

to get away from it
all and head for the mountains to link up with nature once again

conquers
Civilian life and property suffered few casualties at their hands

DAWN
ESSAY

The decreasing tolerance level, the increasing aggression and violence, the dulling of moral sensitivity and brash dogmatism are becoming the hallmark of our society, which, 50 years ago, was more benign and less offensive. What led to this deterioration?

THE distinction between madness and sanity is not only fuzzy, but sliding too. Pascal has rightly observed that 'men are so necessarily mad that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness'. Within this all-pervading madness, some people are more mad than others. It depends as to who is passing the judgment and who is the subject.

Apart from neurosis at the individuals level, can large groups of mankind be collectively abnormal? Like mass hallucination, can there be a mass madness not relating to the frenzy of a crowd, but afflicting human kind while living at home and working at a normal pace of life? How is it that after three revolutions — the Industrial, the French and the American — and after concepts of democracy and human rights started swaying the world, Europe during this very era of enlightenment had to suffer three worst dictators: Hitler (1889-1945), Stalin (1879-1953) and Mussolini (1883-1945). Vast majorities of population very wittingly surrendered their freedom to the dictates of the tyrants. Erich Fromm's explanation, in *Escape from Freedom*, is that men, by nature, shun responsibility and are more at peace with themselves when they are not condemned to 'freedom'. They tend to absolve themselves of moral consequences of their actions and put the blame on others.

Is this a sort of insanity that takes years to cure? And can it recur unless remedial measures are taken? Were the European

and Russian societies of that period sick societies now recovered from their sickness? It may be stretching the point a bit too far to attribute a sort of psychosis to whole societies, but how can the acquiescence of the masses to coercive tyrants be explained?

Coming to the home front, there are problems which our society confronts, partly because we partake in the global ambience and partly because of our own cultural underpinnings. The decreasing tolerance level, the increasing aggression and violence, the dulling of moral sensitivity and brash dogmatism are becoming the hallmark of the very same society, which 50 years ago was more benign and less offensive.

Surely, there are socio-cultural factors, yet, it must have something to do with the learning behaviour of the youth of today. There is a tragic change in the attitude and mental state of people, particularly of those who serve as the conscience of our society and are the upholders of religion. Where is the moral outrage of the sacred segment of our society against gang rape, karo kari and honour killings? What happened to the moral sense and to a balanced personality? Why have we started hanging the sacred Names of God on electric poles and have no love for Him in our hearts? Why has law become an end itself and not the moral existence of a person?

The moral state of the nation has deteriorated to an extent that the educated and enlightened members of its Senate failed to vote for a resolution condemning the honour killing

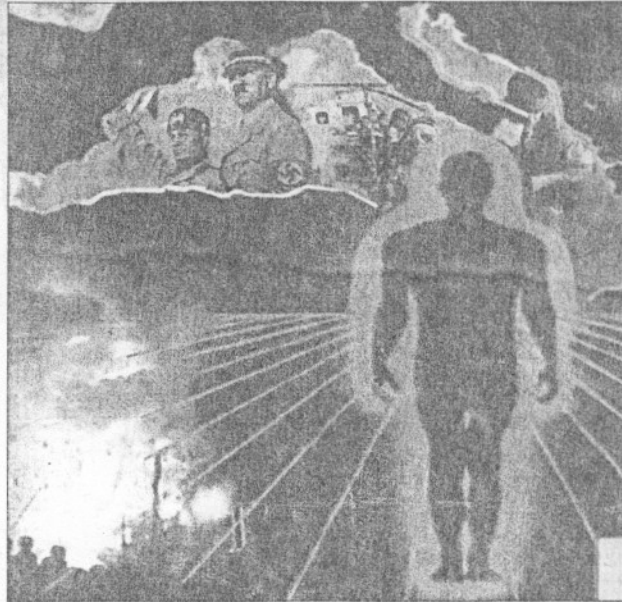
A close

Society & Social Problems
BY MANZOOR AHMAD

of a girl in broad daylight, and where an educated mother, from a highbrow family, was involved in the murder of her daughter.

All these questions are disturbing and may not have anything to do with madness as a disease, but they are related to the mental health of our nation. And it may

makeup which accepts authoritarian roles of any kind. In addition to this general pervasive principle, there are additional factors working in the mental makeup of Muslims, one of which is the crisis of identity and a subconscious 'dread' of disintegration. This dread is not a new fac-



be important to find the psychological and conceptual causes of this phenomenon in the hope of finding some effective therapy.

It is important to analyze the Muslim mind to understand, at least partly, as to why it is becoming increasingly myopic. Let me borrow the paradigm from Erich Fromm. His analysis of European acceptance of dictatorships, in terms of escape from responsibilities, is a plausible psychological explanation. This partly applies to any mental

tor in Muslim history. From the early days, it has started playing a baneful role in our society.

If you look back in time, you will find that right from the very beginning Muslim polity started facing threatening situations. The death of the Holy Prophet though a natural event, was a very traumatic experience for the nascent Muslim society. Immediately after that, there was a fear that the society may disintegrate if someone was not found immediately to control the cen-

ed mind

trifugal tendencies of the tribes. Hazrat Abu Bakar (R) had to face ridda wars, and with great difficulty and tact the mutinous tendencies were checked.

In the first 40 years of Islam, Muslims faced difficult situations of wars and conflict, and eventually a sort of stability was achieved when a sort of monarchy was established and the Muslim

which, gradually and imperceptibly, replaced the original thrust of religious experience.

The dogma now provides the given major premise which cannot be challenged. In addition, it cannot be understood differently from what it apparently meant to the early people. Conclusions can only be deduced through discovering analogous situation.

In the field of morality, nothing is good or bad, *sui generis*. It becomes good or bad by a fiat. Lawmaking again is dependent on this logic — laws can only be deduced from what is given and nothing can be new which is not already subsumed in the given premises, i.e., the Holy Quran and Sunnah. Both morality and law are based on irrefutable given proposition and a rejection of this logic becomes tantamount to heresy. Naturally, this paradigm of knowledge was very conducive to political authority. Thus, the whole society was constructed on the 'command-obedience' framework and free play of mind was considered to be a disintegrating factor.

Society flourished well for about one thousand years, and, though changes occurred, they were not so drastic so as to make this logico-political structure to break. The qualitative change in society occurred only during Renaissance, where the rationalism of Aristotle started crumbling. Descartes broke the monolithic structure of reality and bifurcated the domains of mind and matter. From then onwards, science, medicine and psychology took a new turn, and starting with a new experience of reality, looked for verifiable causes of events, whether mental or physical.

Today's psychology owes it to Descartes and howsoever 'psycho' and 'soma' maybe connected, their domains remain distinct. The Cartesian revolution did not

stop only at the level of psychology and physics, it very drastically influenced concepts of society, of behaviour and of religion. Muslims, on the whole, failed to appreciate the significance of this revolution and, as against their predecessors who readily accepted Greek logic and sciences, closed their minds totally and remained stuck to the paradigm they developed earlier. It is due to the abounding fear that they would lose their identity if they accept some conceptual structures of the West. From amongst all the major religions of the world, both of East and West, it is only Islam which has remained as it was five hundreds years ago, along with its moral, legal and social percepts.

This is the mind that we encounter today. It is a closed mind and, though seemingly they know the language of modern thought, it does not mean the same for them. The meaning of words are ensconced in their minds and there is no way of getting them out and of getting any other meaning in. It is a mental block which cannot be broken unless they shift their dogmatic paradigm and open themselves to the possibility of pluralistic logical discourses.

It is neither the work of a singular person, nor of a single discipline. To unravel the working of a closed mind and to suggest ways and means of opening, it is a multifaceted task. Inputs have to come from sociology, psychology, philosophy and religion, for working out a reasonable definition of mental health and for evolving criteria and norms for judging it. Social policies of the country have to be redesigned accordingly. It is a tremendous task but it is worth its while that we start talking about it. One day we may start reversing the mental decay that has set in our society. ■



state was transformed into an imperial power. The dread of disintegration forced the society to accept and acquiesce not only political authority of the monarchs, but also developed their whole structure of knowledge on that basis. Fortunately for them, they came in contact with Aristotelian logic which provided a wonderful deductive system to support their psychological requirements. This deductive system provided the bedrock for the development of Muslim dogma