

Slavery in Islam

Slavery in Islam 1

Perhaps this is the most odious form of doubt exploited by communists in order to shake the faith of Muslim youth in his religion, Islam. If Islam were suited to every period of human history, it would not, as it did, approve of slavery, which proves conclusively that Islam was but meant for a limited period of history only. It has fulfilled its mission and now stands outmoded and obsolete for it was not designed to be a religion for all times and climes.

The sincere Muslim youth is also haunted by similar doubts. Why did Islam permit slavery? This religion is no doubt revealed by God: there can be no doubt about that, and that it was revealed for the good of the whole of mankind for all times to come, but how is it that it allowed slavery?

How did the religion based on the notion of perfect equality among men, stressing the common origin of them all and then successfully translating its concept of equality in its social life, recognize slavery as a part of its social system and as such made laws for it?

Does God intend that human beings for ever should remain divided as masters and slaves? Does He want that the human race should continue to have a group of people among them that is sold and bought as chattel as was the case with slaves, when He Himself said of human beings:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

“And surely We have honored the children of Adam ...” (Al-Isra, 17:70)

. . .and if God did not intend or like it, why did He not then explicitly forbid it in His Book and abolish it outright as He did, for instance, abolish drinking, gambling and usury etc., the practices which He abhors? In short, the Muslim youth knows that Islam is a true religion but like Abraham he is perplexed and seems to be in a state of mind described in the Quranic verse:

﴿ قَالَ أَوْلَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا ۚ وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ ۚ ﴾

﴿ قَالَ بَلَىٰ ۚ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي ۚ ﴾

"And when Ibrahim said: My Lord! show me liow Thou givest life to the dead, He said: What! and do you not believe? He said: Yes, but that my heart may be at ease. "

(Al-Baqarah, 2:260)

As against this the youth, whose reason is impaired and beliefs confused by imperialistic machinations, does not wait for truth to be made clear before him, but is swept away by his passions and, without any inclination to inquire into the reality, jumps to the conclusion that Islam is antiquated and, hence, is no longer needed by man.

The communists, who hoodwink people by claiming to be scientific, trade in ideas borrowed from their masters abroad which they arrogantly parade giving a false impression of having discovered an unalterable and eternal truth, the genuineness of which cannot be challenged, nor contradicted.

The truth they claim to have discovered is dialectical materialism – the theory which states that human life is divided into certain definite economic phases such as can neither be avoided, nor passed by mankind viz. first communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and the second communism (deemed to be the last page in the book of history) and that all creeds, disciplines, and thoughts that human history knows of were in fact a mere reflection of the various economic conditions or economic systems that prevailed at different periods of human history.

These past creeds and beliefs were all right for those bygone ages, for they fully coordinated with the economic structure and circumstances of those times but they can never be suitable for the next higher stages of human development as these are always based on quite a new and different pattern of economy.

Hence, they conclude, there can be no single system of life such as could be suitable for all times to come. Now as Islam came to the world at a time when the stage of slavery was coming to an end and that of feudalism just beginning, it brought with itself laws, creeds and a discipline of life all of which were in concord with the prevalent circumstances of economic existence. That is why it approved of slavery as well as permitted feudalism, for Islam could not anticipate the next stage of economic development nor give any system to the world for which the economic conditions were not yet ripe for, as the blessed Lord Karl Marx said, it wa absolutely impossible.

We intend to discuss this problem of slavery in its historical, social as well as psychological context with an open mind and without allowing ourselves to be hoodwinked by the clamors of these tricksters and so-called scientific scholars.

When a modern man looks at the problem of slavery with his twentieth century background and in the light of the hideous crimes perpetrated during the slave trade and the abominably barbarous treatment that was meted out to slaves (especially in the Roman Empire) he discovers it as a most shocking and horrid crime. He is at a loss and finds it extremely difficult to understand as to how such a thing could be approved of by a religion or a system of life. He wonders: how could Islam allow slavery when all its other laws and principles point towards the freedom of man from all types and forms of slavery? And then overwhelmed by a sense of shame he desires: would that Islam had set our hearts and minds at ease by banning slavery in clear, explicit terms!

Let us pause here awhile and see as to what story the historical facts have got to tell us. The fact is that the hideous crimes committed against the slaves in the Roman Empire are quite foreign to Islamic history. We have got ample evidence with regard to the life the slaves in the Roman world led which is quite sufficient to illustrate the great change brought about by Islam in their fate.

The slave in the Roman world was considered a mere "commodity" and not a human being. He had no rights whatsoever although he was encumbered with cumbrous duties and obligations. And whence did these slaves come? They were captured in wars, which were not initiated by any noble principle or lofty ideals but were solely directed by a wish to enslave other people and exploit them for self-aggrandizement.

These wars were waged in order to enable the Roman people to indulge in licentious luxuries and live in prosperity, enjoy cold and hot baths, costly costumes, delicious and tasty foods of every kind, and revel in sensual pleasures—drinking bouts, whoredom, dancing as well as public gatherings and festivals. In order to provide for these enjoyments they subjugated other nations and exploited them most mercilessly. Egypt which was freed from the Roman overlordship by Islam was treated no less cruelly. It constituted a granary of wheat for the Roman Empire, besides furnishing various kinds of other material resources.

To satisfy this greedy lust of the Roman imperialists the slaves toiled for them in the fields. As mentioned above, they enjoyed no rights. When working in the fields they were fettered in heavy manacles so as to prevent their running away. They were never fed properly but given provisions just sufficient to keep them alive and fit to do their work, and this too not because they thought it was their right to be provided for with sustenance as even the beasts and trees are. During the work they were whipped just for the savage pleasure of it which was much relished by their sadist lord or his agent. At the end of the day large groups of them – from ten to fifty men a group and still fettered in their manacles – were herded together to sleep in dark, foul-smelling cells infested with mice and insects. They were denied even the comfort of wide and spacious folds such as are enjoyed by cattle in their enclosures.

But the worst and most revolting feature of the Roman attitude towards these slaves was represented by what formed their best-loved diversion Which, by the way, also brings into light the innate, barbarous and inhuman character of the Roman civilization – the civilization which is in modern times represented

by modern Europe and America with all the means of imperialistic exploitation at their disposal. The slaves carrying swords and lances were led out into the arenas with their masters and occasionally the emperor himself seated around exalted seats in order to watch them fight, in dead earnest, for their diversion. The slaves fell upon one another with their swords and spears, recklessly hacking themselves to pieces. The climax was reached when someone of the fighters killed a fellow-slave and threw him cold and lifeless on the ground. At this he was lustily applauded with loud hurrahs, vigorous hand clapping and joyous, hearty laughter.

This was how the slaves fared in the Roman world. We need not dwell upon their legal position in this set-up: the absolute right of the master to kill, punish or exploit them mercilessly without any right on their part, to complain even, and without expecting any moral support whatever from any quarter, as it would add little to our knowledge after going over all that we have in brief described above.

The slave was no better off than this in Persia, India and other countries. Despite all their minor differences the fate of the slave remained the same among all these nations: his life had no worth, his murder no retaliation, he was burdened with cumbersome obligations carrying with them little or no rights in return. The systems prevalent in these countries differed neither in intent nor ill content with regard to the slaves: they differed merely in the degree or intensity of their cruelty and hideousness which they betrayed in their attitudes towards slaves.

Such were the conditions of life that obtained when Islam arrived on the scene. Its advent heralded the restoration of human dignity to these slaves. It told the masters as to their slaves:

بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ

"...you are (sprung) the one from the other ..." (An-Nisaa, 4:25)

It proclaimed that:

"He who kills his slave, we shall kill him; who mutilates his nose, we shall cut his nose; and who gelds our slave, We shall get him gelded in return."

It recognized a common descent abode as well as return for all men, master and slave alike, saying;

"You are all sons of Adam and Adam was created from dust."

And stressed that there was no superiority for a master over his slave merely because of his being a master: whatever superiority there was, it rested on piety:

"There is no superiority for an Arab, or for a black man over a red one, or for a red over a black man save due to piety."

Islam came and told the masters that they should be fair and good in their dealings with the slaves:

وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْعِبَادِ وَاللَّهُ لَا تَشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ
الْجُنْبِ

وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَنْ كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا

"And serve Allah and do not associate any thing with Him and be good to the parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbor of (your) kin and the alien neighbor, and the companion in a journey and the wayfarer and those whom your right hands possess; surely Allah does not love him who is proud, boastful..."

(An-Nisaa', 4:36)

It stressed the fact that true relationship between master and slave was not one of slavery and overlordship, nor of subjection or objection but that of kinship and brotherhood. Thus the masters were permitted to marry the slave-girls they had in their possession:

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ مِنْكُمْ طَوْلًا أَنْ يَنْكَحَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ فَمِنْ مَا بِأَيْمَانِكُمْ أَغْلَمُ وَاللَّهُ ۖ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ مِنْ فِتْيَانِكُمْ
الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

ۖ فَإِنْ كُفُوهُنَّ بِإِذْنِ أَهْلِهِنَّ وَأَتَوْهُنَّ بِعَضُكُم مِّنْ بَعْضِ

أُجُورِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ

"And whoever among you has not within his power amply means to marry free believing women, then (he may marry) of those whom your right hands possess from among your believing maidens; and Allah knows best your faith: you are (sprung) the one from the other; so marry them with the permission of their masters, and give them their dowries justly..." (An-Nisaa', 4:25)

Thus the masters were described as brothers to their slaves by the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.):

"Your slaves are your brothers ...so he who has a brother under him should feed him and clothe him as

he himself feeds and dresses; do not ask them to do things which are beyond their power and if you do ask them to do such things then help them."

With a mark of deference to the feelings of the slaves the Holy Prophet added: "None of you should say: This is my slave and this is my slave-girl. He should rather say: This is my man and this is my maiden."

It was on this authority that Abu Huraira, on seeing a man riding a horse and his slave trudging along after him, said to the man: "Get him seated on the horse behind you, for, surely he is your brother, and his soul is similar to yours."

This was, however, not all that Islam did for the slaves, but before proceeding with our inquiry, we would first like to sum up the great advance that, thanks to Islam, came about in the position of the slave at this preliminary stage.

The slave was now no longer regarded just a commodity – a merchandize – but was looked upon as a human being with a soul similar to that of his master, whereas in the past he was regarded as a being quite different from his master, and created to serve as a slave in every way fit to suffer humiliation.

It was because of this notion that their conscience never twinged them when murdering, punishing, cauterizing, or making their slaves perform loathsome and burdensome jobs. Islam raised them from this state of abject slavery to the exalted status of brotherhood with free men. These achievements of Islam were not mere professions but a fact to which history bears witness.

Even the prejudiced writers of Europe admit that in the early period of Islam the slave was exalted to such a noble state of humanity as was never before witnessed in any other part of the world, They won so dignified a status within the Muslim community as made the freed slaves abhor betraying their erstwhile masters although now they stood in no need or fear of them and were now as free as they. The reason for this lay in the fact that they considered themselves to be members of the family of their previous masters and linked to them with ties akin to those of blood.

Also the slave now came to be regarded as a human being whose personal safety was guaranteed by law not permitting the commission of any transgression against him through word or act. As to the word, the Prophet forbade the Muslims to talk of their slaves as such and instead commanded them to address them in a manner that should make them think of themselves as members of their family, and blot out from their persons the stigma of slavery. With this in view he said:

"Surely God has made you their masters: and if He had willed He could have likewise given you in their possession as slaves."

This means that it was the particular conditions and circumstances that had made them slaves; otherwise they were as good as their masters. In this way, Islam deflated a little the swollen pride of the masters along with raising the status of slaves so as to connect them all in a purely human relationship.

It brought them closer and fostered love among them telling them that love and nothing else should form the basis of all their mutual relationships.

In the case of physical harm or injury, for both of them a kindred punishment was explicitly laid down. "He who slays his slave we shall put him to death," is a principle very clear in its vast implications, all of which go to show that a state of perfect equality prevailed between the slave and his master as between one man and another, besides guaranteeing to both of them the right to live as human beings. Thus Islam made it clear that the present situation slavery – did not preclude them from their rights as human beings,

These guarantees were not only quite sufficient to grant a slave his safety and security of life but were also so generous and noble that no other parallel in the whole history of slave laws exists at all either before or after the advent of Islam. In this respect, Islam went to such an extent that it forbade the master to even slap his slave, except for the purpose of correction (which has its own prescribed limits that may neither be passed by nor overlooked under any circumstances, the punishment given being, however, similar to the punishment the master may award his own children on their mischief). This also provided a legal justification for setting the slaves at liberty. And with this we pass on to the next stage – the stage of actual enfranchisement.

In the first stage, Islam gave spiritual enfranchisement to slaves. It gave them back their humanity and taught that from the stand point of a common origin they enjoyed a status similar to that of their masters and that it was the external circumstances alone that had deprived them of their freedom, preventing them thereby from participating directly in the social life of the community. But for this only point of difference, there was no other

difference between slaves and masters as far as their rights as human beings were concerned.

But Islam did not stop short there as the great fundamental principle of it is the achievement of perfect equality among all men making everyone of them equally free. Therefore it proceeded to bring about the actual freedom of the slaves by two important means: (1) voluntary emancipation by the masters (*Al Itq*) and (2) writing of their freedom (*Mukatabah*).

(1) As to the first of these (i.e. *Al Itq*) it was a voluntary act on the part of the master to set a slave at liberty. The practice was greatly encouraged by Islam and the Holy Prophet himself in this regard too provided the best example for his followers.

He freed all the slaves he had. His companions followed his example, Abu Bakr in particular, spending large sums of money on buying off slaves from the idolatrous chiefs of Quraish to set them free later on. Besides this the slaves were also bought out of the Public Exchequer whenever there was some money to spare for this purpose so as to set them free.

Yahya bin Saeed says: "Umar bin Abdul Aziz sent me to collect alms from Africa. I collected the alms

and then looked for the poor to distribute the alms among them but I found none, nor I found anyone who might have accepted these from me, for Umar bin Abdul Aziz had enriched the people. So I bought a slave with the money and then set him free." The Holy Prophet used to free a slave who would teach reading and writing to ten Muslims or render any other kindred service to the Muslim Community.

The Quran enjoined that atonement for some of the sins consisted in freeing of slaves as also the Holy Prophet encouraged it for the reparation of any other sin one might commit. This contributed more than anything to bring liberty to the greatest number of slaves, for no man could hope to be wholly free from sin as the Holy Prophet said: "All sons of Adam are sinners". It may be well to point out here one of the atonements prescribed by Islam for sins, as it in particular illustrates the standpoint of Islam with regard to slavery. Islam prescribed that redemption for the killing of a believer by mistake was the freeing of a believing slave and paying blood money to his people:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ أَنْ يَقْتُلَ مُؤْمِنًا إِلَّا خَطَأً

وَمَنْ قَتَلَ مُؤْمِنًا خَطَأً فَتَحْرِيرُ رُقَبَةٍ

وَدِيَّةٌ مَسْلُومَةٌ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ يَصَدَّقُوا

فَإِنْ كَانَ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَدُوٍّ لَكُمْ

"And it does not behoove a believer to kill a believer except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood-money should be paid to his people unless they remit it as alms..." (An-Nisaa', 4:92)

The murdered man killed by mistake was a human being of whose services his people as well as the community were deprived without any legal justification, for which reason Islam prescribed that a compensation should be made to both parties: his people and the society: his people getting a just blood money and the society another man to serve it in his place i.e., the newly freed believing slave.

Thus the freeing of a slave meant bringing back to life a human being as a compensation for the one who was lost due to his being killed by mistake. As is clear from this, Islam views slavery as death or a state very much similar to it notwithstanding all those securities that it did provide for a slave. That is why it eagerly snatched every opportunity to resuscitate this wretched class of human beings by restoring to them their liberty.

History tells us that such large numbers of slaves achieved their freedom through this voluntary

emancipation (*Al Itq*) in Islam as have no other parallel in the history of any other nation, before or after Islam till modern times, besides the fact that the factors that contributed towards this emancipation were purely humane springing up from Muslims' sincerest wish to win their God's pleasure by freeing the slaves they possessed.

(2) The second means whereby Islam brought freedom to slaves was that of *Mukatabah* i.e. the writing of freedom to a slave on his asking for it by the master in return for a certain amount of money agreed upon by both of them. The master could in such a case neither refuse nor delay the freeing of a slave ready to ransom his freedom: he must set him at liberty on the receipt of the ransom. Otherwise the slave could move the court to decree his enfranchisement.

By this institution of *Mukatabah*, Islam paved the way for the freedom of all those slaves who happened to desire their freedom and not passively wait for their masters' goodwill or piety to set them at liberty at their own convenience.

From the moment a slave offered to ransom his freedom, not only his master could not turn down the offer, but there was also no need for him to fear any repercussions, for the Islamic government guaranteed that he would henceforth work for his master in return for a fixed payment, or it would make arrangements for him to work outside for anyone else on hire till the time he is able to collect the money needed for winning back of his freedom.

This was what happened in Europe afterwards in the fourteenth century, that is some seven centuries after Islam had already enforced it in its domain, The great distinguishing feature of Islam that can hardly be looked for anywhere else, was the financial aid the Islamic government advanced to slaves such as would demand the writing of their freedom out of the Public Exchequer. This was a clear manifestation of the great interest Islam had in the voluntary emancipation of slaves without expecting any material gains in return, merely with a view to securing God's pleasure and fulfilling one's obligations as a slave towards Him, The Quranic verse describing the uses of Zakat says:

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمَوْلَّاتِ قُلُوبُهُمْ

وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَأَبْنِ السَّبِيلِ

وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ مِنَ اللّٰهِفَرِيضَةِ

"Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming of) captives and those in debts and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer; an ordinance from Allah; and Allah is knowing,

Wise. "(At-Tawbah, 9:60)

Thus the Quran laid it down that Zakat should be spent for purchasing the freedom of such slaves as were unable to work out their own liberty with the help of their personal earnings.

These two institutions in Islam signified a great practical advancement achieved by Islam in the history of slavery. It forestalled the normal historical advancement of mankind by at least seven centuries besides featuring some quite new ingredients of advancement such as security afforded by the state to the slave – something rare in the history of mankind till modern times – and others which mankind is far from having yet realized i.e. the noble and generous treatment of slaves, or freeing them of one's own free will without any external pressure of economic or political developments such as at last forced the peoples of Europe to grant freedom to slaves.

These two things are sufficient to confute the false assertions of the communists, who claim that all systems including Islam represent but a particular stage in the economic development of mankind. Faithful to the law of dialectical materialism thus Islam too with all its beliefs and views came at a time best suited for it, reflecting the economic and material conditions of the period, for a system may, according to them only reflect the economic life but can by no means anticipate a future economic stage.

They insist that this theory cannot be false as it has been testified by the reason of the one who "can neither be influenced with falsehood from above nor from below" – the reason of Karl Marx, the most exalted and blessed one! But the bottom is knocked out of this falsehood by Islam – standing refutation of all this Marxist humbug, for it did not work up its way in the manner Marx prescribed, inside the Arabian Peninsula, nor outside it all the world over, and this is true not only with regard to the life of slaves under Islam but is equally tenable in its manner of distributing wealth, in determining the mutual relationship of the ruler and the ruled, and of a master's to his hireling.

On the other hand, Islam raised its whole social and economic superstructure on voluntary obedience of such a style as in many ways still remains unsurpassed and unmatched in the history of social systems.

Here a very perplexing question may haunt some persons: Why is it that Islam – so great a champion of slave emancipation and taking such radical steps towards that end voluntarily and without any outside pressure or coercion before all the world did not also take the final and decisive step, and abolish it once for all, as it might have in that way immensely benefited mankind besides proving thereby that it was really a system most perfect and in effect revealed by God, Who dignified the sons of Adam over many of His creations?

For an answer to this question we need must inquire into the allied social, psychological and political problems of slavery – the reasons due to which Islam delayed its much expected and outright abolition. We must also during this inquiry bear in mind that actually the abolition of slavery was rather delayed more than Islam would have desired or allowed it if it had continued functioning properly in its pristine purity, unadulterated by extraneous ingredients of deviation.

In the first place then it must be recorded that when Islam came, slavery was prevalent throughout the world as an acknowledged fact of socio-economic existence. There was hardly a man to be met with who was repelled by it, or who felt any need for a change. As such the changing or the total discarding of it required a gradual process stretched over a long period of time.

Thus we see that prohibition of liquor was effected not immediately but after years of preparation although it before all other things constituted a mere individual habit, notwithstanding the fact that it carried so many social implications as well and that some Arabs practiced abstinence even in the days of ignorance believing it a vice degrading for a truly noble man.

But slavery was looked upon by them as something quite different. It was deep-rooted in the social structure of the time as well as the psychology of the individuals, it entailed individual as well as social and economical implications and, as we observed above, nobody regarded its existence as something undesirable, that is why its abolition required a period of time far longer than the life of the Holy Prophet, the period which coincided with the period of Divine revelation through him.

God, the best knower of all that He created, knew that the total prohibition of wine would be achieved after a few years by a mere commandment. So He did command its prohibition when such time came. Similarly, if the conditions of life had been such as a mere direction were to suffice to suppress the evil of slavery, God Almighty would have expressly forbidden it once for all without any further delay.

When we say that Islam is a religion for all mankind and for all times, and that it embraces in itself all the healthy elements necessary for the existence and continuance of good life, we do not at all mean that it has once for all laid down all the detailed rules for all times and climes. No, that is not so, for it has given such detailed directions only with regard to those basic human problems that remain unaltered through all the different vicissitudes of history, for the roots of these problems lie deep in the unchangeable, instinctive headsprings of human nature.

As to the ever-changing conditions of life, Islam is content with laying down some general principles for them so as to outline their future course of development. This is precisely what it did with respect to the problem of slavery. It laid down a sound basis for the freeing of slaves through voluntary enfranchisement or by the ransoming of their freedom besides pointing out the course to a permanent resolution of this old and complicated problem in future.

Islam did not mean to change human nature. It rather sought to civilize it making due allowance for its inevitable limitations so as to help it ascend the highest possible planes of perfection without any recourse to suppression or repression. It recorded a miraculous success in transforming some individuals. As regards human society as a whole its success was no less glorious: it bears no analogy to anything else ever achieved in the domain of human history. But despite all this it did not aim at transmuting human beings to a degree of perfection both rare as well as impossible in the practical life of human beings with all their present human limitations. For, if God had intended that, He would have from

the very first created men like angels and as such ordered them to bear burdens that can be borne by angels only, of whom it is said that:

لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ

وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ

"...they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded." (At-Tahrim, 66:6)

God did not intend to transmute men into angels such as these. He rather made them men and as such He knows their potentialities and the time necessary for their flourishing so as to enable them to follow and successfully execute an order.

However it is quite sufficient for Islam to be the first to initiate the emancipation movement which took the world some seven centuries to adopt and enforce. The fact nonetheless is that Islam had before long practically put an end to slavery in the Arabian Peninsula and but for the presence of a new headspring of slavery due to which slavery lingered on everywhere in the world, it was quite capable of undertaking in earnest its similar effacement in the whole world of Islam.

In the presence of this new cause of servitude it was not possible for Islam to abolish it outright, for it concerned not only the Muslims, but their opponents as well on whom Islam exercised no control or power. The source that thus prevented the total effacement of slavery was war, the most fruitful source of slavery at the time. We would discuss it shortly in some detail.

In treating slaves well and restoring their human status Islam has left behind some most wonderful and admirable examples. Of these we have already referred to some of the Quranic verses and traditions of the Holy Prophet, Here we would in brief take some more examples from practical life in the early period.

When in Medina, the Holy Prophet established brotherhood between some Arab chiefs and some freed slaves. Thus he joined as brothers Bilal son of Rabah and Khalid son of Ruwaihata Al-Khasami; Zaid, the freed slave of the Prophet, and Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet; and Kharijah son of Zaid and Abu Bakr. This relationship of brotherhood was a real bond akin to blood-relationship, so much so that the two persons thus made brothers inherited from each other just as only the blood relations now do.

But Islam did not stop at that. It went a step farther. Thus the Prophet married away his cousin Zainab, daughter of Jahash, to his ex-slave Zaid. But marriage touches a very delicate aspect of a person's life especially in that of a woman. Therefore, although Zainab accepted a man far below her in social status, she could not reconcile herself to be the wife of one who

did not come of a noble family like her, nor possessed wealth. But the Holy Prophet did by this act set an example to show that a slave could attain to the highest level of a Quraishite chief from out of the abyss of ignominy into which he was hurled by his cruel fellow human beings.

But still this did not satisfy Islam. Slaves were exalted to the position of military commanders and leaders. Thus when the Holy Prophet sent out an army which consisted of the closest of the Companions – Emigrants and Helpers, the acknowledged leaders of the Arabs – he entrusted Zaid, the slave, with the generalship of the army. After the death of Zaid the Holy Prophet appointed his son, Usatnah as the commander of the army consisting of such illustrious men as Abu Bakr and Umar, his two principal ministers and afterwards successors.

Thus slaves were given not only a status equal and similar to others but were at the same time raised to the exalted positions of heading the armies of free men. In this regard the Holy Prophet went to such a great length that he is reported to have commanded the believers:

"Hear and obey (the orders of your leaders) although the man appointed above you as your leader be a negro slave with a raisin-like head so long as he continues to enforce among you God's law. "

Thus even a slave could aspire to the highest office in the Islamic state. When faced with the problem of appointing his successor, Umar said: Had Saalim, the slave of Abi Huzaifah been alive, I would have appointed him caliph." [2](#)This was just a continuation of the tradition founded by the Holy Prophet.

Umar's life affords yet another admirable instance bearing upon the respect enjoyed by slaves in the Muslim society. When he was vehemently opposed by Bilal, son of Rabah, an ex-slave, concerning the problem of conquered lands Umar despairing of all other means of silencing his opposition prayed to God: "My God! Requite me with Bilal and his comrades!" What a reaction for a caliph in the face of opposition by one of ex-slaves from among his subjects.

The great superiority of Islam with regard to slavery is manifest in various aspects. It aimed at freeing slaves externally as well as internally, but to achieve that end it did not merely rely upon the pious wishes as Abraham Lincoln had done by issuing an order without preparing slaves mentally. This demonstrates Islam's deep understanding of human nature and how it employed all possible means to achieve its objective.

It not only liberally restored these people's liberty but also trained them so as to safeguard it and bear responsibilities flowing from it. It infused a spirit of love and cooperation throughout the society. It did not wait till conflicts should break out within the society over these rights as had happened in Europe leaving behind them an odious legacy of bitter malice and hatred and sapping all the spiritual headsprings in human heart. In the end, let us now take up the main basis on which Islam worked out the final emancipation after a due process of spiritual elevation of slaves.

We have already pointed out that Islam successfully put an end to all those old sources whence slavery

sprang up save one which it was virtually impossible for it to do away with, and that was war, the only effective source of this evil left behind after the crusade of Islam against it. We propose to deal with it at some length.

The principal practice that dated back to the remotest past and was prevalent at the time was that prisoners of war were either enslaved or put to death.³ It was a practice such as had with the passage of time come to stay as a necessary condition of human existence in those past ages.

It was against this social background that Islam was revealed to mankind. Many battles took place between the forces of Islam and its opponents. The Muslims taken prisoners in these wars were made slaves by their captors. Their liberties were forfeited. Men were exposed to oppression and all those miseries that were commonly the lot of a slave at the time.

The honor of woman was violated in a most flagrant manner; several men – fathers, sons and friends – all jointly shared a single captive woman with no regard whatever to any rule or law, or respect for her womanhood, or any consideration whatever about her being a virgin maid or a married woman. Besides this, the children, if captured, were brought up in a most odious and abject servitude.

As the conditions stood it was not possible for Islam to forthwith set at liberty all the prisoners falling in its hands from the camp, for it would have not only been a piece of bad policy but would have also implied a virtual encouragement to its enemies especially as the Muslims as well as their dear and near ones captured in war were being made slaves by the enemies and exposed to all sorts of tortures, atrocities and humiliations.

In such circumstances, the best and the only course left open to Islam was to treat them as captives as they treated the Muslims. The enslaving of the prisoners of war could not be abolished unilaterally by Islam when the enemies insisted on its continuance. So the practice was tolerated just so long as there did exist no alternative to it and till the time the people all over the world should agree among themselves upon a basis other than that of slavery in dealing with their prisoners of war. We must not also overlook the great difference between Islam and other religions in their wars or the treatment of the prisoners captured in these wars.

Wars have been and still are a melee of treachery, surprise, violence; and the enslavement of one nation to another due to its expansionist designs and the lust for exploitation in order to advance its own selfish ends. Such wars are and have been the outcome of personal ambition, pride, vanity or a wish for vengeance of a king or a military commander. Motivated as these

wars were by low earthly designs, the people captured therein were made slaves not because of their creed or ideal nor because they were inferior in their physical, psychological or intellectual equipment to that of their captors, but simply because they had lost the battle and belonged to the vanquished party.

Moreover, there was nothing that could in the event of war, prevent a victorious party to subject the conquered people to humiliation and disgrace, violate their honor, raze peaceful cities to the ground and put women, children as well as old men to sword, – a logical sequence to lack of a lofty ideal, principle or creed to guide them.

With the advent of Islam all these practices were abolished. It prohibited all wars save the one fought in the way of God; to avert cruelty and injustice to Muslims; crush a tyrannous oppressor resorting to force and violence to prevent people from embracing true religion; or to remove a powerful but iniquitous impostor interposing between men and their God incapacitating them to see or hear and follow the truth independently. Thus the Holy Quran declared:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

"And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits." (Al-Baqarah, 2: 190)

And:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةً وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ

***"And fight with them until there is no more persecution and religion should be only for Allah ..."* (Al-Anfaal, 8:39)**

The message of Islam thus becomes a message of peace, which none can dare ignore:

قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

***"There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error."* (Al-Baqarah, 2:256)**

That there are even today Christians and Jews in the Muslim world who follow their respective religions unchecked bears testimony to the irrefutable fact that Islam does not approve of using force in converting men to its own viewpoint.

If people accept this message of Islam and agree to follow the truth, the hostilities between them and the Muslims cease forthwith. They become part of the Muslim community and are not to be put to subjection

or humiliation.

They enjoy rights similar to those enjoyed by other Muslims, for no distinction is permissible between one Muslim and the other, nor had any Arab any superiority over a non-Arab except due to his piety. In the case of people who refused to adopt Islam as their religion but were desirous to live under its protection with their own religion, Islam did not compel them to adopt its creed but gladly undertook to protect them in return for a special tax (*Jizya*) with the understanding that all such taxes would be paid back to them in the event of Muslims proving unable to defend them against outside aggression.⁴ And that despite the belief of Islam that it , was a creed far superior to and better than the one it had undertaken to protect. But if people reject their superiority in material wealth and arms, only then and against these people it is that war is declared. But even such a war is not plunged in without a formal ultimatum or declaration as a last effort to prevent bloodshed if possible and spread peace the world over:

وَأِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ

***"And if they incline to peace, then incline to it and trust in Allah ..."* (Al-Anfaal, 8:61)**

Such then is the story of the wars of Islam which sprang out of its wish to direct mankind to the right path if all peaceful means towards that end should prove ineffective. They were not motivated by any ambition to exploit or vanquish people by any military commander, for they were, in a word, wars waged in the way of God.

Not only this but clear injunctions and rules were also laid down for the conduct of these wars. The Holy Prophet admonishing the Muslims said:

"Go in the name of God to fight in the way of God, kill him who rejects God, fight but do not commit a perfidy, nor mutilate, nor kill a child"

Also no man except he who carried arms against the Muslim army was to be killed. Nothing was to be destroyed or ruined, nor anybody's honor violated. No mischief or evil was to be encouraged, for

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

***"Surely God does not love the mischief-makers. "* (Al-Qasas,28:77)**

History bears witness that the Muslims upheld all these noble traditions in their wars against their enemies, including even those they had to fight against their treacherous opponents, the Crusaders. The Christians when in possession of Jerusalem committed all sorts of iniquity and transgression against the Muslims living in the city.

They violated their honor and recklessly put them to sword. Even the great mosque there did not escape from their transgression. But when the Muslims captured the city, they did not try to seek revenge against them although they were permitted by God to pay the transgressors back in their own coins. Instead, they chose a course such as to this day remains unsurpassed in generosity and nobility.

This constituted the great fundamental distinguishing mark as to their war-aims and traditions between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam could very easily adopt the view that all those who insisted on their despicable idol-worship and actively fought against Truth and Light were half-human and thus fit for being held in bondage only, for how could people not defective in their intellectual or human make-up refuse Light and Truth? And that, therefore, they neither deserved respect, nor the freedom which is the privilege of human beings only.

But Islam did not adopt this course. It did not allow taking prisoners of war in servitude on the plea that they were subhumans. They were taken slaves just because their people too treated the captured Muslims as their slaves. The problem of slavery was thus left by Islam undecided till all the belligerents should agree to a principle other than that of slavery in dealing with their prisoners of war, for, as the conditions stood, this was the only guarantee against the non-Muslims' ill-treatment of their Muslim prisoners or subjecting them to misery and humiliation without any fear of retaliation.

At this price it must also be mentioned in passing that the only Quranic verse touching upon the fate of prisoners of war says that:

فَأَمَّا مَنَّا بَعْدُ وَإِمَّا فِدَاءً حَتَّى تَضَعَ الْحَرْبُ

"...and afterwards either set them free as a favor or let them ransom (themselves) until the war terminates."(Muhammad, 47:4)

It does not mention the enslaving of prisoners, which would have enforced it as a permanent rule of war, what it explicitly laid down is rather the ransoming or setting them free as a favor, for it is these two that the Quran prescribed as a permanent law of war, Thus if the Muslims held the prisoners of war in slavery it was purely an act of policy dictated by the force of circumstances. It does not form intrinsic principle of the Islamic law.

But despite this the practice generally followed in Islam did not insist on taking prisoners of war as slaves. If peace was restored, they were never made slaves. The Holy Prophet set at liberty some of the Meccan prisoners captured in the battle of Badr, in return for a redemption, while he freed the others as a mark of favor.

Similarly, he accepted *Jizya* from the Christian deputation of Najran and returned their prisoners over to them. All these noble deeds were meant to serve as precedents for mankind when once it should be able to shake off the odious legacy of its past and be ready to treat the prisoners of war as human

beings.

We may also add that the prisoners fallen in the hands of Muslims in wars were never ill-treated, tortured or subjected to the humiliation such as described above. They, on the other hand, found that if they chose the way to freedom lay open before them provided also that they were ready to bear the responsibilities that go with freedom. If they fulfilled these conditions they were set free, although most of them were bondsmen before falling into the hands of the Muslims, and comprised of slaves seized by Persians and Romans, and packed off to fight against the Muslims.

As far as the women were concerned, Islam respected them even in their captivity even if they were taken prisoners from foreign enemy lands. No one was allowed to violate their honor or treat them merely as a part of booty captured in war. They were no longer to be treated as a common property of all with every man having free access to them to gratify his animal passions. They were hence forth to belong to their masters alone.

None else could establish sexual relations with them. Moreover, they were, like men, granted the right to work out their freedom through *Mukatabah*, besides providing that a slave-maid would be free the moment she gave birth to a child by her master. Besides the mother, the child would also be deemed free. The treatment given them by Islam on the whole during their captivity was equally noble and generous.

Such is the story of slavery in Islam – a story which constitutes one of the brightest pages of human history. Islam never approved of slavery in principle as it strove hard with all the different means at its disposal to eliminate slavery once for all. It tolerated its existence for the time being just because it had no other alternative for it concerned not only Muslims but those people as well who were not under its direct control. They held the Muslims in servitude making them suffer the worst possible forms of humiliation and miseries which drove the Muslims to adopt with respect to these people a course of like treatment, at least in treating their prisoners of war as slaves though not in their actual transactions with these slaves afterwards.

Islam could not effect the abolition of slavery so long as the world did not agree to put an end to the only source of slavery enslavement of prisoners of war. So when that concord was achieved Islam welcomed it as it formed the unalterable fundamental principle of its polity: liberty for all, equality for all.

As to the instances of slavery, slave-traffic, seizure and sale of Muslims met with in some latter periods of Islamic history without any regular religious wars having taken place, they have no relation whatsoever to Islam. They can with no more justification and truth be imputed to Islam than the vicious crimes and guilt that are perpetrated by some Muslim rulers in the name of Islam at the present times.

In this respect we would do well to bear the following in mind:

(1) The governments in the latter stages of history encouraged and tolerated slavery in several ways

without any genuine need. They were motivated by their lust for power and conquest, one nation or class of people holding another nation or class of people in subjection. The other forms of slavery sprang up from causes such as poverty, birth into a certain class held as inferior and the fact that a man worked as a tenant on a particular tract of land. Islam stood for the abolition of all these forms of slavery except that one and the only form of it, which, due to the unfavorable circumstances, it could not effectively check. Slavery was tolerated till such time as the circumstances should grow ripe and favor its abolition.

(2) Despite the fact that in Europe slavery prevailed in so many forms without any genuine need, the Europeans in fact did never abolish it even when they at last condescended to ban it. European writers themselves confess that in fact slavery in Europe came to an end only when due to their economic difficulties, lack of will to exert themselves and their incapacity to work, the slaves became more of an economic liability than an asset to their masters. The master had to spend far larger amounts of money on the sustenance and supervision of their slaves than the profits they got back as a result of their exertion.

It was thus a purely economic factor just a matter of profit and loss – that helped in bringing about the liberation of these European slaves and as such it bears no analogy to the lofty ideal that respected every man for his humanity and which was inspired by that lofty concept of humanity restored to the slave his freedom. The freedom thus won by the slave in Europe sinks into insignificance when viewed in the context of those successive revolutions that broke out there as a result of the restlessness among slaves and which in the end made it impossible for their masters to hold them any longer in subjection.

All these series of revolutions could not, however, help the slaves in winning back their liberty. They were rather as a result of these revolutions bound all the more securely, for henceforth they were held in serfhood bound to the soil they till and changed masters on the sale or transfer of land. The slave could not leave the soil which, if he did, he was declared a fugitive by law, bound in chains, cauterized with fire and returned to his master. This form of slavery continued to exist in Europe till it was finally swept away by the French Revolution in the eighteenth century that is, some eleven hundred years after Islam had already enunciated the principle of emancipation.

We should not be taken in by beautiful names. The French Revolution in Europe and Lincoln in America abolished slavery along with the understanding among the people the world over to suppress it in all its forms but all these were mere names, beautiful ones, of course, for, has slavery been abolished in reality? Isn't tyranny still strutting all the world over in different guises? What is called that which the French did in Algeria? In what other terms can we describe the black crimes of the Americans towards the Negroes there, and the felonies of the English against the colored people of South Africa?

Is not slavery in effect the subjection of a nation to another and the deprivation of a class of people of the rights enjoyed by other men like themselves? It means just that and nothing else. Why should we not then call a spade a spade? Why misname these different forms of slavery as liberty, fraternity, and

equality? For, surely the surface decoration is of little value where the crimes perpetrated underneath are of the most monstrous and hideous nature yet witnessed by mankind during their long career on the earth.

Islam was very frank and explicit on what it stood for and advocated. It told the people in a straightforward manner. in clear and unequivocal terms as to what it thought of slavery, that such and such was the real cause of it, this is the way out of it to freedom; and that this is the way to its outright abolition...the way that was for the time being not checked due to the disagreement among the people of the world as to the treatment of their prisoners of war.

But the civilization of modern times is neither so frank nor straightforward with regard to its real aims and methods. It excels in one thing only: in painting its exterior in the brightest of colors, elegant outwardly but dark and gloomy from within. It killed hundreds of thousands of people in Tunis, Algeria and Morocco just because they demanded their freedom and human dignity; freedom to live in their respective homelands without any intrusion from abroad; the freedom to speak their own tongue, to follow their creed and religion, and to have a free homeland and a direct share in determining their political and economic relations with the rest of the world.

They killed these innocent people, hauled them into loathsome dungeons without food or water, violated their honor, raped their womenfolk . . . killed them and ripped up their bellies waging if the child they carried was a male or a female. These monstrous crimes are committed, but the twentieth century hypocritical civilization describes them as the propagation of the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality, whereas Islam 's voluntary, ideal, respectful and generous treatment of slaves thirteen centuries ago, and its declaration that slavery was not a permanent condition of life but only a temporary one, are called backwardness, reactionarism and barbarism!

Similarly, this hypocritical civilization finds nothing shocking if the Americans put on their hotels and public places the notices announcing ' "For whites only"; "Blacks and dogs not allowed"; and when a crowd of "civilized" white Americans mercilessly lynch a colored man throwing him on the ground and kicking him round with their boots till he is dead, for he despite being colored had dared succumb to the temptation of having relations with a white American girl, with the initiative, however, coming from her and not from him, while during all this the policemen stand around passively and do nothing to stop them or save one of their compatriots united to them through common bonds of language, religion as well as humanity. They perpetrate all these monstrous crimes and still they remain as "civilized" as ever, and their nation is looked upon as a pinnacle of modern civilization and progress!

As against this we see that when a Parsee slave threatened Umar with assassination, refused Islam as well as denied to pay *Jizya* to the Islamic state, they were treated as real antagonists obstinately continuing their hostilities against Islam and turning down its offer for a peaceful agreement. They were the people who took upon themselves to arrest the spread of Truth and Light ruthlessly employing all, Umar did not say anything to the slave although he understood what the threat implied.

The slave was neither imprisoned, nor banished from the country, nor did Umar order his execution on the plea that he belonged to a sub human species who out of sheer prejudice and insolence insisted on worshipping falsehood even after he had with his own eyes seen the truth and the light. How vulgar of him and how contemptuous his attitude towards the slave as a man when he on hearing the threat said instead: "The slave has threatened me", and then went his way without in any way curtailing his freedom. He was charged with the assassination of the Caliph only after he did actually commit the heinous crime.

On the other hand, we see that the colored people of Africa are oppressed, killed or, as the English papers put it, are hunted down; and their human rights withheld from them as they have dared realize their human dignity and so demand of the English people their freedom. This is the English justice at its highest and the human civilization at its best! And these precisely are the "sublime" and "glorious" moral principles on the basis of which Europe claims precedence and dominance over the whole of the world.

But so far as Islam is concerned, it is extremely barbarous and frivolous, for adopting the course of a like-treatment towards its enemies; it allowed the enslaving of prisoners of war temporarily without, however, approving of slavery in principle. It is also very backward; for it never allowed 'man-hunting,' nor did it indulge in the killing of men because of their having a black skin. Far from that, its reactionarism advanced to such an extent that it declared: "Hear and obey even if the one appointed over you be a Negro slave with a raisin-like head".

As far as female slaves were concerned, they constituted a quite different problem.

Islam made it lawful for a master to have a number of slave-women captured in wars and enjoined that he alone may have sexual relations with them and that he might, if he wished, marry anyone of them. Europe abhors this law but at the same time gladly allows that most odious form of animalism according to which a man may have illicit relations with any girl coming across him on his way to gratify his animal passions without any consideration whatsoever to any law or human dignity. The guilt of Islam in reality is that it did not countenance adultery. That is why the Europeans seem so wroth with it.

The women captured in wars were among other nations forced to lead a shameful and vile life of prostitution, for they had none to take care of or look after them and as their masters' sense of honor was seldom injured by their pursuing such a wicked course of life. Far from it, the masters would often rather force them to it for their own material gains. But Islam, "the reactionary and backward Islam", never countenanced adultery; it rather made efforts to keep society clean of this hideous moral taint.

Therefore, it enjoined that these slave women would belong to their masters only; they were to provide for their maintenance, feed and safeguard them from falling a prey to such a depravation, gratifying their sexual needs along with satisfying their own in a clean, respectable manner.

But the "conscientious" Europe cannot bring itself to countenance this animalism. That is why it approves of adultery extending it all possible support and protection of law and then, not content with that, spreads its cult throughout the world wherever its imperialistic designs would lead it.

The names have changed but the reality behind them remains unchanged: the woman is as slave to the lust of men as ever she was, for is a modern prostitute, despite all her much publicized freedom, really free to reject her customers who have no interest in her save as a means to achieve the gratification of their own animal urge? Is she really a free woman? There is nothing common between this filthy, abominable trade of human bodies and that clean and spiritual bond that ties a maid to her master in Islam.

As against Islam, modern civilization lacks definiteness and clarity of vision. It does, for

instance, recognize that prostitution is an institution of slavery, but still insists on its continuance on the plea that it is a "social necessity".

And why do Europeans consider prostitution a "social necessity"?

Prostitution has come to stay as a social necessity in European civilization because a "civilized" European does not want to burden himself by supporting anyone, a wife or children. He wants to have pleasure without the responsibilities that it generally carries with it. Therefore what he seeks is a woman no matter who she is, or what she thinks of him or he of her, for the gratification of his sexual instinct. He wants her body and nothing else. As such he is far from being attached to any particular woman, for he may satisfy his animal passion with any woman walking in the street.

This is the social necessity on the basis of which slavery of women in the modern epoch is justified. However, it is no more than a mere bluff, for it ceases to exist the moment the European man should get rid of his vanity and animal passions and agree to ascend to a higher plane of humanity.

It may also be mentioned here that the civilized western governments, which at last prohibited prostitution, did not act so out of any respect for the human status of a prostitute as such, nor did they in any way manifest their moral, psychological and spiritual elevation rendering them immune to this crime. It rather sprang out of the fact that these prostitutes had lost all their usefulness, their place having been taken by the common society girls. The crime was no longer regarded as a crime. And the governments just did not feel any need to interfere with the freedom of its citizens.

But still the Europeans have the audacity to blame Islam for its solution of the problem of captive women thirteen hundred years ago declaring that it was just a temporary arrangement and was not meant to perpetuate for ever and notwithstanding the fact that the system Islam stood for was far more superior and cleaner to that represented by their twentieth century modern civilization, the natural and the most perfect one, according to them that none may dare disown or even think of changing, it being the pinnacle of human civilization and as such destined to last for ever.

We must not be taken in by the ostensible freedom with which these sybaritic modern society girls surrender themselves to others and think that they are free, for we know that there has always been a group of slaves who were glad to surrender their freedom and willingly prefer servitude to freedom. That

is what European civilization has, in fact, accomplished. It encourages adultery and moral corruption, be it in the form of traditional prostitution or the presence of the sybarite society girls who willingly surrender themselves to men.

This, in short, is the story of slavery in Europe right up to this twentieth century: slavery of men, women, of whole nations and classes. It was a slavery that sprang up from various new sources and causes; a slavery that was sustained without any real and genuine social need such as thirteen hundred years ago forced Islam to tolerate an inevitable form of it. It was founded in the vileness of European civilization and its innate inhuman character.

We may add a word about slavery under which people of communist countries are groaning. The government is the only master in these countries, all the other people being just slaves to it ever ready to obey orders. Men and women do not even have the freedom to choose their job or the place they would like to work in. They are not more than slaves. A similar situation prevails in the capitalist countries of the West where big capitalists are the virtual masters who wield real power. The working classes are helpless and completely dependent upon them.

The reader may come across the votaries and supporters of one or the other of these systems but he should never be taken in by their loud professions if he would but keep in mind all that we have briefly sketched above. From this he can easily judge for himself if both these systems – capitalism and communism – are anything more than the continuance of all those centuries–old forms of slavery that have been imposed on the people in the name of civilization and social development.

He can also see whether mankind during the last fourteen centuries has continually moved ahead on the path of progress and glory by ignoring the guidance of Islam or has it instead been steadily sinking low going down and down showing thereby how desperately it stands in need of the guidance of Islam to help it get out of the darkness it has long since been plunged in.

[1.](#) Quoted from Muhammad Qutb's Islam the Misunderstood Religion

[2.](#) Though the real meaning of the words of Umar is correct and very attractive and important, because from the viewpoint of Islam a slave can take the place of a ruler, this is regarding the matter of Umar's rule. From the viewpoint of Shia, Caliphate (ruling) over Muslims is not a matter of appointment by men themselves – Imamate is divine)

[3.](#) On page 2273 of the Historical Encyclopedia called, Universal History of the World we are told that in the year 599 A.O. the Roman emperor Marius, motivated by his love for economy, refused to ransom a few of the millions of those prisoners that had been captured by his forces in wars. He instead put them all without a single exception to sword.

[4.](#) History is full of instances such as bear upon this point. But we would mention just two out of Mr. T. W. Arnold's book The Preaching of Islam. (Ashraf's edition 1965). On page 61 of the book he says: "Again in the treaty made by Khalid with some towns in the neighborhood of Hirah." he writes (Tabari. the historian): "If we protect you, then Jizya is due to us; but if we do not, then it is not due." He goes on to say that "The Arab general, Abu Ubaidah, accordingly wrote to the governors of the conquered cities of Syria, ordering them to pay back all the Jizya that had been collected from the cities, and wrote to the people saying:

"We give you back the money that we took from you, as we have received news that a strong force is advancing against us. The agreement between us was that we should protect you, and since this is not now in our power, we return you all the t

we took. But if we are victorious we shall consider ourselves bound to you by the old terms of our agreement."

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