

# The Political Interpretation of Islam



MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

First published 2015  
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Goodword Books  
A-21, Sector 4, Noida-201301, India  
Tel. +91-8588822672, +91120-4314871  
email: [info@goodwordbooks.com](mailto:info@goodwordbooks.com)  
[www.goodwordbooks.com](http://www.goodwordbooks.com)

Goodword Books, Chennai  
Tel. +9144-4352-4599  
Mob. +91-9790853944, 9600105558  
email: [chennaigoodword@gmail.com](mailto:chennaigoodword@gmail.com)

Goodword Books, Hyderabad  
Tel. 04023000131, Mob. 07032641415  
email: [hyd.goodword@gmail.com](mailto:hyd.goodword@gmail.com)

CPS International USA  
2665 Byberry Road, Bensalem, PA 19020, USA  
Tel. 617-960-7156  
email: [cps@alrisala.org](mailto:cps@alrisala.org), [www.alrisala.org](http://www.alrisala.org)

Islamic Vision Ltd.  
426-434 Coventry Road, Small Heath  
Birmingham B10 0UG, U.K.  
Tel. 121-773-0137  
e-mail: [info@ipci-iv.co.uk](mailto:info@ipci-iv.co.uk)  
[www.islamicvision.co.uk](http://www.islamicvision.co.uk)

IB Publisher Inc.  
81 Bloomingdale Rd, Hicksville,  
NY 11801, USA  
Tel. 516-933-1000, Toll Free: 1-888-560-3222  
email: [info@ibpublisher.com](mailto:info@ibpublisher.com)  
[www.ibpublisher.com](http://www.ibpublisher.com)

Printed in India

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## *Preface*



This booklet is a summary of my book *Ta'bir ki Ghalati* ('Error of Interpretation'). Here, I have tried to briefly clarify why I think that the writings of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (d. 1979), the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami and proponent of a distinctly political interpretation of Islam, are problematic. The political interpretation of Islam has been, and continues to be, the cause of much strife and conflict across the world.

The noted Indian Muslim scholar Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi (d. 1977) once referred to what he termed as a 'diseased mindset'. As he put it, 'Even some very virtuous people are no exceptions' in this regard. Such people simply cannot tolerate any criticism. After I began critiquing Maulana Maududi's writings, I gained first-hand experience of this mindset.

One of the clauses of the Constitution of the Jamaat-e-Islami, which the Maulana himself prepared, reads: 'No one should be considered to be above criticism'. As long as I used this right in order to criticize others, people in the Jamaat-e-Islami circles heartily congratulated me. But the moment I used this very same right to criticize Maulana Maududi, it was as if I had dared to step across the forbidden frontier!

Perhaps this clause in the Jamaat's Constitution was meant to allow for criticism against everyone but the framer of the Constitution himself.

In his *Khilafat wa Mulukiyat* ('The Caliphate and Monarchical Despotism'), Maulana Maududi wrote that the Caliphate was an ideal system of Islamic life, and noted that after this system collapsed, a system he termed as *mulukiyat* or Monarchical Despotism took its place. The objective of the Maulana's efforts was to re-establish the system of Caliphate rule.

What exactly happened when the Caliphate was replaced by Monarchical Despotism? The Maulana discussed this in terms of eight broad themes, one of which he termed as 'The End of the Freedom of Expression'. In this regard, he wrote:

Islam arranged, not just as a matter of right but also as a duty (and this was something that the proper functioning of Islamic society depended on), that the conscience of the community should remain alive and that its members should be able to speak out and admonish even the highest person for misdeeds and openly speak the truth. During the Righteous Caliphate, this right of the people was fully protected. The Righteous Caliphs not only permitted it, but even encouraged people to [exercise this right]. In this period, people who spoke the truth were rewarded not with scolding and threats, but with praise. Those who critiqued others were

not suppressed. Instead, they were appropriately replied to in an effort to satisfy them. But in the Age of Monarchical Despotism, people's minds were sealed and their tongues were tied up. And so it came about that people could only use their tongues to praise [rulers], or else they had to keep quiet. If some people's conscience would not allow them not to speak the truth, they had to be ready to face imprisonment and death or being lashed. And so, in this period those who could not stop themselves from speaking the truth and critiquing those who committed bad deeds were given heinous punishments.

The Caliphate that the Maulana struggled to revive had, according to him, eight special characteristics, one of which was that under this system, efforts were made to appropriately reply to critics so as to satisfy them. Furthermore, people were actually encouraged to voice their criticism. In fact, they were supported and praised for this. In contrast, the Maulana said, under Monarchical Despotism, critics were suppressed, silenced, beaten up and threatened—and if all this did not work to keep them from speaking out, they were tortured and thrown into jail.

Keeping in mind what Maulana Maududi wrote in this regard, consider what happened with me some years ago. At that time, I was a member of the Jamaat-e-Islami. It so happened that I gradually began to discern some things in the writings of Maulana Maududi which I found objectionable. And so, in

December 1961, I put my views down on paper and sent them to the Maulana. And what reply did I get? The Maulana was a flag-bearer of the revival of the Caliphate, and so one would have thought that his response to my critique would have been to say that not only was I exercising my right, but also abiding by my duty. After all, he himself wrote that this is precisely what ought to happen under the Caliphate that he wished to establish. He should have taken it as proof of my living conscience. He should have encouraged me in my effort. If he did not agree with me, he could have tried to give me an appropriate reply and thereby tried to satisfy me.

But what actually happened? In my book *Ta'bir ki Ghalati* I have included the correspondence that I exchanged with him the on this issue over a period of two long years. Anyone who reads these letters can easily understand that the Maulana did not give a proper and convincing reply to my arguments. He can also easily discern that the Maulana tried to behave in precisely the same way that he regarded as characteristic of Monarchical Despotism.

Why didn't the Maulana try to give me a reply that would have satisfied me? Instead, the Maulana accused my understanding of issues to be extremely faulty and limited. He charged me with being deluded. He suggested that I was arrogant, adding that he was not in the habit of addressing arrogant people. He said I had crossed the stage beyond which he believed it was useless trying to reason with me.

In this way, throughout our correspondence, Maulana Maududi failed to satisfactorily reply to any of the issues I had raised. Instead, what he did was to say all sorts of things about me. When I insisted that he should come to the point, he finally said I should publish my views, sarcastically remarking that adding one more name to his already long list of ‘well-wishers’ would make no difference.

Gauging from Maulana Maududi’s reaction, you can decide for yourself if he was indeed impelled by the spirit of the Caliphate or the spirit of Monarchical Despotism. The Maulana imagined himself to be in position from where he could afford to criticize the renewer of the faith (*mujaddidin*) without any exception, and, even beyond that, to point out the mistakes of the Companions of the Prophet, and, going beyond even that, to even inspect the Righteous Caliphs. But if someone were to critique him, it was as if he deserved the same sort of punishment that the Maulana noted that monarchical despots used to administer to their critics—the only difference being that these despots could go to the extent of, in the Maulana’s words, ‘imprisoning and killing and lashing’ their critics, while the Maulana himself had the power only of punishing his critics through his pen.

This is a classic example of what, as I mentioned at the outset, Maulana Darybadi termed as a ‘diseased mindset’.



Criticism can be a very beneficial thing for collective existence—but on the condition that the critic abides by certain principles and acts justly. At the same time, the one who is critiqued should listen to his critic without letting his ego come in the way. Only when people can engage in meaningful critique of others, and, at the same time, the courage to listen to others' criticism of themselves can they truly evolve, individually as well as collectively. To critique people's errors while, at the same time, being large-hearted and genuinely concerned about their true welfare is an essential condition for higher attainment in life. As a hadith report tells us, difference is a mercy.

Criticism is the most difficult thing for most people to bear. But if they know how to accept criticism, it can become, for them, a source of great blessing and progress. I hope this booklet will be taken in this spirit.

## *The Nature of the Error of the Political Interpretation of Islam*



Marxism is referred to as an economic interpretation of History. This is because in Karl Marx's understanding of life, the economic factor dominates everything else. In the same way, Maulana Maududi projected Islam in such a way that every aspect of it seemed to acquire a political hue. Accordingly, one can term his ideology as a political interpretation of the *deen* or the religion of Islam.

Life is a collection of various parts or aspects. These parts are separate from each other but yet are inter-linked. They can also be ranked or placed at different levels.

Ordinarily, there are three broad ways in which we can discuss or describe these aspects:

- ◆ We can describe a particular aspect in its relation to the totality in exactly the same way as it is in reality or as it appears to be. This is a legalistic sort of description.
- ◆ We can stress a particular aspect which is the major subject of discussion in a given context.

- ◆ We can make a particular aspect the basis of the interpretation of the totality of a phenomenon. In this way, this particular aspect is presented as representing the phenomenon as a whole, or as its crux or centre-point. It is as if by understanding this aspect we can understand the totality or all the other aspects of this phenomenon. In this booklet, I have used the term ‘interpretation’ in precisely this sense.

Let me clarify this point about these three broad ways that one can describe the different parts of a phenomenon by examining how the term ‘Economy’ can be used in different ways.

One way of talk about the economy is to say that human beings are made up of body and soul, and that the human body has certain needs that require to be satisfied through economic activity, just as the soul also needs certain things for its nourishment. This is a way of talking about an aspect of a phenomenon in terms of its relation to the whole.

A second way of talking about the economy is to say that life depends on the economy, and that without the existence of appropriate economic means or resources, life is difficult, if not impossible. This is a way of talking about an aspect of a phenomenon by stressing its particular importance.

A third way of talking about the economy is to say that economic conditions are the real driving-force of, or power behind, History; that it is the economy

that determines every aspect of life; and that every human feeling, all forms of knowledge, and all human institutions are shaped by the prevailing economic conditions. This is a way of talking about an aspect of a phenomenon by presenting it as the crux or core of the phenomenon, the sole basis of understanding the phenomenon as a whole.

The first of these examples is illustrative of a legalistic sort of description. The second is an instance of a way of addressing an issue in order to stress its particular importance while at the same time not making it out to be the fundamentally determining factor. The third is an example of making a particular aspect or factor the basis of interpreting a phenomenon in its totality.

What we have been discussing here applies to religion as well. The *deen* or religion of Islam has various parts or aspects or dimensions, and there are different ways of explaining and describing them. Talking about them in terms of *fiqh* or jurisprudence is akin to the first method of description referred to above. Missionaries and social reformers typically use the second method of description. As for the third method, it has been rare among Muslims, although it has been characteristic of some strands of Sufism. Maulana Maududi's thought is an example of this third approach. He expressed his understanding of the *deen* of Islam in such a manner that it can be called, in the sense I am using the word, a particular interpretation of the *deen* based on a single central factor—politics.

In brief, his understanding of the *deen* can be said to be a political interpretation of Islam.

I am aware that no single word can fully represent a complex phenomenon, but the picture of the *deen* that emerges from Maulana Maududi's writings can be said to approximate what I term as a 'political interpretation of the *deen*'. In the Maulana's attempted comprehensive interpretation of the *deen*, the political aspect appears as the focal point of the totality of the *deen*. From this perspective, the reality of belief and prophethood cannot be understood without taking politics into account. Nor can the true significance of worship be comprehended apart from its supposed political underpinnings. Nor, too, according to this perspective, can one progress on the spiritual path or understand the meaning of the Prophet's ascension (*mi'raj*) if these are sought to be understood without taking into account their supposed political dimensions. It is as if without politics, the *deen* of Islam is so utterly empty and so totally incomprehensible that, in the words of Maulana Maududi, it is bereft of 'more than three-fourths' of its components.

## *The Political Interpretation of Islam*



“**E**conomic issues are a very important part of life. Every person should have access to the material resources that are necessary for life. No one should be allowed to wrongfully exploit others.”

No one can deny this argument. But when the same argument takes on the guise of Marxism, an intelligent person finds himself compelled to critique it.

What is the reason for this? There is just one reason, and that is that the economy, which, despite its importance, is just one necessary aspect of human life, has, in Marx’s intellectual framework, been given the garb of a complete ideology. The natural corollary of this is that the economy no longer remains just one among many aspects or components of life. Instead, it comes to be seen as the basis or crux of life. And so, all happenings in life come to be seen and explained in the light of the economy. The worth or importance of individuals and groups comes to be measured on an economic basis. People’s emotions and thought patterns, too, come to be seen as a product essentially

of their economic conditions. The economy becomes the vortex of all conflicts and struggles. In other words, people's minds and the world at large come to be determined by the economic factor. Of course, other aspects of life still continue to exist, but they come to be dominated by this one single factor. Detached from the economy, they are thought of as of no importance.

Socialist thought emerged in Europe in the context of the enormous changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Witnessing the havoc wrought by new industrial technologies in the lives of the working classes, some sensitive souls were moved to undertake efforts to ameliorate the workers' plight so that they, too, could gain some of the benefits of the Industrial Revolution. In other words, in the beginning, Socialism was based on the importance of the economic factor, but this factor was not taken to be the be-all and end-all of life.

The fact of the matter is that unless a certain point is singled out for particular attention, sometimes to the point of exaggeration, it does not receive much attention or popular appeal. Because of this, a certain revolutionary fervor began to characterize the writings and speeches of Socialist leaders, tending towards a certain exaggeration of the importance of the economic factor. Gradually, this tendency manifested itself in the form of an entire worldview based on the economic factor alone, in which every other aspect of life revolved around it and was dominated by it.

Marx was the turning point in this regard. He termed Socialist trends before his arrival on the scene, till around the middle of the 19th century, as 'Utopian Socialism'. He called the Socialism that he developed as 'Scientific Socialism'.

Till such time as Socialism just meant economic reforms, it did not lead to any seriously negative consequences. But when it assumed the form of Marxist philosophy, it turned to be completely fallacious at its very root.

The same sort of thing can happen with interpretations of the *deen* or religion of Islam. Suppose that in a particular period and under particular circumstances a particular aspect of Islam is being violated or ignored. Witnessing this, a pious man is moved to do something about the situation by reviving this particular aspect. He makes various efforts in this regard. Both his strong reaction to the situation he witnesses as well as the exigencies of his missionary work necessitate that he give particular stress, even to the point of exaggeration, to this aspect. And so, very naturally, when he reaches out to his addressees, he will not use the idiom of jurisprudence or logic. Rather, he will speak like a public speaker or a missionary, with passion and emotion. Obviously, when he speaks like this, driven by great missionary zeal, his words may not be carefully calculated or measured.

Let me illustrate this point with the help of an



example, recorded in the *Tabaqat* of Ibn Sa‘d (d. 845 C.E.). Once, the famous scholar Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyib (d. 715 C.E.) was approached by his slave, a man named Bard, who mentioned to him about some people who spent a lot of time in worship. These people, Bard told him, prayed continuously, from the noon (*zuhr*) to the mid-afternoon (*‘asr*) prayers. Thereupon, Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyib remarked:

Do you even know what worship is? Worship is contemplation on divine affairs and staying away from what God has forbidden.

Now, from this statement it does not mean that a pious scholar of the stature of Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyib was unaware that prayer, fasting, remembrance of God and reciting the Quran are also forms of worship, or that he thought that worship was only the two things that he had mentioned. His statement must be seen as a ‘missionary statement’, rather than as a juridical or strictly logical one.

When an Islamic jurist or *faqih* gives his views on a particular issue, he does so in very clear and specified terms. But unlike for a *faqih*, for a missionary, someone engaged in *dawah*, inviting people to God, the issue at hand is not the intellectual or legal explanation of a particular matter, but, rather, the reform of the conditions around him. That is why he searches for those things that need to be reformed and which he feels need special mention. Hence, his discourse is driven not by strictly legalistic concerns, but, instead,

by what he regards as public welfare. He focuses in his discourses on those particular aspects that he thinks demand particular attention. Conversely, he either ignores or else only lightly touches upon those matters that, from the point of view of missionary imperatives, are not necessary or of particular salience at that particular moment.

This way of addressing others is indeed in accordance with the *shariah*. Examples of this approach are to be found, in some way or the other, in the sayings of the Prophet of Islam as well as all the missionaries of Islam. Without this, it is not possible to engage in *dawah* work.

This matter is perfectly correct to this extent. But, sometimes, religious leaders and their followers fall prey to a misconception that a leader's utterances that stress a particular aspect are not simply a *dawah* imperative, but, rather, a general explanation of the *deen* in itself. This is where the blunder starts. For instance, a writer tells a *da'i*, a missionary, that he would like to publish books on Islam, and, in that way, serve Islam. In reply, the *da'i* says, "Nothing happens through books. You will sit and write, and people will lie down and read!"

This reply is given in a particular context. Now, if the followers of this *da'i* later come to think of it as a general principle and so abstain from using literature to serve religion, it would be tantamount to transforming a phrase that had only a temporary and

restricted validity into a general, eternal principle. When the *da'i* made his statement, he was not wrong, but when it was interpreted by his later followers as a general principle, it was, of course, wrongly understood.

Sometimes, this sort of error goes beyond this, so that what was meant to be relevant in a particular context is wrongly interpreted as general in application. Sometimes, the *da'i* is so heavily influenced by his own thought that he begins to see the particular aspect of the *deen* which he had felt it necessary to stress as actually being the *deen* in its entirety. Accordingly, he begins to explain the whole of the *deen* in the light of this one aspect alone. He does not remain content with stressing the importance of this aspect in itself, but goes beyond, to make this aspect a question of the whole of the *deen*. He begins to see the causes of everything—whether beneficial or baneful—as lying in this one aspect alone. When a person reaches this level, his blunder reaches its peak. At this juncture, something that was just one part of the *deen* (and in some cases, simply a relative part) becomes, in his view, the 'total *deen*' or the 'essential *deen*'. This is just like how the importance of the economic factor was transformed into Marxism—and we know that, despite focusing on a necessary value or aspect of life, the underlying basis of Marxism is fallacious.

This point can be further understood with the help of an analogy. Consider the case of two people. One of them looks at an object that is yellow in colour. The

other man puts on yellow-tinted spectacles and looks at things. The first man will perceive the object that he stares at as being yellow in colour. If he focuses his attention on the object continuously for a while and then looks at other things, for a few seconds everything else will also look yellow. But this effect will soon wear off and then everything will appear in their normal colours. On the other hand, the second person will perceive everything, no matter what its real colour, as yellow. He will not be able to perceive any other colour, no matter where he looks. The same holds true when the *deen* comes to be interpreted in terms of the assumed primacy of a single factor such as politics. Then, every aspect of the *deen* comes to be wrongly seen as being underpinned by politics.

What is the difference between stressing, from the point of view of dawah, a certain aspect of the *deen*, on the one hand, and making this aspect the basis of the interpretation of the *deen*, on the other? This question can be answered with the help of the following analogy.

Suppose someone says, “For every Muslim, it is a must that, in addition to being a Muslim, he should develop within him a martial spirit.” This statement appears to be a considerable exaggeration, because, obviously, it is almost impossible for every Muslim to become a soldier. After all, Muslims include men and women, children and old people, the weak and the strong, the sick and the healthy.

This exaggeration can be thought of as a way of expressing something in order to exhort people in a certain direction. If understood in this way, it is not something that damages the conception of the *deen*, nor is it a new interpretation of the *deen*.

However, in the other hand, if someone were to declare:

The true spirit of Islam is militaristic. Heavenly scriptures were sent down and prophets were commissioned so as to instill in people a martial spirit. The ultimate aim of all practices in Islam is to provide military training to its followers. The azan, the call to prayer, is a sort of army bugle. Worshippers who gather in the mosque are like soldiers gathering at a parade ground on hearing the sound of the bugle. Fasting is a rehearsal for the difficulties that will be faced on military campaigns. Haj is a march-past of the army of the Muslims of the entire world in front of the House of God. The Muslim *ummah* is a sort of divine army, and Islam is the military law that the *ummah* has been given to enforce. For, as it is said [in the Quran]: ‘You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind. You enjoin what is good, and forbid what is evil, and you believe in God.’ (3:110)

If someone says this sort of thing, it can be said

that he is engaging in nothing less than a militaristic interpretation of the *deen*.

So, these are two distinct scenarios. In the first case, to simply claim, “For every Muslim, it is a must that, in addition to being a Muslim, he must develop within him a martial spirit” exemplifies a particular stress on a single issue while speaking in order to exhort people in a particular direction. In contrast, the second scenario goes far beyond this and turns into a new interpretation of the *deen*. In the first case, stress is given to the martial spirit, while in the second case, militarism is projected as the very base of religion, in the light of which the entire *deen* is sought to be interpreted. The significance of the various parts or aspects of the *deen* comes to be determined on the basis of their relationship with militarism.

The issue that we are discussing here—the distinction between emphasis, for preaching purposes, on a particular aspect of the *deen*, on the one hand, and making it the basis of a new interpretation of the *deen*, on the other—can be put slightly differently. In the first case, one stresses the importance of a particular aspect of the *deen*, while in the second case, one makes it the basis of understanding the whole *deen*. In the former case, it is recognized to be one among many parts that make up a whole. In the latter case, this one part is used as the criterion or base to determine the value of the whole. In the former case, the stress given to one aspect does not negate the importance of the remaining aspects. In the latter case, this one

factor is given such a central status that without it, the entire *deen* appears as meaningless. In the former case, the salience of this particular aspect of the *deen* is a reflection of its intrinsic importance. In the latter case, this aspect is seen as the uniting factor for all the remaining aspects of the *deen*. In the former case, the aspect in question is like a single page of a book. In the latter case, it is like the binding that holds the whole book together.

In brief, stressing a particular point or factor while preaching may simply be a practical necessity, but when this factor becomes the basis of interpreting the entire religion, it gets transformed into a complete philosophy.

My objection to Maulana Maududi's writings is that in giving importance to the political aspects of the *deen*, he engaged in such inordinate exaggeration that he made it the basis of an entire interpretation of the *deen*. I do not object to his including politics in the *deen*. Everyone knows that politics, too, is part of religion. I do not consider it wrong that he stressed political aspects in his writings, because if at a particular time a preacher feels the need to stress a particular aspect of the *deen*, he must do so, otherwise people cannot be suitably enthused to try to bring about necessary changes.

If the matter rested here, no one would have cause to object. My objection is this—that Maulana Maududi so greatly exaggerated the importance

of the political aspect of Islam that he evolved a political interpretation of Islam. This is just like how exaggerating the importance of economics beyond what was warranted led to the development of Marxism as a completely new ideology.

Maulana Maududi was not alone in desiring the revival of an Islamic state in the Subcontinent. Several other Islamic groups think in these terms, each in their own way. Each of them has its own way of addressing this concern. Because of differences in their analyses of conditions and in their methodologies, there are considerable differences between them. Yet, none is bereft of the desire that God should bring in the day when Islam shall acquire prominence. Till here, there is no fundamental difference between the various Islamic groups. But where the difference starts is when Maulana Maududi's particular political interpretation of the deen begins.

This difference does not lie in the fact that Maulana Maududi stressed the issue of politics. Rather, it lies in the fact that he promoted a certain mindset, a distinct mentality, that sees everything in a political hue.

To use an analogy, consider the fact that across the world, there are many groups that desire economic reform. Marxists, too, want economic reform. Yet, despite this, Marxist Socialists are distinct from all their fellow travellers. The difference between them is not over wanting or not wanting economic reform. Rather, it has to do with their differences in their understanding of the nature of economic reform as



well as differences in their understanding of life and the universe.

In 1857, following the collapse of Mughal rule in India, some Indian *ulema* launched efforts to revive Muslim rule, thus giving particular importance to politics. Yet, this did not tantamount to a political interpretation of Islam. Rather, it was simply an expression of what, from the point of view of what these ulema thought of, rightly or wrongly, as a temporary necessity. But when it came to Maulana Maududi, it got transformed into a complete interpretation of the *deen* of Islam. Before this, politics was thought of as but one aspect of the *deen* and, accordingly, was given the stress it was considered to deserve. But in Maulana Maududi's ideology, it was given the status of the central focus of the *deen*, on the basis of which the whole of the *deen* was sought to be explained.

The relationship between the political movement of the *ulema* and the ideology of Maulana Maududi is like the relationship between 'Utopian Socialism' and Marxist Socialism. If Maulana Maududi and his followers imagine that, like Marx, he provided a complete picture of the reduced perception of Islamic politics, they may be right in their understanding, but it is this understanding that is the real reason for their error.

## *Maulana Maududi's Writings*



The nature of the fundamental mistake in Maulana Maududi's interpretation of Islam is not the same as sidelining an aspect of the *deen* (as for instance, denying the practice or *sunnat* of the Prophet) or adding a new aspect to the *deen* (such as a new claimant to prophethood). Rather, the Maulana's real error is that he had transformed the philosophy of the religion of Islam. This is the root of all the other errors that resulted from his interpretation.

If someone believes that the fundamental purpose of life is to earn money, he will not deny the salience of other basic human needs and related matters. He will continue to recognize the importance of everything else that human life requires, including religion, morals and social relations. But the way he relates to these will be entirely different. He will relate to them as mere means to accomplish what he sees as the purpose of his life—to make as much money as he can. He will establish relations with others, and even with himself, simply on the basis of how far this can help him earn more money. He may donate money in charity, but here, too, his motive will be to help him increase his earnings.

Maulana Maududi's interpretative mistake is somewhat of the same order. His particular bent of mind made him bestow on politics the central place in his interpretation of the *deen*. Accordingly, for him, to establish the dominance of the *deen* was tantamount to establishing its political domination. He saw this as the very purpose or goal that God wants his servants to strive to work for. Naturally, then, in his understanding of Islam, the rest of the *deen* came to be subordinated to politics. Politics assumed the central place through which every aspect of the *deen* could be understood and its importance ascertained. In this way, in his understanding of Islam, every aspect of it acquired a political hue. This naturally resulted in a major deviation.

This point is so very clear and prominent in the various writings of Maulana Maududi that nobody can deny it. I would like to cite some examples to illustrate this point.

### *Explanation of Life and the Universe*

An exaggerated importance given to the issue of the economy led, in the form of Marxism, to an explanation of life in which economic issues were given the greatest importance. Similarly, a political understanding of religion led to a new concept about life and the universe in which politics had a pre-eminent place.

Thus, for instance, Maulana Maududi noted that God has placed those aspects of human life that are ‘animalistic’ and ‘natural’ under the sway of natural laws. As regards these, Man is, like all other creatures, totally surrendered to God. But as regards the uniquely human aspects of Man, wherein Man can use his intelligence and powers of discrimination and act according to his own choice, God has bestowed freedom on Man. This free-will is actually a test. The right thing to do is that in this sphere, too, human beings should surrender themselves totally to their Creator, in just the same way as they do in those matters of human life over which they have no control. This is because God alone is the legitimate ruler. Obedience is due to Him alone. However, God does not compel people to obey Him in these matters, having left them free to decide things for themselves.

The Maulana then went on to write that in the sphere in which human beings have to use God-given free will, the law that ought to be followed is the divinely-revealed *shariah*, which was conveyed through God’s messengers. This law covers a wide range of issues, including beliefs, morals, society, civilization, politics, and so on. It is not enough, the Maulana wrote, to regard God as the Creator and Lord of the Earth and the Skies. In addition, he said, ‘It is necessary to accept Him as the Emperor and Ruler and Law-Maker.’ One must also obey ‘the principles, moral rules, limits and laws set by Him’. If someone simply accepts God and believes Him to

have no partners but, at the same time, claims to be fully independent in the sphere in which humans have free-will, he 'actually revolts against God'. The same is true, the Maulana added, if someone were to claim to establish his dominion over a bit of the earth and announce, 'Here I shall rule according to my will, and in any way I like.' This, the Maulana commented, is precisely what monarchs, dictators, priests and even citizens in democracies claim. This, too, is what every person who 'does not accept obedience to God' claims with regard to his personal life. According to the Maulana, all such people, who regard someone other than God as the ruler, rebel against God. 'The task of the true believer is to wipe out this rebellion from the world and to put an end to the divinity of everything other than God,' the Maulana wrote. The true believer's mission in life, he added, is to ensure that just as God's natural laws are followed throughout the universe, His *shariah* laws, too, must be enforced in the human world. 'The goal of all the efforts of the true believer is to take out God's servants from servitude to everyone other than God and to make them servants of God alone,' he maintained. This task is to be done essentially through guidance, instruction, exhortation, preaching and so on, he said. But, he added, 'those who have illegally become the rulers of God's domain and have made the servants of God their own servants' generally do not give up their positions simply as a result of preaching. Nor can such people generally tolerate that knowledge of

the Truth spread among the public. They regard this as threatening to destroy their lordship. ‘That is why’, he contended, ‘the true believer is compelled to take to war so that he can remove the hurdles in the path of establishing Divine Government’.

### *The Concept of the Goal of Life*

A natural result of the political interpretation of Islam was that the goal towards which a believer had to strive came to be understood in essentially political terms. In this understanding of the goal of a believer, acquiring political power became of fundamental importance.

Thus, in his book *Tehrik-e Islami ki Akhlaqi Bunyaden* (‘The Ethical Foundations of the Islamic Movement’), Maulana Maududi contended, ‘The ultimate aim of our struggle is bringing about change in political leadership’. ‘This is to say’, he explained, ‘that the final stage that we want to attain in this world is the end of the rule of godlessness and immorality and the establishment of the system based on a pious leadership. We regard this struggle as a means to acquire the pleasure of God, in this world and in the Hereafter.’ ‘It is this,’ he wrote, ‘that we have made our goal.’ He bemoaned the fact that many Muslims failed to appreciate ‘the importance of this issue in the *deen*.’ The ‘final basis’ for progress as well as decline in human affairs, he contended, was the question of who wielded political power. Without

this sort of power, he believed, it was impossible to attain the fundamental purpose of the *deen*. And so, he opined, the establishment of a 'pious leadership' (*imamat-e saleh*) and the 'Divine System' (*nizam-e haq*) was of paramount importance. 'If there is any negligence in this matter,' he argued, 'there is nothing one can do to earn God's pleasure.' 'Establishing and maintaining a pious leadership and the Divine System is the real aim of the *deen*', he continued. 'According to Islam, the establishment of a pious leadership is of central and basic importance,' he wrote, adding, 'This, according to me, is the demand of the Book of God. This is what the practice (sunnat) of the prophets was. And I cannot change my stand on this matter unless someone proves to me from the Book of God and the practice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) that this is not demanded by the *deen*.'

In the same vein, the Constitution of the Jamaat-e-Islami declares:

The objective of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the aim of all its efforts is the establishment of Divine Government in this world and the winning of God's pleasure in the Hereafter.

### *Understanding of the Deen of Islam*

The political nature of Maulana Maududi's interpretation of the *deen* is evident from the following passage, taken from his book *Musalman Aur Maujuda Siyasi Kashmakash* ('Muslims and the Present-Day Political Struggle'):

The word *deen* is almost identical in its meaning to how the word ‘state’ is understood in present times. People accepting a superior power and obeying it—this is the ‘state’. This is also the understanding of the term *deen*. And the true *deen* (*deen-e haq*) is that human beings abandon slaving for, and obedience to, other people, their own egos and all created beings, and accept the superior-most power of God alone and become His servants and obey Him.

Maulana Maududi wrote that the Prophet had ‘brought with him from his Sender’ a state system that had no room whatsoever for people’s independent authority and for allowing some people to rule over others. Rather, he added, ‘ruler-ship and the superior-most power are entirely God’s.’

### *Prophethood*

The political interpretation of the *deen* presents God’s sending of the prophets to the world in a particular political light. Thus, discussing the nature of the mission of the prophets in his book *Tajdeed-o-Ihya-e Deen* (‘The Renewal and Revival of the *Deen*’) Maulana Maududi wrote:

The highest goal of the mission of the prophets (on whom be peace) in this world has been to establish the Divine Government and enforce the system of life that they had brought from God. They were willing to give the people who



followed Ignorance (*ahl-e jahiliyat*) the right to remain established in their ignorant (*jahili*) beliefs and to allow them to continue to follow their ignorant ways to the extent that the impact of their actions remained restricted to them alone. But they were not willing to give them the right—and, quite naturally, they could not give them this right—that the reigns of power could be in their hands and that they could run human affairs according to the laws of Ignorance (*jahiliyat*). This is why all the prophets made efforts to set off a political revolution (*siyasi inqilab*). In the case of some, their efforts were only to the extent of preparing the ground—for instance, the Prophet Abraham. Some of them launched revolutionary movements in actual practice, but their work ended before establishing Divine Government—for instance, the Messiah [Jesus]. And some took this movement to the stage of success—for instance, the Prophet Moses and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

This opinion about the prophets is not proper—that when they acquired power, they permitted people to continue in their wrong ways.

### *The Islamic Party*

When Islam is made out to be a political ideology, then, quite naturally, the Islamic community is made

out to be a political party. This is what Maulana Maududi suggested, as for instance in the following excerpt from the chapter titled *Jihad fi Sabilillah* ('Jihad in the Path of God') of his book *Tafhimat*:

Those people who embrace Islam become members of the Islamic party, and in this way the international revolutionary party comes into being which the Quran terms as *hizbullah* ('party of God'). As soon as this party comes into being, it launches jihad in order to attain its goal. Its existence demands that it make efforts to wipe out the ruler-ship of non-Islamic systems, and, as opposed to these, to establish the Government of that just and balanced laws of civilization and social life which the Quran terms by the comprehensive name *kalimatullah* ('word of God').

This 'Islamic party', Maulana Maududi contended, is not a party simply of 'religious preachers' 'lecturers' and 'people who spread good news' Rather, he wrote, 'It is a party of soldiers of God, and its work is to forcibly wipe out oppression, corruption, immorality, disobedience and illegal exploitation from the world.' This 'party' aimed at ending the worship of everyone except God and replacing evil with good. 'Hence', Maulana Maududi added, 'this party has no choice but to capture the powers of Government'. This, he explained, is because a civilization that is based on immorality depends for its existence on a government that is based on immorality, while a

pious civilizational system cannot be established unless the reigns of political power are snatched from those who are immoral and sinful, and come into the hands of the pious.

### *The Purpose of Worship*

In the political interpretation of Islam, worship or *ibadat* acquires a certain definite political meaning and status, as is evident in the statement below in Maulana Maududi's book *Khutbat*:

Prayer, fasting Haj and zakat, which God has made a duty for you and has appointed as pillars of Islam—all these things are not, as in the forms of worship in other religions, mere rituals and offerings and customs that you perform and God is happy with you. Rather, the fact of the matter is that they have been made into a duty to prepare you for a lofty purpose and to train you for an important task. This aim is to wipe out the rule of human beings and to establish the ruler-ship of the one God. To be ready to sacrifice one's everything and make efforts for this purpose even at the cost of one's life is called jihad. Prayer, fasting, Haj and zakat are all for preparing for this particular purpose.

In his book *Islami Ibadat Par Tahqiqi Nazar* ('An Analytical Perspective on Islamic Worship'), Maulana Maududi wrote about what he regarded as the purpose of congregational prayers in Islam as follows:

For Muslims, this world is a battlefield for stern struggles, contestations and difficulties. There are large groups here of people who rebel against God, and who, with full force, have imposed on human beings the laws that they themselves have devised. In opposition to them, Muslims have been given the responsibility—a very backbreaking responsibility—to spread God’s laws here and to get them to be enforced, to wipe out human-made laws wherever they are in operation and, in their place, to establish the system of life linked to the law of the one God who has no associates. This great service that God has given Muslims to do cannot be undertaken by any Muslim individual by himself against the groups of people who rebel against God. Even if there are tens of millions of Muslims in the world and if they make individual efforts separately, by themselves, still they cannot succeed in the face of the organized strength of their opponents. That is why it is indispensable that all those who want to worship God should make one group and should struggle in a united way for achieving their goal. Prayer does this work, in addition to the building of individual character. It builds the entire structure of the social system, establishes and preserves it, and brings it into action five times every day so that this system continues to function, like a machine.

## *The Understanding of Piety and God-Consciousness*

In the political understanding of Islam, piety and God-consciousness also come to be understood in a particularly political way. Thus, in his book *Tehrik-e Islami Ki Akhlaqi Bunyaden* ('The Ethical Foundations of the Islamic Movement'), Maulana Maududi wrote that *taqwa* or piety is based on fear of God, which leads people to save themselves from His wrath, while the basis of *ihsan* or spiritual excellence is God's love, which inspires people to acquire His pleasure. He explains what he regards as the difference between *taqwa* and *ihsan* with the help of the following analogy.

Among the employees of the Government, Maulana Maududi wrote, are some who are very dutiful and who do the work they have been assigned very diligently, carefully abiding by all the rules and regulations. They do not do anything that, from the Government's point of view, is objectionable. On the other hand, there is another group of employees who are very loyal to the Government, and who are willing even to sacrifice their very lives for it. Not only do they perform the tasks they have been assigned, but, more than that, they constantly think about how the Government's interests can be better served. And so, they go beyond their duties and do extra work for the Government. If the Government faces any challenge or threat, they are willing to sacrifice their lives, their

wealth and their children for its sake. If someone revolts against the Government, they stir themselves up and put their lives at stake to quash the revolt. They simply cannot tolerate even seeing anyone damaging the Government's interests. Their heart-felt desire, Maulana Maududi wrote, is that their Government's power alone should prevail throughout the world, and that not even a bit of land should remain across the world where their Government's writ does not run.

Maulana Maududi argued that the first sort of people exemplify *taqwa*, while the second category exemplify *ihsan*. The former, he wrote, 'will also receive promotions and their names will also be included in the list of good employees'. However, he stated, 'no one can share the glorious stature' of the latter. Although those who have *taqwa* (*muttaqin*) are also worthy of respect and trust, he commented, the 'real power of Islam', is 'the group of those with *ihsan* (*muhsinin*), and the work that Islam wants should get done in the world can be done by this group.'

### *Bearing Witness to the Truth*

In the political interpretation of Islam, bearing witness to the Truth is considered to be incomplete without the establishment of Islamic Government. Thus, in his *Shahadat-e Haq* ('Witness to the Truth'), Maulana Maududi wrote:

If this witness can reach its culmination, it can

only happen when a state is established based on these principles and it brings the entire *deen* into action, and, through its justice, its reformist programme, its good administration, the welfare of its subjects, the good character of its rulers, its pious internal politics, its principled external policy, its noble warfare and its loyal reconciliation, it bears witness throughout the world that the religion that has given birth to such a state is truly a guarantor of human welfare and in obeying it lies the welfare of humankind. When this sort of witness combines with verbal witness, the responsibility that has been given to the Muslim *ummah* is properly fulfilled—that is when *itmam-e hujjat* [providing the necessary proofs of Islam in the appropriate manner] with regard to humankind is accomplished.

### *The Prophet's Ascension*

As a result of the political interpretation of Islam, religious realities such as the ascension of the Prophet, too, come to be given a political interpretation. Thus, in his book titled *Mi'raj ki Raat* ('The Night of the Ascension'), Maulana Maududi wrote that the Planet Earth is a 'small province' of the 'grand Sultanate of God'. The status of the Prophet who has been sent from God to this 'province' can be likened, he wrote, to that of a governor or viceroy who is sent by the Government to a country that is subordinate to it.

The Prophet of Islam engaged in preaching work for around twelve years when his mission entered a new stage. This new stage began when the time had arrived to leave the unfavourable environment of Makkah and shift to the more favourable environment of Madinah and where, Maulana Maududi wrote, 'the movement of Islam was to be transformed into a state'. That is why, he maintained, on this important occasion of his new 'appointment' and to give him new 'instructions', God, 'the Emperor of the entire universe', called the Prophet to His presence. This was, he says, the *mi'raj* or Prophet's ascension.

The Maulana wrote that the fourteen principles that were given to the Prophet during the ascension were not just moral or ethical teachings. Rather, these were what he called 'Islam's manifesto' and the 'programme' on the basis of which the Prophet was to build up a society. These instructions provided during the *mi'raj* were, he said, given to the Prophet when his movement was crossing the stage of preaching and 'was about to step into the stage of Government and political power.' And so, 'before the beginning of this stage', the 'principles' on the basis of which the Prophet was to 'establish the system of civilization' had been clarified. 'This is why besides laying down these fourteen points,' the Maulana wrote, 'God made prayers five times every day a duty for all the followers of Islam, so that moral discipline should develop in those who stood up in order to give this



programme a practical shape and they should not be negligent of God.'

One could cite several more such passages from Maulana Maududi's writings to indicate his distinctly political interpretation of Islam. The passages provided above are, however, more than adequate to understand the nature of the problem at hand. It is readily apparent—and anyone can easily see this—how in the political interpretation, every aspect of Islam comes to assume a political dimension. The purpose and meaning of life and the universe are given a distinctly political colour—in just the same way as in Marxism everything is coloured by the economic or material question. The goal of life is projected as essentially political. The *deen* of Islam comes to be seen as shaped by politics. God's sending of prophets to humankind also comes to be seen as impelled by political goals. The highest position for the Muslim *ummah* was as a political party. Worship is reduced to a preface to politics. Piety and spiritual excellence come to be shaped in a distinctly political mould. Witnessing to the truth becomes a political act. The ascension comes to be seen as a sort of political journey. In other words, in this political interpretation of Islam, the whole of the religion of Islam wrongly comes to be seen as a collection of parts whose individual and collective significance cannot be understood without linking them with politics.

Can this be called simply stressing the importance of the political aspect of Islam, of highlighting one

aspect of Islam among many? No, not at all! Rather, it is nothing short of a complete interpretation of the *deen*—and which, for want of a more appropriate term, one can call ‘the political interpretation’ of Islam.

## *Arguments From the Quran and the Hadith*



Someone might ask, “If Maulana Maududi has made politics the central aspect of Islam, what is so objectionable about it? It could perhaps be that this is really what the status of politics is in Islam.”

The question here arises as to what proof there is that this is really how politics is envisioned in Islam. It is not enough simply to claim that this is so, or to write books championing this argument. Evidence for this claim must be present in the Quran and the Hadith if it is to be accepted—and this evidence should be in the form of explicit mention in these sources. To use any other sort of proof in order to try to validate this claim will only make the claim even weaker than it already is.

In my book *Ta‘bir ki Ghalati*, I critically researched and analyzed, in a very detailed manner, the arguments that Maulana Maududi and some other writers who belong to his circle sought to provide from the Quran and the Hadith to back their claim. In that book, I proved that none of the Quranic verses and hadith reports that Maulana Maududi and other writers of his circle cited to back their claim can truly

be considered to legitimize the Maulana's particular interpretation of Islam.

Let me cite two examples, one, a Quranic verse, and the other, a *hadith* report, to clarify this point. Among the Quranic verses that are used in support of the political interpretation of Islam is the following:

God has ordained for you the same religion which He enjoined on Noah, and which We have revealed to you, and which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus, so that you should remain steadfast in religion (*aqim ud-deen*) and not become divided in it. (42:13)

In the political interpretation of the *deen* of Islam, the word *ad-deen* used in this verse is taken as referring to the entire gamut of the commandments and laws of the Islamic *shariah*, covering personal, social, national and international affairs. The term *aqim ud-deen* in this verse is interpreted as 'to enforce' the laws of the *deen* of Islam in their entirety. Now, because this understanding of the *deen* cannot be realized without a Government, 'to establish the *deen*', as mentioned in this verse, is taken by proponents of a political interpretation of Islam to mean establishing the 'Divine Government', or what Maulana Maududi called *Hukumat-e Ilahiya*.

The fact of the matter, however, is that, as far as I know, no Quranic exegete worth mentioning has interpreted this Quranic verse in this manner. Almost all scholars of Quranic exegesis take the term *ad-*

*deen* to mean the essence of the *deen* or the basic teachings of the *deen* of Islam, and not the complete commandments of the *deen*, the *deen* in its totality. They take *aqim ud-deen* or *iqamat-e deen* not to mean establishing the entire *shariah* system, but, rather, as adopting fully that part of the *deen* that is incumbent on every person and in all circumstances, fully abiding by which a person becomes a Muslim in God's eyes.

The translation of the term *aqim ud-deen* or *iqamat-e deen* as 'establish the *deen*'—which is how proponents of the political interpretation of Islam render it—is not in itself incorrect. But it creates a sort of misunderstanding. When people whose minds are shaped by a political interpretation of Islam consider the phrase 'establish the *deen*', they take it as a commandment to do something—to establish the dominance of the *deen* or to enforce it, or, in other words, to establish the Divine Government. The fact, however, is that this is not the meaning of the phrase *aqim ud-deen* in this Quranic verse. A better rendering is 'to maintain the *deen*' or to 'keep the *deen* established'. That is why Urdu translators of the Quran have taken the phrase in this sense. They do not take to mean 'establish the *deen*' (in Urdu: *deen qaim karo*), but, rather, in the sense that I take it—to 'maintain the *deen*' or to 'keep it established' (in Urdu: *deen qaim rakho*). This, for instance, is how well-known South Asian Quranic scholars, such as Shah Abdul Qadir, Shah Rafiuddin, Shaikh Abdul Haq Haqqani, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Deputy Nazir

Ahmad and Shaikh ul-Hind Mahmud ul-Hasan, have taken it.

This understanding of this phrase is based on the fact that if it is seen in the context of the whole Quranic verse of which it is a part, it will be clear that it is a commandment about the establishment of the very same deen that was revealed to all the prophets, from the Prophet Noah to the Prophet Muhammad. Now, as far as the beliefs and fundamental principles taught by the different prophets are concerned, their deen was identical, but there were considerable differences in terms of the details of the laws (*shariah*) and practical commandments that they taught. This is why this Quranic verse can only indicate that portion of the deen that was common to the teachings of all the prophets.

As the noted Quranic commentator, the twelfth century Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 1209 C.E.) noted in his *Tafsir al-Kabir*, the term *ad-deen* here refers to those aspects of the teachings of all the prophets that they shared in common, which is to say matters in their teachings other than the laws and commandments that were different for different prophets. This, Imam Razi wrote, consists of faith in God, His angels, His books, His prophets and the Day of Judgment as well as matters that emerge from faith (*iman*)—detachment from the world, concern about the Hereafter, cultivation of morals and abstaining from evil.

In a similar vein, the noted Indian Muslim scholar,

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d. 1943 C.E.), wrote in his Quranic commentary *Bayan ul-Quran*, that by *ad-deen* is here meant ‘the principles of the deen’ (*usul-e deen*) that are common in all the shariahs of the different prophets—as for instance the oneness of God, prophethood, resurrection, and so on. This verse indicates, Maulana Thanvi said, that one must ‘keep this deen established’ (*deen qaim rakhna*) ‘and not change or abandon it’.

This same opinion is voiced by almost all other Quranic exegetes. Some of them have taken the term *ad-deen* in this verse to mean the beliefs common to the teachings of all the prophets, while some also include, in addition to these beliefs, certain practices or actions that come into being in people’s lives as a necessary result of these beliefs.

Thus, for instance, Abul Aliya (d. 708 C.E.) opined:

In this verse, *iqamat-e deen* means devotion to God alone and His worship.

Mujahid (722 C.E.) wrote:

God ordered every prophet to establish prayer, give zakat, acknowledge God and obey Him—and this is what *iqamat-e deen* is.

Abu Hayyan (d. 1344 C.E.) commented about *iqamat-e deen* in this context as follows:

It is a name for the beliefs held in common that are related to the oneness of God, obedience to God, faith in the prophets, faith in God’s books, faith in the Last Day and recompense for deeds.

Al-Khazin (d. 1341 C.E.) wrote:

Here, *iqamat-e deen* refers to the oneness of God, and faith in God and His books and the prophets and the Last Day and obeying God in matters of His commandments and prohibitions and doing all those things the performing of which makes a person a Muslim. In this context, *deen* does not connote the *shariahs* that are revealed according to the conditions and interests of different communities because, as the Quran clarifies, these are different.

Al-Alusi al-Baghdadi (d. 1854 C.E.) commented about the term *iqamat-e deen* as used in this context as follows:

The *deen* of Islam is the name for the oneness of God, obedience to God, and faith in His books, His prophets and the Day of Recompense and all those things on the basis of which a person becomes a true believer (*momin*). By *iqamat-e deen* is meant to properly follow the affairs of the deen and to remain established in it.

Qumi Nishapuri (d. 1328 C.E.) opined that the phrase *iqamat-e deen* as used here means:

To be established on the oneness of God, prophethood and the Hereafter and to follow other similar basic teachings that are other than those minor legal details (*furu'at*) that are different in the different *shariahs*.

Likewise, al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 C.E.) noted:



It [*iqamat-e deen*] means the oneness of God and obedience to Him, and faith in His prophets, His books and the Last Day, and all those things on the basis of which one becomes a Muslim. Here is not meant the *shariahs* that are given in accordance with the conditions and interests of [different] *ummahs*, because these have always remained different.

Similarly, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 C.E.) commented that by *iqamat-e deen* is meant:

Those things that are in common in the teachings of the various prophets relating to the worship of the one God without any associates, although besides this, their *shariahs* and methods are different.

Similarly, Hafizuddin Nasfi (1310 C.E.) wrote that this Quranic verse indicates that:

In other words, you need to abide by the *deen* of Noah, the *deen* of Muhammad and the *deen* of the prophets who appeared between them, and what is common to the teachings of these exalted prophets. By *aqim ud-deen* is here meant the establishment of Islam: the oneness of God, obedience to God, faith in the prophets, the [heavenly] books and the Day of Recompense and all those things through which someone becomes a Muslim. This commandment does not refer to the *shariahs* of the prophets, because these have remained different between the different prophets.

From these excerpts from the writings of numerous well-known scholars it is clear that a great many Quranic exegetes have understood the Quranic verse referred to here to mean the full acceptance of the basic teachings of the *deen*. Given this, how can the verse be interpreted to mean the imposition of the entire gamut of commandments of the *deen* that relate to all aspects of individual and social life—or, in other words, bringing about the establishment of Divine Government, as is believed by the proponents of the political interpretation of Islam?

This does not mean, however, that besides the essential or basic teachings of religion, the establishment of the social and civilizational laws of the *shariah* is not an important issue. I only wish to show that their establishment has not been made incumbent on us in the absolute sense that proponents of the political interpretation understand it to be. That is why one finds no support for this interpretation even in those places in the Quran that talk about establishing the social laws of the *deen*.

Now consider efforts to seek justification for the political interpretation of Islam from the corpus of the Hadith. In an article published in an official organ of the Jamaat-e-Islami, it was said:

In the matter of the goal that the Jamaat-e-Islami has adopted for itself, the likes or dislikes of any individual play no part whatsoever. Instead, it has faith that God had sent all the prophets, and, finally, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for this objective, for this mission, and for

this purpose. And until the Day of Judgment this is the reason for the very existence of *ummat-e muhammadi*. In this way, the objective of the Jamaat-e-Islami is directly connected with the purpose of the sending of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In the words of this Jamaat-e-Islami writer, the objective of the Jamaat-e-Islami is ‘to establish the Government of God’s laws (*Allah ki tashri’i hukumat*) in the world’, ‘to enforce the *deen* and *shariah* sent by God and reform the world’ and ‘to establish the *deen* and to make it dominant over all false *deens*.’ This, he says, is the purpose of God’s sending the Prophet to the world. He says that this is mentioned in the Quran, Hadith and books of Islamic history. However, despite claiming to have a vast storehouse of evidence for his claim, he cites in this regard just a single hadith report that, according to him, confirms his argument and which, so he contends, ‘is a very good explanation’.

This single piece of ‘evidence’ is a report contained in the Sahih of Imam Bukhari, which some other Hadith scholars have also cited in their books. The report relates that Ata ibn Yasar (d. 721 C.E.) says that he met Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As (d. 683 C.E.), a Companion of the Prophet and requested him to describe to him the qualities of the Prophet Muhammad that have been mentioned in the Torah. Abdullah told him about these qualities, one of which was that God would not take the Prophet away from the world until through him the ‘crooked community’

(*millat-e awja*) was straightened and people began saying, 'There is no god but God.' Through this, the Prophet would open many blind eyes, deaf ears and closed hearts.

Commenting on this hadith report, this Jamaat-e-Islami-oriented writer says that the purpose behind God's sending the Prophet Muhammad was *iqamat-e deen*. He adds that a very long time before the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad, the Torah had predicted that 'until the *deen* became established' the Prophet would not die. Then, in conclusion, he writes:

These details fortify our conviction that the Jamaat-e-Islami has made no error in the objective that it has adopted for itself. Rather, this is the objective of the entire Muslim ummah, which the ummah is neglecting.

To properly appreciate the hadith report that this writer refers to in order to back his argument, it is useful to turn to what two noted scholars of Hadith, Aini and Ibn Hajar had to say about this report. Allama Aini (d. 1451 C.E.) writes in his *Umdat ul-Qari* that it means that, through the Prophet, God would negate polytheism and affirm His oneness. He adds that the 'crooked *millat*' mentioned in this report are the Arabs. 'The Arabs are called "crooked" because they changed the *deen* of their ancestor the Prophet Abraham and idolatry emerged among them,' he comments. Hence, according to him, this hadith report indicates 'establishing the Arab *millat*' and

‘taking them out of infidelity (*kufir*) and towards faith (*iman*)’.

Likewise, in his *Fath ul-Bari*, Ibn Hajar (d. 1449 C.E.) opines that the ‘crooked *millat*’ mentioned in this hadith report are the ‘Arab *millat*’ and that they have been referred to here as ‘crooked’ because they had taken to idolatry. Their iqamat or ‘establishment’ means, he says, ‘taking them out of infidelity and towards faith’.

From this explanation, it is clear that the meaning of this *hadith* report that the Jamaat-e-Islami-oriented writer provided is not correct. For one thing, this *hadith* talks about making people say ‘There is no god but God’. I do not know on what basis he took this to mean the ‘reform of the world’ and establishing ‘the Government of God’s laws’. Moreover, this *hadith* does not talk about the duties of the Muslim ummah. Rather, it is about an action that would be undertaken in the future by God through the Prophet. This *hadith* report mentions that God would not let the Prophet die before he made people say, ‘There is no god but God’. This is clearly about the Prophet. But if one were to argue from this that this applies to all the followers of Islam, it would mean that every one of us would have to undertake not to die until we have made all our opponents into Muslims! Will the writer of this article make such a promise?

Now, this does not mean that reforming the world or establishing a government based on God’s laws is something separate from Islam. The fact, however, is that in Islam, rules for individuals, on the one hand,

and for social life, on the other, are of a different nature. The mistake made in the political interpretation of Islam is that injunctions relating to individual life and social life have been given the same position—although this cannot be proven from the *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

There are some aspects of Islam that relate to individuals, and these are necessary to be followed under all circumstances, as long as one is in a position to do so. It is different, however, with laws about social or collective life. They become applicable only when the entire society is willing to put them into action. That is why these laws were always revealed at a time when the believers had already established a political structure and were in a position to put into effect social laws of this kind. Only a Muslim society that possesses the necessary authority, and not individual Muslims, can be expected to put into action these social laws of the *shariah*.

To make this point clearer, consider the history of the Children of Israel. They were not given any legal commandments in the *Torah* as long as they were in Egypt. However, after they left Egypt, their status changed—they were now a free community possessing authority, and so God sent them certain laws. The same sort of thing happened in Arabia. When the Prophet was in Makkah, that portion of the *shariah* was revealed that applied to every believer in his or her individual capacity, and which the believers were duty-bound to follow at all times, no matter what the circumstances. The rest of the *shariah*

was revealed over time, in accordance with the then prevailing conditions. This was at a later stage, when the believers acquired political power.

The order in which the different *shariah* commandments were revealed clearly indicates that under normal or ordinary conditions, believers are duty-bound to observe and follow only that portion of the *deen* of Islam that was revealed to the Prophet before the acquisition of political power. Abiding by the rest of the laws becomes incumbent as a duty binding on them only if and when they acquire the opportunity of running a Government, which is necessary for enforcing such commandments. It is clear that the entire gamut of *shariah* laws can be put into action only if the necessary conditions prevail. Their application depends on the actual circumstances of the concerned individuals and groups. As regards *shariah* laws that relate to the collective sphere, it is only those groups of believers that have the capacity of putting them into action that are expected to do so. Believers who may exercise power only at a limited level are not commanded to enforce religious commandments at the societal or national level. People can be expected to abide by laws only to the extent that it is practically possible for them.

There is a clear principle of the *shariah* in this regard. The Quran says: *La yukallifullahu nafsan illa wus'aha*, or 'God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear.' (2:286) From this we learn that God does not expect people to do more than they are capable of. Given this, how can God give believers

commandments that they are not in a position to follow? If someone claims that the believers are required by God, under all conditions, to enforce all the laws of the *deen* in their entirety, it is just the same as if someone were to argue that since *zakat* is payable on various forms of wealth, it is the duty of every Muslim to try to become the owner of every such form of wealth so that he can fully abide by the duty of giving *zakat*!

It should be clear by now that the entire gamut of the detailed demands of the *deen* of Islam are not required to be put into practical effect in the form of laws at all times. This is only possible depending on the circumstances. As the sphere of the believers expands, the demands of the *deen* expand, too. If an individual Muslim is all by himself, he is duty-bound to observe only that part of the *deen* that relates to his person. At this time, he will apply Divine laws on and to himself. When the believers expand in numbers and become a family or a couple of families, the scope of the laws that they are expected to observe will correspondingly expand. And when an entire society of believers comes into being that has the necessary authority, it then becomes the duty of the whole society to fully observe all the Divine laws relating to social affairs. This can only happen if the society possesses the necessary political authority, in which case it would need to appoint a leader or *amir* who will ensure that these laws are obeyed.



## *Where Does an Erroneous Interpretation of the Deen Take Us?*



Following the publication of my book *Ta'bir ki Ghalati*, the Jamaat-e-Islami came out with a considerable number of writings criticizing it. But the end result of these efforts was only to make even clearer than before that in the entire Jamaat-e-Islami circle, not a single person possessed even a single convincing bit of evidence in support of the political interpretation of Islam.

This is not really the place to repeat my views about Quranic verses and hadith reports which I discussed in *Ta'bir ki Ghalati*. Those who would like a more detailed discussion of these issues can find it in that book. Here, I would like to restrict myself to just one conclusion that seems to be a necessary fall-out of Maulana Maududi's interpretation of the *deen*. And that is that this interpretation has completely transformed the understanding of Islamic history. This is clearly evident in two of Maulana Maududi's key books: *Quran ki Char Bunyadi Istilahen* ('Four Basic Terms of the Quran') and *Tajdid-o-Ihya-e Deen*.

In his *Quran ki Char Bunyadi Istilahen*, Maulana Maududi discussed four Quranic terms: *Ilah*, *Rabb*, *ibadat* and *deen*, and sought to explain them according to his perspective. In the preface to the book, he said that the meaning of ‘most Quranic words’ in the books of linguistics and Quranic commentary written in the later period of Muslim history had been ‘extremely narrowed down’ and their real import obscured. Thus, he said that the Quranic term *Ilah* had been wrongly translated as *Mabud*, a deity to be worshipped, *Rabb* as *Parvardigar* or Sustainer, *ibadat* as parastish or worship, and *deen* as *mazhab* or religion. In this way, he showed that these terms had acquired a special sort of spiritual or religious meaning. In his view, what he considered as their ‘civilizational’ and ‘political’ significance had, accordingly, been rendered invisible. He considered this book of his as lifting the veil over what he believed to be the ‘true’ civilizational and political significance of these four important Quranic terms.

How, according to the Maulana, did such a massive blunder take place in our understanding of these key Quranic terms? How did this blunder continue through several centuries? The Maulana had a seemingly simple answer to these questions: ‘People in the past did not understand the *deen* properly.’ In this way, he sought to argue for the veracity of his understanding of the *deen*. But this interpretation changed the very nature of Islamic history. Muslims believe that throughout Islamic history there has been

an ideological continuity or continuity of religious ideas. But if the Maulana is to be believed, this belief is erroneous. Going by his understanding, Islamic history, during its long existence, was marked by an enormous vacuum which no one was able to address before the advent of the Maulana himself.

In his preface to this book, the Maulana said:

When the Quran was presented in Arabia, everyone knew what the word *Ilah* meant and who was called Rabb, because both these words were already used in their language. They knew what these words signified. And so, when they were told that Allah is the only *Ilah* and Rabb and that no one else shares in His Divinity and Sustainer-ship, they got the complete message. In the same way, the words *ibadat* and deen were already present in their language. They knew the meaning of *ibadat* and deen. And so, when they were told to abandon the servitude of everyone else and to serve God alone and to separate themselves from every other deen and enter God's deen, they faced no misunderstanding in comprehending the message of the Quran. On listening to it they understood what changes this teaching wanted to make in their pattern of life.

He continued:

However, in later centuries, gradually the way these terms were understood began to shift from their original meaning, from how they were

understood at the time the Quran was revealed. Departing from their original, expansive meaning, they began to be understood in a very narrow way, and their true significance was rendered unclear. One reason for this was the lack of appropriate taste for Arabic. A second reason was that for those who were born in an Islamic society, the terms *Ilah*, *Rab*, *deen* and *ibadat* no longer had the same meaning that they had in the non-Muslim society at the time of the Quranic revelation. Because of these two reasons, in the books of linguistics and Quranic exegesis written in the later period, most Quranic words began being explained, not in terms of their real meaning, but, instead, as later Muslims understood them. As a result of this, it became difficult for people to really understand even the essential subject-matter of the Quran.

The Maulana further said:

And so, the fact is that just because a veil was drawn over the meaning of these four basic terms, more than three-fourth of the teachings of the Quran, in fact its essential spirit, was hidden from view. This is one major reason for the fact that people's beliefs and actions are faulty despite having accepted Islam. Hence, in order to clarify the central Quranic teaching and its basic subject-matter, it is very essential that these terms be fully explained.

In this book, the veiled meanings of these four

basic Quranic terms that Maulana Maududi has unveiled are preeminently political. In this way, it is clear that, according to him, the political dimension is the essential subject-matter of the Quran, more than three-fourth of the Quran's teachings, and in fact, its essential spirit. It is this political dimension that, in his view, is what he calls the Quran's 'central teaching' and 'essential subject-matter'.

If what the Maulana said is really true, then he has been very charitable by ascribing unawareness of the meaning of the Quran only to the later period of Muslim history, otherwise he could have extended his point even beyond that period!

If, according to the Maulana's argument, the 'essential subject-matter' of the Quran has been veiled at the ideological and intellectual levels, it is but to be expected that this would greatly impact on the efforts of *ulema* and religious reformers. According to a hadith report, in every century God will appoint a *mujaddid*, someone who will renew His *deen*. According to this prophecy, not less than a dozen *mujaddids* must certainly have appeared so far. But from the perspective of the political interpretation of Islam, it would appear that in the history of the last 1400 years, not a single person has been born who could, according to this interpretation, be considered to be a *mujaddid* in the full sense of the term.

Maulana Maududi tried to solve this question by arguing that *mujaddids* are of two types: partial

and complete. So, he opined that all the *mujaddids* who have appeared till now have all been partial *mujaddids*. In his words, ‘The stage of the complete *mujaddid* is empty till now.’ Revealingly, on the very first page of the Maulana’s book *Tajdeed-o-Ihya-e Deen*, the following words were once printed: ‘A Critical View of the Achievements of the *Mujaddids* of the *Ummah*’, but now these words have been deleted from the book. In this book, the Maulana termed all the *mujaddids* who have appeared till now, without exception, as ‘partial *mujaddids*’.

The matter does not rest here, however. There is more to it. The Maulana wrote that a *mujaddid* is basically meant to do the kind of work that a prophet does. According to him, the fundamental difference between a *mujaddid* and a prophet is that the latter receives divine revelation, while the former does not. A *mujaddid*, therefore, does not have the same status as a prophet. Now, if one accepts as valid the political and revolutionary interpretation of the deen, then one would also have to accept that, like the *mujaddids*, there are—God forbid—‘partial prophets’, on the one hand, and ‘complete prophets’, on the other! This is because we know that the most of the prophets were not successful in bringing about a political revolution in their lands. The fact of the matter is that, in practical terms and with some differences, most of the prophets did the sort of work that was done by the so-called ‘partial *mujaddids*’. In the Maulana’s words, ‘The efforts of some of them

were only to the extent of preparing the ground, such as the Prophet Abraham. Some launched, in practical terms, revolutionary movements but their work ended before establishing the Divine Government, such as the Messiah. And some of them took this movement to the stage of success, such as the Prophet Moses and the Prophet Muhammad'. It is as if, according to this explanation, the Prophet Abraham, the Friend of God, was a 'partial prophet' who could not take the revolutionary movement of Islam to the stage of success.

From this it is readily apparent how even a minor deviation from the truth can lead to enormous blunders.

An advocate of the Jamaat-e-Islami school of thought once sought to rectify this blunder by claiming that it is wrong to believe that all the prophets of God did not establish an Islamic Government. Writing in the July 1965 issue of the Jamaat's journal *Zindagi*, he insisted that, in fact, all of the prophets had established such a Government. In his words:

It is possible that people will think this to be novel, but if we keep in front of us the practice (*sunnat*) of God with regard to the prophets that the Quran talks about, then no doubt remains about the veracity of this assertion.

This person said that if the history of the earlier prophets had been carefully protected, it would have been possible to highlight 'all the details of their

Government', in just the same way as one can with regard to the polity that the Prophet Muhammad established in Madinah. In other words, he suggested that even though the Quran does not explicitly mention the establishment of Divine Government by earlier prophets, and this remains unknown to History so far, it must be accepted as an actual fact simply because this person's conception of the *deen* suggested to him that this must certainly have been the case.

This is the same sort of argument that Friedrich Engels employed when he said that while history had not recorded the conditions of pre-historic Man, his conception of the universe and human life led him to believe that pre-historical human society must certainly have been a communist one.

From this discussion, it is clearly apparent how a change of perspective leads to a change in one's basic conception of things. For instance, if you look at Indian history through the eyes of Mao Tse-tung, Mahatma Gandhi will appear to you as a 'bourgeois agent', while through Indian eyes he looks like the hero of the nation. In just the same way, if one sees the world in the light of the political interpretation of the *deen*, it would seem as if Muslim religious history has for very long been characterized by an enormous vacuum. You would be led to think that throughout almost the whole of Islamic history there was neither a proper and complete conception of the *deen* nor any



person who really engaged, in a complete sense, in the essential mission of the *deen*.

Following from what we have discussed so far, is there any need left for additional evidence to prove the falsity of this political interpretation of Islam? The interpretation of the *deen* that requires one to believe that almost the whole of Islamic history is wrong is simply to be rejected.

### *Conclusion*

My intention in analyzing the political interpretation of Islam is not to attack anyone's intentions or to debate about anybody's beliefs and actions. However, in response to my critique of this interpretation of Islam in my book *Ta'bir ki Ghalati*, the Jamaat-e-Islami took it as blind criticism, similar to writings by some other writers who have opposed the Jamaat. And so, the Jamaat could not properly understand the basis and nature of my critique. Naturally, then, its reply to my book was thoroughly inappropriate.

When I look at whatever the Jamaat-e-Islami had to say in reply to my book, it seems like a wrestler entering into an empty wrestling-ring and beginning an imaginary wrestling match. All the arguments raised by the Jamaat-e-Islami against my critique, in written, verbal, published and unpublished form, were either about completely irrelevant issues or else based on a complete misrepresentation of my

position. Some of these arguments clearly indicated that, driven by a fiery zeal to counter me, my critics from the Jamaat completely forgot what the word 'evidence' means. Some of them went beyond all limits by indulging in mockery. Perhaps they thought that their lack of evidence against me could be made up in this way.

I must clarify here that I do not say that the literature on and about the political interpretation of Islam has been deliberately written with the aim of promoting deviation in Islam. Rather, this has happened unconsciously. The dominance of a certain way of thinking led one of the principal pioneers of this literature, Maulana Maududi, in a certain direction. Motivated with a passion for serving the *deen*, and not with the intention of disfiguring its image, he sought to explain the entire *deen* in a particular manner. To this extent I see him as faultless. But after this, when his attention had been drawn to this state of affairs, it was necessary for him to ponder on it, instead of considering his writings to be the last word and ignoring any critiques of it. Making a mistake is not a mistake in itself. But it is certainly a big mistake if someone continues to insist on his position despite his error being pointed out to him.

I am aware that for the author of this literature to acknowledge his mistakes may not have seemed a simple issue because there were several delicate matters involved. That is why before I published *Ta'bir ki Ghalati*, I repeatedly requested the leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami for a very small thing. If they

had accepted this then, and even if they accept it now, I, considering the interests of the *deen*, was ready to say that at least at the ideological level, this debate should be put an end to, even though at the level of principle, the matter still remained unresolved.

I proposed two possibilities in this regard in my book. The first had to do with Maulana Maududi himself, and the second with the Jamaat-e-Islami. As regards the first, I suggested that Maulana Maududi should declare that the conception of the deen that he had been trying to present through his literature was not an absolute conception of the deen, but rather that, in accordance with the prevailing conditions, he had focused on some aspects of the deen in particular. The second proposal was that the Jamaat-e-Islami should clearly acknowledge that the writings of Maulana Maududi were not an authoritative exposition of the ideology of the Jamaat. If this were to happen, the status of Maulana Maududi's literature in Jamaat circles would naturally change. It would be considered relative, rather than absolute. And so, if this literature were read and used, it would be on the basis of their usefulness, just like many other books that are also read in Jamaat circles. It would cease to enjoy the status and importance of an authentic legal manifesto or exposition of the Jamaat's ideology.

I made these proposals before the publication of my book and in the book itself as well. The fact of the matter is that given the nature of the problem, these proposals made hardly any demands at all, and it was probably due to deep-rooted prejudice or else

an unwillingness to reflect on the matters that I had raised that even these minimal requests were not accepted.

I know what status the literature of Maulana Maududi is coming to enjoy, in practical terms, in Jamaat-e-Islami circles. And perhaps the day is not far off when its status will be that of a sacred memorial—to touch or dishonour which will undoubtedly be considered an unforgiveable crime. However, at the intellectual and practical levels, it will no longer have any relationship with people's lives, just as has happened with Karl Marx and his writings. In the Communist world, Marx's words are still considered to be some sort of holy writ. But in reality, they are now just decoration pieces in libraries and have no bearing at all on people's lives, which are now directed by other ideologies. The same is bound to happen in the case of the Maulana's writings.

An unrealistic and unnatural interpretation of any truth always passes through a historical process. It temporarily attracts and influences a particular generation of people, and then it begins to weaken. Finally, it comes to be locked up in a cupboard in a museum.

Maulana Maududi's literature is bound to meet this same fate. Its inheritors and custodians simply cannot stop the work of this historical process. However, if they openly admit this inevitable development, it would undoubtedly be a great blessing.

## *How Mindsets Work!*



**E**ven if people are given adequate proofs and logic for something, you can never be sure that they will accept it as valid. Something that appears as white to everyone else may appear as black to someone, and no matter what proofs you provide him, he may refuse to budge from his position. This is a general phenomenon. It happens because in perceiving and understanding something and forming an opinion about it, our perspectives play a very important role. When we read something, we never read it as it is. Rather, we read it through the prism of our perspective or mindset. Consequently, what we understand is not really the thing in itself, but, rather, the thing as it has been moulded and perceived by our mindset. This is why two people who have very different mentalities or mindsets do not see the same thing in an identical way or form the same opinion about it.

Let me cite an example to clarify this point. In the preface to my Urdu book *Mazhab Aur Jadeed Challenge* (which has been translated into English and published under the title *God Arises*) I acknowledged a place where I had benefitted from Maulana Maududi. Although I have ideological differences with the Maulana, I do not think that such differences should

lead one to refuse to recognize that there may be truth in some things a person with whom one has differences says.

This portion of the preface to my book was quoted and commented on in two Urdu magazines. Interestingly, in doing so the impressions that they sought to create were completely contradictory to each other. For its part, the *Faran* had this to say:

The respected Wahiduddin Khan Saheb is a high-level religious thinker. His scholarship is very vast. With God's blessings, in addition to his learning and scholarship, his own life is also religious and characterized by fear of God. In the preface to his book, he writes:

'It is a strange coincidence that the names of two personalities are linked to this book who have been regarded as particularly notable symbols of the *deen* in the last quarter of this century in India and Pakistan—I mean Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi. It is indirectly because of Maulana Maududi that, fifteen years ago, during a critical stage in my life, my heart was overwhelmed by the desire to devote my life to the service of the *deen*, one expression of which is this book. And it was because of the respected Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi that this work reached its culmination.'

This sort of clear acknowledgement is evidence

of the writer's nobility, sincerity and love for the truth. Otherwise, in today's world, students defy their teachers and do not want to give any credit to their benefactors and those who have trained them.

In contrast, the very same words from the preface of my book, which the *Faran* perceived as exemplifying what it called 'nobility, sincerity and love for the truth', were understood in a diametrically opposite way by a magazine that has a very different mindset. My reference here is to the review of this book of mine that appeared in the Jamaat-e-Islami's magazine *Zindagi*. The magazine quoted the very same lines from my preface as the *Faran* did, but the mentality that informs this magazine led to a very completely different opinion. Thus, the reviewer quoted the following lines from my preface:

'It is indirectly because of Maulana Maududi that, fifteen years ago, during a critical stage in my life, my heart was overwhelmed by the desire to devote my life to the service of the *deen*, one expression of which is this book'.

He then commented on these lines in the following words:

When I read this quotation, I remembered this couplet:

*He whom I taught the skill of shooting arrows  
Finally made me a target for his arrow!*

Note how in the same quotation from my preface one reader discerned nobility, sincerity and love for the truth, while another saw a reason to be sarcastic and indulge in unwarranted and useless criticism. One saw in it humanness and a lofty purpose, while another thought of it as an expression of unworthiness. To one, it was something laudable, while to another it was despicable and something to be mocked at.

This holds true with virtually everything in life. To truly comprehend anything and to form a correct opinion about it, one needs a proper mindset. If that is absent, then, no matter how obvious a thing may be, one will fail to understand it properly.