

The Contribution of the Muslim Minority

MUHAMMAD YUSUF

In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful

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All praise and thanks are due to Allah the Creator, the Lord of all, the Judge of actions on the Judgement Day and Salutations to all prophets and apostles of the world and those who followed them in thought and action.

Mr. Chairman and Brothers, Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu!

Allah has graciously granted us this opportunity to meet together on the occasion of the Celebrations of the 15th Century Hijri, sponsored by the government of our neighbour and friendly country Sri Lanka. The hundred million Muslims of India who form a minority as well as the second majority in their country appreciate and applaud the various beneficial measures adopted by the Sri Lanka government to commemorate the event.

(A speech delivered by Former President of *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind*, Late Maulana Muhammad Yusuf in Colombo, Sri Lanka in January 1980)

On my behalf and on behalf of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, I offer our congratulations and felicitations to the Hon'ble President, Mr. J.R. Jayawardene, and to the people and government of this beautiful and serene island which is said to be connected with the advent of Adam, the first prophet of Islam (peace be upon him).

Brothers! Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) whose Hijrath (migration from Makkah to Madina) turned the course of history of the world, was not the prophet of Muslims alone. The Qurän says that he was sent to guide the whole of humanity to the service of the One and the only God. Allah is described in the Qurän as the Lord of all people and the Holy Prophet is described as a Mercy and a Messenger of Allah to all people of the world. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the Sri Lanka government should celebrate the memorable event of the Hijrath and thus provide an opportunity to all people to familiarise themselves with the Divine guidance revealed to the last prophet of Islam who was in a minority of one as against the whole world but whose teachings and life guided the destinies of Muslims during the last fourteen centuries and are still guiding the destinies of Muslims in those lands where they are in majority as well as in those countries where they are in minority.

Brothers, the terms majority and minority are recognised as an admitted fact of life in the

constitutions of all countries of the world. They are very familiar terms of the Constitutional Law, which deal with religious, linguistic and racial minorities. If a government wants to destroy its minorities, by wiping out their existence, religion or language, it becomes incumbent on the nations of the world to protect them and they try to save them in accordance with the International Law regarding genocide. Muslims of the world are also considered as a minority in many countries, but a special point in regard to them is that they are not a minority like other minorities for whose protection other nations of the world may come forward. If linguistic minorities are not protected, their language begins to languish. Similarly, racial minorities have a special sphere; and if their interests are not safeguarded they are liable to perish. Religious minorities, however, stand on a different footing. They rise and fall because of the ideologies and basic values which they cherish.

There are a number of religious minorities in the world, but in the practical field there stand out prominently two progressive groups which deserve special mention. They have progressed because of their ideas, principles and actions. These are the Christians and the Muslims.

Looking at the history of the rise of Christianity in modern times, three factors appear to be prominent. First, Christianity could progress only

in those countries where Christians were the rulers. Secondly, Christian missionaries played an important role in its advancement in those countries where they are in a minority. With the help of their government and public foundations, they established big hospitals and this means of serving the people helped in the advancement of Christianity. Side by side, they also founded schools which became a source of propagating Christianity. Thirdly, these preachers of Christianity chose backward areas for spreading their mission. These were the regions, where due to lack of facilities only those people could reach who were firm in determination and steadfastness.

As for Islam, several factors are responsible for its advancement. There is a great attraction in its practical ideas and principles. Good behaviour of individuals in society was also helpful in its advancement. The forward-looking attitude of Muslims to meet the demands of knowledge and science also played its part. Muslims considered mankind as the creation of One God. Hence mankind has always been the pivot of their attention. This was due to the teachings of Islam. Once Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is reported to have remarked that people were standing on the brink of fire and it was his endeavour to save them from falling therein. Even at the most critical and painful occasions the last messenger of God (S.A.W.)

proved by his actions and words that human beings are the lost brethren and Muslims should try to bring them out from darkness into light, from superstition and ignorance towards knowledge, from torture and tyranny to social justice and from the bondage of false deities and human beings to the service and worship of the One God. He exhorted the people to show mercy to those on earth so that He who is in the heavens may shower mercy on them. Side by side the Holy Prophet created in the Muslim Ummah, the Islamic community, an urge to consider themselves as belonging to the Hereafter and live in this world with the consciousness that they have to give an account of their actions to their Lord on the Judgement Day, when they can hope to get through the Divine Blessings the ever-abiding blissful life as a result of their right faith in the unity of God, in the Hereafter, in all Prophets and Divine Scriptures of the world, in angels, performance of good and righteous deeds, and total and complete submission to the Divine Laws and Commandments regarding the performance of their dual duty—duty to God and duty to man.

Equipped with these ideas and principles, individuals belonging to Islamic society went out as traders, travellers and savants to the four corners of the world and wherever they went they brought about a healthy change in society. Unfor-

tunately however, for the last several centuries there has been a lull in these activities. Yet if we look to the conditions prevailing in different parts of the world we shall find that the impact of Islam is nevertheless visible everywhere.

Thus it would not be correct to consider Islamic society as a minority in the sense in which other religious minorities of the world are spoken of. It is an ideological group raised to carry out the same Divine mission which was the mission of all prophets of the world. Hence, as history proves there is room for growth and development of the individual as well as of society. It is an article of faith with this group that all human beings form a single unit, belong to the family of God, and have descended from a common parent. Allah is Compassionate and Merciful to His creatures, and loves them, hence Muslims should also love them. Therefore, do not bother if they are in minority. They believe in peaceful co-existence with the majority community and other minorities.

It is a common phenomenon that those movements or parties which are in power, and even if they are not in power, they become the focus of attention of the general public. Their members are less in number compared to the total population of their country, yet because they translate the feelings of every section of the populace and echo their pain and agony, hence despite the paucity of

numbers, the public feels that these movements can remove their difficulties and solve their problems.

Now Islam and movement are not synonymous. The connotation and significance of Islam is very much wider in scope than that of a movement. Yet for the sake of argument if we suppose Islam to be a comprehensive movement, we shall find that despite the paucity of numbers there are ample opportunities for its growth and development.

To understand this point fully well, let us take an example. Leaders of different national parties, connected with different movements, belong to different communities, but people of different communities join those parties and movements, and every one of them thinks that the fulfilment of many of his aspirations and demands will come through that particular movement of which he is a member. People do not think that such movements reflect their aims and objects completely and fully, yet they participate in them. Now vis-a-vis this perspective consider about the Islamic community. Has it not the possibility of success if it were to start a beneficial comprehensive movement in some region?

Morality, freedom of conscience, equality, social justice, a just and balanced economic order, fair and moral politics, apt criminal regulations,

war and peace policies are necessary for every people and on their basis movements come into existence and grow. Islam, as I said, is very much wider in scope than a comprehensive movement. It encompasses many more beneficial measures than those enumerated above. Hence if an Islamic movement with a comprehensive programme comes forward to solve the various problems confronting the humanity today, why can it not have the opportunities available to the other movements!

There is no doubt that the problem of religious minorities is very complicated today. The sphere of action in countries where Muslims are in majority is different. Quite a large number of Muslim inhabitants of those countries are devoid of Islamic morality and principles professed, practised and propagated by the Holy Prophet in Makkah before the Hijrath and in Madina after the Hijrath. Many governments of Muslim countries are even ignorant of the fact that Islam which provides a happy blending of the spiritual and the temporal, can solve social, economic and political problems and can form the basis of a State. They do not know that history cannot provide a parallel to the State established in Madina by the Prophet after the Hijri. If the invigorating principles of Islam given by Allah to all Prophets of the world and finally to the last Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), flourished in

these Muslim countries from the markets-places to the Parliament and perforated from the educational institutions to the entire Muslim society, then the work of the Muslims living as minorities would have been easier. They would point out the benefits accruing to a country in which Islam as preserved in Kitab and Sunnah formed the basis of society and State. Unfortunately such a state of affairs is not to be found in many Muslim countries. Hence, Muslims living as minorities in various countries should chalk out their own programme of action. In my humble opinion, Muslim minorities should pay special attention to certain points:

1. Total reform of Muslim society in the light of Kitab and Sunnah so that the people at large may know how high becomes the place of humanity by joining the society based on Islamic principles.
2. Introduction of Islam to the widest possible number of non-Muslims through word of mouth and exemplary Islamic conduct and character.
3. Utmost participation in social service activities and co-operation in all those activities which are for the real benefit of the whole nation.
4. Adoption of such a course in the political field that those values may govern the working of the State which are commanded by Islam as being beneficial to humanity and eradicate those values which in the eye of Islam are pernicious and harmful to human beings.

These four activities are *sine qua non* in all circumstances. Through them Muslim society can be galvanised into a movement which, it is hoped, would draw the attention of the people at large.

A big problem which often confronts the Muslim thinkers in those countries where they are in a minority is that on the one hand they have a plan of action for the amelioration of the conditions of the country as a whole and on the other hand there come up before them the problems of the Muslim society. If the latter were to be overlooked, it would go against the concept of Islamic brotherhood stressed by Allah in the Qurän. Moreover, great energy and time are absorbed in tackling them. In my humble opinion much depends on sagacity of the individual thinker. He should tackle the problems affecting the country as well as the community simultaneously and in a well balanced manner. He should by degrees persuade the Muslims to appreciate and implement their mission as mentioned in the Qurän that they are the best of the people by virtue of their being beneficial to the whole of humanity through implementing the good and eradicating the evil with complete faith in Allah. Thus alone can the Muslim minority contribute to the national well being and progress.

The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind has made some experiments in this direction and has tried to hold

an even balance between performing its duty to the country as well as to the community. A detailed mention thereof can be made at some other appropriate time so that others might know about our experiences and similarly we might benefit from the experiences of others.

At the end, I wish to express my thanks to the people and government of Sri Lanka for the kind invitation and hospitality accorded to me. I wish the conference every success so ably organised by our respected brother Mr. M.H. Muhammad, Hon'ble Minister of Transport. May Allah help him and the organisers! Wasssalam. Our last call is that all Praise is due to Allah and salutations to all the Prophets of the World.

Muhammad Yusuf

Former Ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami Hind

Dated, Colombo, 25.1.80.