighbouring states in Europe roughly until the 17th century.

From the dawn of the eighteenth century A.D. they began to decline. The same causes which had brought about the downfall of the previous Muslim dynasties in different areas began to operate against them. The same un-Islamic system of hereditary succession which brought about degeneration after a few generations and sometimes also led to the wars of succession among the various competitors for the throne, became one of the chief factors which determined their decline. Another important cause which brought about their decline was the neglect of the spread of Islam, which left them a minority in their own Empire. On the other hand, they treated the non-Muslim subjects so well that the latter preferred to migrate from their Christian lands and settle down peacefully under the Turkish jurisdiction. It worked very well except with the Europeans who, because of their social institutions of monarchies and

feudalism, were not in a position to accept the Islamic ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity.

However, when the European powers had awakened to a new life after the Crusades, and particularly during the 15th and 16th centuries, largely as a result of contact with the Muslim world in general, and Muslim Spain in particular, a new era began in their life. They broke the shackles of tradition and set out in search of new ways. Later on they achieved striking success in the fields of science and technology which enabled them to operate on a higher level of energy than the world of Islam. On the other hand, the Ottomans, for their part, kept on trying to ossify their traditional institutions and the obsolete moulds of their way of life. They were, therefore, outstripped by the European powers whose deep enmity they had aroused by following a policy of unremitting expansion at the expense of these Europeans. To make matters worse, the Christian subjects were won over by their co-religionist rulers when they were in a position to accord them the same treatment which was accorded to them by the Turkish rulers. Therefore, the Turks were confronted from two dangers simultaneously, from within at the hands of their own Christian subjects, and from without at the hands of the Christian powers. By and by, all the outlying provinces of Turkey where Christians constituted the majority became independent of the Central Government. To the European powers also, the Ottomans gradually lost large parts of their territory. The process continued till 1919 when the Ottoman Empire became a shadow of its former greatness. Subsequently, the Empire broke up and the Caliphate was abolished, giving place to the Republic of Turkey in those areas alone where they happened to be in majority.

The Muslim provinces which were included in the Turkish Empire also broke away from the centre through the machination of the foreign Christian powers. After undergoing subjection for a few years at the hands of their so-called friends, they have now all acquired independence.

### **Indo-Pakistan**

Muslims had conquered parts of India early in the 8th century but the process had not gone further. The conquest in right earnest was taken up later in the eleventh century by the Ghaznavid dynasty.

Since then the Muslims remained the rulers of the bulk of the sub-continent until mid-nineteenth century. The Great Mughuls (1562-1857) are particularly celebrated in the Muslim history of India.

During their long rule over India, the Muslims have imprinted their stamp on every aspect of Indian life. The customs, the intimate details of domestic life, music, the fashions of dress, the way of cooking, the ceremonials of marriage, all these bear the indelible impression of Muslim culture. But apart from these details of relatively less importance, Islam has deeply influenced the basic orientation of the Indian society. Prior to the advent of Islam, the Hindu society stood divided, fragmented and broken into watertight compartments. Under the caste system, the society was rigidly divided into four classes, the Brahmans (i.e. priests), the Khastrayas (i.e. soldiers and warriors), the Vaishas (i.e. the business class) and the Shudras (i.e. the untouchables). The Brahman tyranny had grown to wildest proportions and the Shudras were leading a sub-human life. Under such conditions, the light of Islam appeared on the Indo-Pakistan horizon. It came with a message of universal brotherhood and heralded a new era in the religious and social life of India. The influence of Muslims who despised the sanctity of Brahmans and proclaimed the unity of God began to operate gradually. The egalitarian and democratic character of Muslim social life ultimately paved the way for the incorporation of democratic values and institutions.

Another gift of Muslims to India is historical literature. Among the Hindus the sense of chronology was very imperfectly developed. Before the advent of Muslims the Hindus had produced no true history at all. In contrast to Hindus, the Muslim rulers kept a regular record of their reign which provided a solid basis for historical study. India would have been deprived of all the records of her past if Muslim historians had not recorded what they have done. In fact a systematic, regular and reliable history of India begins only with the advent of the Muslim rule.

The Muslim rulers of India in general and Mughul kings in particular, were great patrons of art, literature and architecture. The pursuit of beauty seemed to have become an over-powering craze with the Mughul Emperors who decked the whole country with beautiful gardens, palaces, mosques and mausoleums. Taj Mahal, which is one of the wonders of the world, is a living monument of Mughul architectural greatness.

Last but not least, the Muslims broke the hegemony of Sanskrit and developed common vernacular languages known as Urdu and Hindi, which ultimately became the national languages of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Among these, Urdu has developed a very rich literature during the span of just a few centuries and expresses some of the finest and aesthetically superb aspects of the Indo-Pakistan Islamic culture.

However, the dawn of the eighteenth century saw the beginning of the end of the Mughul might in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. The causes of their decline were almost the same as in case of the preceding Muslim dynasties in various parts of the World. The same undefined system of hereditary succession, which naturally brought about degeneration among the future successors and often led to wars of succession among the various competitors for the throne was adopted by the Mughuls. To make matters worse, the Muslims in Indo-Pakistan accorded the same liberal treatment to the Polytheists, which was rightly accorded to the members of the revealed religions in other parts of the world. The Muslims should have realised that there is nothing in common between those who believe in the unity of God and those who have no conception of monotheism but worship various gods. The other political blunder committed by the Turks and Muslims in Spain, i.e., the neglect of the spread of Islam, was also repeated by these rulers. The result was that they remained in minority even in their capitals of Delhi and Agra where they ruled for centuries. Owing to incapable rulers in subsequent years, the central authority got weakened with the result that the outlying provinces assumed independence and began to fight among themselves. The political vacuum gave rise to an era of anarchy which gave an opportunity to the East India Company to build up an Empire governed from abroad.

Between 1833 and 1856, the British adopted a policy of large-scale expansion of their territory in the sub-continent. Most of the States were annexed on the pretext of a lapse as the rulers, like the aristocracy all over the world, were often devoid of male heirs.

The last attempt made by the Muslims to recover their lost power was the unorganised upheaval in 1857, which failed in achieving its object. This upheaval and its disastrous consequences led to the political and economic ruin of the Muslim nation in Indo-Pakistan and the establishment of the British Indian Empire on a

solid basis.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, both the Hindus and Muslims tried to secure more Constitutional reforms. From the very beginning, the Muslims had fully realised that if power was ultimately transferred into the hands of the Indians as a whole, on democratic basis, they being in minority would naturally be enslaved by the Hindus over whom they had ruled for about eight hundred years. Hence the Muslims emphasized this point on the British Government and succeeded in securing from them the right of separate electorate on the occasion of the Morley Minto Reforms of 1907. Once this right was conceded to them, the Muslims never gave it up. On the occasion of every future Constitutional advance, the British Government recognized this demand of the Muslims till ultimately the whole country was divided between the two major nations, Hindus and Muslims, in 1947. Thus the Muslims succeeded in securing a separate home land for themselves on the principle of self determination in those areas where they happened to be in majority. This new homeland of the Muslims is known by the name of Pakistan, and is the largest Muslim State in Asia and the fifth largest in the whole World.

### **Southeast Asia**

In Southeast Asia (east of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent) Islam spread through a unique process of peaceful propagation unaccompanied by any political influence or military campaign. Islam was carried to this region, first by the Arab traders who since the early centuries of Islam traversed the whole length of Asian sea-route from the Persian gulf to Canton (China) in quest of peaceful commerce, and set up numerous Muslim colonies at important intermediary stations. They were later joined by Muslim merchants of India and Persia as well by the Sufi savants who dedicated their lives to the propagation of Islam. Through the peaceful efforts of these merchants and Sufis, from the 13th to the 15th century A.D. the Malayan Peninsula and Indonesia were completely won over to Islam.

During this period the moral and spiritual life of these peoples had greatly degenerated through the nefarious influences of Tantarik Hinduism and Tantarik Buddhism, on the one hand, and by the

horror of local animistic superstition and witch-craft, on the other. Islam with its doctrines of simple monotheism, universal justice, equality and brotherhood came to the rescue of these debased and perplexed peoples and the preachers of the light of Islam were acclaimed as the Saviours everywhere in Malaya and Indonesia. Conversion to Islam gradually became the fashion of the day, so that during the fifteenth century A.D. Muslim kingdoms sprang up throughout the lands stretching from Malaya to Mindanao (in the Philippines). The triumph of Islam in this region, was the triumph of truth and beauty of its doctrines which freed the people from the shackles of superstition and elevated their souls to a higher plane of moral and spiritual life. Their conversion to Islam also brought them in close contact with the wealth of Muslim culture and the progressive social system of Islam which flourished brilliantly in the contemporary world. While the process of proselytism of the masses was accomplished from the 15th to the 18th century and the people were progressively brought under the civilizing influence of Islam, these regions also increasingly fell prey to the colonial designs of the newly rising Western nations – the Portugese, Spanish, English and Dutch.

Although through a long and sustained struggle from the 16th to the 19th century, the Western powers succeeded in subjugating these peoples, they failed, in spite of the best efforts of the Christian missionaries, to check the progress of Islam except in the Philippines where the Spaniards succeeded in reducing the Muslim majority into a minority through their Christian missions. However, Islam infused the Malayan races of Malaya and Indonesia with a high sense of cohesion and unity and their languages vastly enriched by Islamic lores found the finest expression in Persia-Arabic script. In their ceaseless fight against colonialism, Islam provided them with an all-pervasive ideal and the rallying ground for the expression of their patriotism.

The rise of the idea of the right of self-determination of nations in the 20th century gave an opportunity to the Muslims of Malaya and Indonesia to shake off the shackles of foreign rule. Availing themselves of an opportunity at the end of the second world war, the Indonesians declared their independence in 1945, and fought to victory against the Dutch. Thus one of the greatest Muslim States and the greatest in this region came into existence. Likewise, Malaya also achieved freedom recently from the British rule; both these

countries now thrive as important States in the Comity of Nations.

### **Conclusion**

The last three centuries are centuries of Muslim decadence. Muslims remained steeped in the stagnant patterns of their life. They refused to heed the signs of the time and respond to the call of change and progress which had been so ably done by their ancestors. They gave up their former spirit of intellectual inquiry and investigation; their former unquenching thirst for things better cooled down. The Muslims dismally failed in this regard, but not Christian Europe, which, availing herself fully of the treasures of Muslim learning, opened for herself new, undreamt of vistas of progress. The result was that European nations succeeded in subjugating large parts of the Muslim world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Subjugation by European powers, however, proved a blessing in disguise for the Muslim world. It shook the Muslims into giving up their complacency and realizing their weaknesses. It also set ablaze the love of freedom which has, by now, led to the restoration of independence to all except a few Muslim countries and these countries too are not far from their cherished goal of freedom. Contact with the West was also beneficial in another way. It stimulated a new life and awakening throughout the Islamic world. However, it has also created baffling problems for Muslims: the problems centering on the integration of modernity into their ideological framework without allowing the unhealthy features of the modern Western culture to undermine the Islamic fundamental values. The Muslims of our times are keen to become and remain free, and to exercise their right to shape their own destiny. They are also keen to move forward towards building up a healthy, progressive, and modern civilization in their lands. And last but not least, they are keen that this civilization, in addition to being vigorous and modern, should also be Islamic; it should embody the life-giving teachings imparted to mankind by the greatest teacher of humanity and the last Prophet of God, Muhammad (peace be upon him).