THE RISE
OF MUSLIM UMMA AT MAKKAH
AND ITS INTEGRATION
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The term ‘UMMA’ is derived from the word ‘amm’ (the root) which means ‘to aim at’ or ‘to intend to’. Hence, ordinarily, it means the people who ‘intend to’ follow a leader or a religion. Moreover, it is used in the sense of the desire ‘to belong to’ one place or generation, and various kinds of birds.

The Quran, however, has employed the term in a variety of meanings. These are:

**Nation.** The following translations of the verses of the Quran can be inferred as referring to umma as nation.

“Our Lord, and make us submissive unto Thee and of our seed a nation submissive unto Thee.”¹

“That are a people who have passed away. Theirs is that which they earned, and yours is that which ye earned . . . And every nation hath its term and when its term cometh they cannot put it off an hour nor they yet advance it.”²

“Thus we sent thee unto a nation before whom other nations have passed away.”³

“And for every nation there is a messenger.”⁴

“And verily we have raised in every nation a messenger.”⁵

**Group of People.** Accordingly:

“And there may spring from among you a group that invites to goodness and enjoins right conduct and forbids indecency.”⁶

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“Among them are people who are moderate but many of them are of evil conduct.”7

“And of Moses’ folk there are people who lead with truth and establish justice therewith.”8

“And when a group of persons among them said.”9

Religion. Still other verses impress upon umma as a religion.

“Nay they say only: Lo! We found our fathers following a course (religion) and we are guided by their footprints.”10

“Lo! We found our fathers following a religion and we are following their footprints.”11

Period of History or Duration of Time. Likewise:

“And if we delay for them the doom until a reckoned time.”12

“And of the two, he who was released and (now) remembered after a long time, said . . ..”13

Humanity at Large. Instances of the word umma implied as humanity are:

“Mankind were one community and God sent to them Prophets as bearers of good tidings and warners . . ..”14

“And were it not that mankind would have become one community.”15

Religious Community. The term umma also denotes a religious community, combining the first (nation) and third (religion) senses. It is specifically in this sense that the Quran speaks of the followers of Muhammad (peace be upon him) as Umma. The following verses explain:

“Thus we have appointed you a midmost nation, that ye may be witness against mankind, and that the Messenger may be a witness against you.”16

“You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind.”17

BACKGROUND

In Islamic history, the term umma is perhaps used for the first time in the charter of Medina, promulgated by Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.18 Which, according to Dr. M. Hamidullah, is the first
written constitution of the world.\textsuperscript{19} Though the Muslim Umma does not recognize territorial limits and that it is a single umma; yet in recent decades the use of the term umma in the Character of Medina has led to a variety of interpretations by the orientalists and Muslims scholars as to its precise meanings.\textsuperscript{20} This will be dealt within the present paper at the appropriate place.

Muslim \textit{fuqaha} [jurists] and \textit{ulama} [knowledgeable-s] have also discussed and deliberate on the concept of umma in Islam. They have reserved the term umma for the Muslims alone. Accordingly, the Muslim Umma is the religious community of persons who believe in the unity of Allah and the finality of the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and fulfill all the obligations required by the \textit{sharia} [Islamic law or jurisprudence].\textsuperscript{21}

It is to be noted that the Quran has employed the term umma for the believers, as well as, non-believers and that the prophet had followers at Makkah just before his migration to Medina, fulfilling the obligations of the \textit{sharia}. So, it is incorrect to say that the concept of umma emerged only after his migration to Medina. Or that the umma was territorial in nature in the beginning and later on became universal.

Even in its Makkahn verses, just before the establishment of the Islamic state at Medina, the Quran employed the term umma in the sense of a religious community.\textsuperscript{22} Hence, the concept of umma emerged with the emergence of Islam at Makkah and fully development in Medina—naturally, because Median became the seat of Islam.

Now this appellation by its very definition presupposes unity, integration and solidarity, not only on ideological plane but in external organisation as well. If this is the case then we have to see to what extent the unity and integration of the umma was accomplished at Makkah. This would require treatment under different categories—spiritual, political, economic and others. The first and fundamental is the spiritual integration of Muslims at Makkah.

\textbf{SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION}

\textsc{Syed Amir Ali} in his seminal work \textit{The Sprit of Islam} writes of umma as spiritual integration at Makkah. “The beginning of the seventh century A.D. was an epoch of disintegration (of the Arabs of the per-
Islamic times) . . . national, social, and religious; its phenomena were such as have always involved a fresh form of positive faith, to recall all wandering forces to the inevitable track of spiritual worship,” he writes.23

It is an admitted fact that the internal process of disintegration can be checked by the existence of a vital external threat, harmonising internal elements of a society or state, that is, unity against external threat. The Arabs had become a prey to moral degradation, which had provided an opportunity to the surrounding domineering powers of the age to strike directly against their very existence. That is why, the Prophet soon after launching his mission of transforming the pagan world, warned first the Qurayshites [members of the Quraysh tribe settled at Makkah] of their miserable plight. He called them upon to the will of Allah and warned them of his punishment.24

It is true that before the emergence of Islam a few outstanding individuals, known as muwahhidin (unitarians), were open to deep religious stimuli. They had openly renounced idolatry and other evil practices and preached the belief in the unity of God.25 But this lacked cohesive, national character, because religion of whatever kind it might have been in the pre-Islamic social framework, generally, had little place in the Arabs’ lives. As Arabs were engrossed in worldly leisure and pleasure like games, winning, adulterating and fighting. They overly neglected God, the Almighty, save when in grave dangers, favouring idols.26

When Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) began to openly preach his new faith. It directly posed a threat to the economic and political stature of tribal aristocracy the Quraysh. They protested the new dispensation and opposed Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and his companions economically and politically.27 The abhorrence of idolatry by the Prophet was objected to, on the ground, that it had direct bearing upon their ancestral customs, power, prestige and influence.28 Hence, they resisted the Prophet with all means and measures—threats, promises, insults and offers of worldly honors and gain—to induce and reduce him in abandoning his course of action. The Prophet remained firm and committed to his mission.

Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) advised the Quraysh to obey the injunctions of God and follow his instruction, so that they gain success in the next world. Despite the bitter opposition from the traditional and
vested interests, the people of Quraysh had forsaken their own kith and kin, preferring Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). Thereof, the followers of Muhammad [the umma] steadily increased. He by the virtue of his being the Messenger of Allah, became a source of inspiration and proved the magnetic force of integration.

The chief vehicle for achieving spiritual integration was the acceptance of Islam that is in fact belief in the unity of God and the prophet-hood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). By its very nature, the unity of Muslims was ideological, transcending all considerations of race, colour, clan, language, etc. A universal brotherhood of people bound them together, nothing else but of the consciousness of commonality of faith and morality. The Quran [primary source of sharia] sought to regulate and integrate their lives as an indivisible unit. It did not hang around theirs necks as the chain of original sin. All men, according to the Quran, were born pure and innocent, capable of rising to the highest summit. But, nonetheless, if they did not follow the dictates the Lord, they were liable to sink to the lowest of depths.29

For ordering human relations and realizing unity with God, the institution of salat (prayer) was made obligatory, soon after the call of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) to prophet-hood. About the value of salat as the medium of elevation of morality and purification of heart, the Quran reveals: “Salat Keeps (one) from indecency and evil and certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest force.30 Belief in the unity of Allah and His remembrance through common prayers kept the Muslims as one not only in physical but also in spiritual spheres.

Hence, the intellectual arguments of the Quran regarding the Day of Judgment,31 reward for good and punishment for evil deeds,32 and by calling attention to the signs of Allah and His powers and activities33 played a positive and important role in the unification process of the Muslim umma at Makkah. The members of this umma considered the fellow-faithful as belonging to one family, that is, the family of Allah regardless of one’s social status. Thus the clans or tribes to which the Muslims belonged before Islam were of no avail. He who embraced Islam had to forget all his tribal and clannish affiliations.

It must be pointed out here that the teachings of Islam are inspired by and based on the concept of Divine’s Unity and for that matter
create a sense of unity in purpose. And, therefore, do not demarcate between the worldly and heavenly lives, like that in Christianity, nor do insist on an abandonment of worldly life. It aims at the betterment of life both here and hereafter. The Quran, therefore, declares:

“But seek the abode of the hereafter in that which Allah has given you and do not neglect your portion of this world and be you kind (to others) as Allah has been kind to you. Seek not corruption in the earth, for Allah does not love the corrupters.”

Indulgence in worldly affairs, at the cost of other-worldly, is however not permitted in Islam. That is why the early verses of the Quran revealed at Makkah, insisted on wealth and family—the things that counted much and conferred a high social status in the jahiliyya (ignorant or pagan world)—would be of no avail when people would come before Allah on the Day of Judgment.\(^{35}\) Such injunctions and moral teachings of the new faith exercised a unifying and integrating influence on the character of members of the emerging umma.

The consciousness of fraternal belongingness, created first at Makkah, was meant primarily for achieving spiritual integration, though it led to social and economic integration. Thus it united the Muslims in a single whole. This Brotherhood meant equality in the eyes of Allah, which also implied unity in faith. Since the Prophet was the symbol of unity, providing for cementing tie-up to this brotherhood.

It must, however, be kept in mind that Islam does not sacrifice the body (physique) on the altar of the soul. It, therefore, laid equal emphasis on the material well-being of the individual along with spiritual uplift. Keeping this point in view, let us now see how far economic integration was achieved at Makkah with the teachings of Islam soon after its emergence.

**ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**

In pre-Islamic Arabia, the commercial milieu of Makkah witnessed a rising mercantilist aristocracy, which tended to control means of production in the form of capital and land. The Makkah verses of the Quran and the relevant hadiths indicate exploitation of poor by rich, and that wealth and family counted the most, conferring on the member a high social status. The institution of the Hilf al-
Fudul (Compact of the Virtuous), for redressing the growing injustice done to the Bedouins, small businessmen and the destitute, supports our contention.\(^{36}\)

It was in a milieu characterized by such economic and social conditions in Makkah that Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) began to preach the new message. It had, therefore, to pay equal attention to the economic aspect of the individual’s life. It must, however, be made clear that there was a fundamental difference between the approaches of the Qurayshite aristocracy and that of the Prophet of Islam. As the former tended to modify the current economic system to the benefit of sectional interests and the latter maneuvered to reform it to the interests of the community at large.

The Makkahn verses of the Quran are stuffed with denunciations of the economic injustices prevalent in the Makkah society. These included, mainly, profiteering and stinginess of the rich and unethical commercial practices such as cheating in weight and measurement.\(^{37}\) Economic exploitation is one of the causes of the disintegration of a society when the general welfare is neglected and the rich are taking undue advantages of their capitalist-power to earn more wealth.

Therefore, one of the ways in which Islam tried to eliminate exploitation was the insistence on spending money for public good to please Allah (\textit{infaq fi sabil Allah}). The Makkahn verses of the Quran urge Muslims to spend their surplus wealth for the cause of Allah. As a mode of redistribution of wealth, \textit{Infaq} played a prominent role in the integration of Muslims at Makkah.

It is important to note that one of the malpractices of the pre-Islamic Arabia was usury (\textit{riba}), the most repressive weapon, which had wiped out social equality and mutual cooperation.\(^{38}\) Islam, therefore, condemned it at the outset.\(^{39}\) In Medina, where and when Islam became political dominant, \textit{riba} was not only categorically prohibited\(^{40}\) but those who practiced it were threatened with war from Allah and His Messenger.\(^{41}\)

The condemnation and abhorrence of the unethical commercial practices and economic exploitation in any form was tended to integrate the new spiritual community—the \textit{umma}. In order to strengthen the bonds of unity against the bitter opposition of the Qurayshites, the Prophet was determined to establish an egalitarian society in which exploitation of any kind and in any form must be
eliminated. This could be done by inculcating definite and different values, for instance feeding the poor,\textsuperscript{42} persuasion of the rich to spend on the poor\textsuperscript{43} and the needy and to pay zakat [amount of wealth to paid on accumulated wealth as a trust of God], \textsuperscript{44}abstaining from oppressing the orphans, driving away the beggars\textsuperscript{45} and shunning niggardliness.\textsuperscript{46}

These measures were destined to ensure feelings of fraternity and mutual affection, leading to greater unity. The hoarding of riches was regarded anti-human because it creates dissensions in the community. Hence, the rich section of the umma was asked to spend their surplus wealth on the poor. It might not be out of place to mention here that zakat was made compulsory in Makkah, just before the migration of the Prophet to Medina, in order to ensure the poor members of the community social security.\textsuperscript{47} And this measure was taken at a time when the umma had limited material resources.

The institution of zakat, to note, did not aim at creating a class of beggars, looking for the surpluses of others. What Islam aimed at was the equal distribution of wealth and prevention of concentration in few hands and families. The prophet was aware of the grave consequences of the concentration of wealth and extreme poverty in a society. Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is reported to have exclaimed on a number of occasions: “Poverty may bring a man to the verge of unbelief.”\textsuperscript{48} He, therefore, took the boldest step of fraternisation of the Muslims hitherto unknown to the Arabs. In so doing, the Prophet implemented the Quranic injunctions, which describe Muslims as brothers,\textsuperscript{49} urging cooperation. Such injunctions were mainly implicit in Makkah, but explicit in Medina where they led an organised political life.

The remedies suggested by the Quran sought to eliminate exploitation and social injustice, tended to disintegrate the social framework in the pre-Islamic Arabia. Thus the practical steps taken by the Prophet, at a time, when He was facing stern opposition from Quraysh had strengthened the bonds of fraternity and love among Muslims. It, however, must be kept in mind that that economic integration rested on spiritual basis, which in turn led to social integration.

**SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

The Quran, as we have examined, seeks to build human society on
the basis of morality, justice and fair play. The Quran reveals and prescribes general principles of social interactions. Textual injunctions of legal nature are, therefore, scantier than the moral ones. When the Prophet began to preach his mission, men of different social status gathered around him. His immediate task was to strengthen the bonds of unity and fraternity through the dissemination of the teachings of the Quran. But these cannot be set apart from the social environment of a people. Hence along with the spiritual and economic integration of the *umma*, the process of social unification was also undertaken.

The circumstances under which the Prophet launched the grand mission of Islam were detrimental to the social structure of the Arabs. The pre-Islamic society suffered from evils that had shaken the very foundations of the social framework. Below we reproduce relevant portions of the speech of Iafar bin abi-Talib, who had reportedly made in the court of the King of Abyssinia on the migration of Muslims, which would illustrate the point:

“O King! We were uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating carrion, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly, and our strong devoured the weak. Thus we were until God sent us the Apostle. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and kindly hospitality. He forbade us to commit abominations and to tell lies and to devour the property of orphans, to vilify chaste women.”

The aforementioned section of the speech reflects the troublous times and the Prophet’s endeavours to reconstruct the social framework on the basis of fraternisation, cooperation and social justice. It may be observed that the Quran regards the social troubles of the time as due to a wrong attitude, namely, reliance on wealth and political power and control of resources. Great stress was, therefore, laid on spending wealth in the way of Allah and practicing generosity so as to bring social harmony in the umma.

By eliminating the social evils of the time and strengthening the bonds of fraternity of the *umma*, the Prophet devised certain ways and means in the light of the teaching of the Quran. One of these measures was the institution of *mu‘akhat* [brotherhood]. This was done in order to ensure social justice, emphasised in the early Makkahn verses of the Quran. Members of the *umma* equal before
Allah, irrespective of theirs social statures.

This equality was not meant for men only but women also enjoyed it. After the emergence of the Muslim umma, women were no more at the whims and mercy of men. This ensured social harmony and cohesiveness. Equality and brotherhood were, therefore, regarded not only essential features of the umma but a pre-condition of the Islamic faith.

For achieving further unity among the members of the umma and for destroying the so-called barriers of the pre-Islamic times, a major step was taken towards the abolition of the institution of slavery. Slavery was completely prohibited and slaves were freed masters of their fate. Having accepted the system of slavery as a necessary evil, Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) tried his level best to improve lots of the enslaved. He urged the Muslims to treat their slaves in humanly. In Medina too this was considered a highly meritorious act. A part of the zakat-money [making a portion of the public treasury] was also allocated for the manumission of the slaves. The Prophet is reported as:

“Your slaves are your brothers. Allah has placed them under you. So if a man’s brother is under him, he should give him the same meals he eats, he should provide him with the clothes he himself wears and that he should not over-burden him with work that would overpower him. If the burden of the work is overpowering, he should help him.”

The above tradition of the Prophet shows importance of the remedial measures of Islam for eradicating social evils was that the downtrodden, poor class to a level at which they could carry on shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the well-to-do members of the community.

It is to be noted that the basis of this social brotherhood was not kinship but religion of Islam, which provided a cementing force to the social structure of the rising umma. The high morale of this umma provided coherence as well as vitality.

So far we have dealt with the integration process at Makkah in spiritual, economic and social spheres. It is appropriate to study the impact of this process on the political integration, because Islam is an indivisible reality recognising no watertight compartments between the ecclesiastical and temporal affairs. It stood for total
transformation. Even at that embryonic stage, it had to guide Muslims in political affairs as well. Let us see how for integration in this field was achieved.

**POLITICAL INTEGRATION**

It is generally believed that political integration of the Muslim umma commenced only after the hijra [the Prophet’s migration from Makkah to Medina] and that the umma secured its standing in integrated form thereafter in Medina.\(^{57}\)

But a closer scrutiny of the term would reveal that it refers to ties, which members of a community have with one another. These ties vary in intensity from one group to another so that we speak of highly integrated and loosely integrated groups. Actually there are no just bipolar types but various degrees of integration. Since integration refers to one or more ties, it may be high in some respects and loose in others. It is true that the Prophet had no political authority in Makkah in the sense of modern political terminology. Those who obeyed him as the Messenger of Allah did so out of respect for him. But reason and experience have shown that political organisation whatsoever is an indispensable necessity for social life. The moral obedience to the Prophet implied political obedience as well because the two cannot be conceived apart from one another in Islam. For the solidarity of the umma some definite and sound political base was, therefore, the logical necessity.

It follows that even in Makkah the members of the umma had to be trained for political unification. This was accomplished, though the intensity of integration was less than that attained in Medina, when a model state was founded. The Makkah period of the rising umma may therefore be regarded as pre-political. But it does not necessarily mean that the pre-political community should also be unpolitical is inherent in any community building process. The Quran had indications at Makkah,\(^ {58}\) which imply that sooner or later the umma would have to shoulder political responsibility of waging wars against the forces of tyranny and oppression. Thus during the last years of its Makkah period, the umma started endeavouring consciously to define and attain its political goals, tended to become more and more politically organised a community.\(^ {59}\) Later on, when these goals were attained in Medina, it became a state in the formal sense.
The sources at our disposal suggest that the core of tribalism in the pre-Islamic social and political structure was a relationship of blood. There were, however, other tribes as well who had attached themselves to these tribes through confederation (hilf), contract (aqd) or neighborhood (jar) for protection. But members of the umma did not recognise kinship but the belief in the Oneness of Allah and the Prophethood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). Members of different clans and tribes, united under the banner of Islam, owed their allegiance not to their tribes or clans but to the ideals of Islam.

It is to be noted that in the pre-political community established at Makkah (and later) all powers belonged to Allah [omnipotent]. Man acts as God’s vicegerent. For the practical implementation of the Quranic istikhlaṣ fi,l-ard, it needed organisation because the Quran did not provide the details of this institution and left them to be worked out by the Muslims themselves declaring that the rule in Islam is by mutual counsel among its followers. This implies that at this stage of historical development, the members of the umma had no important worldly matters to decide for which they might have stood in need of counsel, yet the principle of mutual consultation was introduced. To quote Muhammad Ali: “. . . the injunction is clearly meant to prepare them for transacting the momentous affairs of state and all matters connected with national weal or woe.”

Doubtless it is that the Quranic verse does not relate to the principles of government at that stage, for the umma had no such organisation but shura [a convention] at that stage presupposes and sustains a high degree of social cohesion, based on mutual trust and confidence. In the words of Khalifa Abdul Hakim: “Islam had to found a state and give to the world in practical form the ideals of statehood. Human Destiny had at last thrown up a philosopher king and it is a matter of paramount importance for remolding of human society to examine clearly what were his ideals and in what manner he realized them in his life-time in the creation of polity.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In view of what has been stated above it is obvious that the mission of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was directed towards creating a system where there could be least chances of exploitation of man by man. The umma emerged at Makkah was distinct and apart from the Arabs, for it was based on the moral principles of Islam. It embraced
Muslims only and therefore it was a single umma and certainly not a composite umma, as some writers have suggested.

Montgomery Watt seems to be the exponent of this theory, who contends that this composite umma became a single umma only after the expulsion of the Jews from Medina. This conclusion he draws from the clauses of the Charter of Medina, where it has clearly been laid down that in the beginning the umma had reference to territory, but gradually the concept of territoriality gave place to that of universality as the Arab umma was transformed into a world umma with the establishment of a state covering the Arabs as well as the non-Arabs.

An important thing to be noted here is that the learned writer on the one hand admits that the religious community of Muslims emerged at Makkah; on the other, he feels the necessity of merging Jews with Muslims on the principle of territoriality. He forgets that Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) gave the charter that was a revolution. So the concept of the composite or territorial umma as suggested by these writers is based on erroneous assumptions.

Coming to the sequence, it is to be observed that the study of the integration process is that the Prophet Muhammad commenced on formation of the umma at Makkah on spiritual, economic, social and political planes, may throw light on how the integration of the Muslim umma in modern times can take place.

The emphasis here is that the impact of the moral crises cannot be met alone by material considerations. As seen above, Islam did not sacrifice the body on the altar of the soul. It lays equal emphasis on the well-being of the individual along with the fulfillment of his spiritual requirements. With a view of establishing an egalitarian society, all sorts of malpractices and exploitation were altogether abolished. Economic aspect of an individual was made subservient to the spiritual aspect of life.

In the present crises ridden and complex society, when moral principles have given way to malpractices, that is common phenomena. Therefore, integration of the umma cannot be accomplished unless an egalitarian society on the model of the Prophetic Society is established.

The increasing popularity of the cult of Marxism constitutes a threat to the Islamic ideology and likewise to its political, social and economic systems. This onslaught can be checked only when a just
and equitable social order on the fundamental principles of Islam is established. To make humanity march forward to progress and to the attainment of higher values of life, a more elevated and finer framework can be found only in the spiritual regeneration of society and this, on the basis of the present attempt, is the most conspicuous contribution that Islam can make to enable man to live a good, just and honorable life in this world and the world hereafter. Such is the lesson taught by Islam and it can be disregarded only at the cost of our own extinction.

**ENDNOTES**

1 Quran, II: 128
2 Ibid, II: 134
3 Ibid, XIII: 30
4 Ibid, X: 47
5 Ibid, XVI: 36
6 Ibid, III: 143
7 Ibid, V: 66.
8 Ibid, VII: 159
9 Ibid, VII: 164
10 Ibid, XLIII: 22
11 Ibid, XLIII: 23.
13 Ibid, XII: 5.
14 Ibid, II: 213.
15 Ibid, XLIII: 35
16 Ibid, II: 143
21 Al-Baghdadi, *AL-Farq*, Cairo, 1948, pp 141-42
22 Quran, XVI: 92 and XXIII: 52
23 ‘Introduction,’ Karachi, 1968, p xviii
26 Quran, XVII: 67
The Hijra to Abyssinia had great political significance. The Prophet’s approach to Banu Sa`sa for protection, His visit to Banu Thaqif at Ta’if and lastly his negotiations with the Yathribites were all important form the political point of view.
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62 Ibid, XLII: 38
63 Quran, XLII: 38 as commented upon by Maulana Muhammad Ali (footnote).
64 Abd al-Hamid al-Muttawali, Mabda al-Shura Fil-Islam, Cairo, 2nd ed, 1972, p 29;
   See also, Muhammad Abduh, Tafsir at-Manar, vol: 4, Cairo, 1368, p 45
65 Khalifa Abdul Hakim, Islamic Ideology, Lahore, 2nd ed., 1953, p 197