

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and His Approach to Modern Challenges in Turkey

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The acceleration of European imperial expansion into Muslim lands on the one hand and on the other the serious decline of the power, prosperity, and dynamic expansionism of imperial Islam in the last years of the eighteenth century posed a challenge of a magnitude that Muslim world had never faced before. Consequently a major shift in power occurred by the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Prior to the European conquest of Muslim lands, foreign invaders such as the Crusader, Mongol may have caused horrific material and human damage, but were not able either to undermine Muslim societies' cultural and religious foundations or shake Muslims' belief in the superiority of their values and civilisation. None of the earlier conquerors had been able to offer an alternative system of values and law that could claim to be superior to those of Islam and hence capable of replacing those values and laws as the organising principles of Muslim societies at both spiritual and material levels. On the contrary, in due course earlier invaders had accepted Islam as faith and civilisation and had expanded it to new frontiers, as is illustrated by the Mughal Empire of India and by the Ottoman Empire, which resurrected the caliphate and extended Islam's frontiers to Europe¹. But as a result of Western colonial domination, the Islamic world experienced cataclysmic changes in the field of social, economic, political as well as on the ideological level. Western imperialism precipitated a religious as well as a political crisis. Amidst this confusion and transaction of the Muslim world great many personalities like Jamal al Din Al Afghani (Assadabadi) (1838 -1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-

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1905), Rashid Rida (1865-1935), in the subcontinent— Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) Muhammad Iqbal (1875-1938) and in Turkey Bedizzaman Said Nursi(1873- 1960) emerged to respond this situation and to ameliorate the conditions of the Muslims in their respective places. They endeavoured to revive Islam and reform Muslim societies within and without. Turkey was the leader of the Muslim world up to the beginning of the 20th century, although she was already in decline but the Muslims around the world were looking towards Turkey (Ottoman Caliphate), about which the Bernard Lewis writes:

From its foundation until its fall the Ottoman Empire was a state dedicated to the advancement or defence of the power and faith of Islam. For six centuries the Ottomans were almost constantly at war with Christian West, first in the attempt.....to impose Islamic rule on a large part of Europe, and then in the long-drawn-out rearguard action to halt or delay the relentless counter-attack of the West. For the Ottoman Turk, his Empire, containing all the heartlands of early Islam, was Islam itself. In Ottoman chronicles the territories of the Empire are referred to as 'the lands of Islam', its sovereign as 'the Padishah of Islam', its armies as 'the soldiers of Islam', its religious head as 'the *seyh* of Islam'; its people thought of themselves first and foremost as Muslims. Both Ottoman and Turk are, as we have seen, terms of comparatively recent usage, and the Ottoman Turk had identified themselves with Islam — submerged their identity in Islam —to a greater extent than perhaps any other Islamic people. It is curious that while in Turkey the word Turk almost went out of use, in the West it came to be a synonym for Muslim, and a Western convert to Islam was said to have 'turned Turk', even when the conversion took place in Fez or Isfahan.²

Unfortunate for the Muslim world, Turkey started looking towards West and there by leaving the Muslim world leaderless. At the time Badiuzzaman Said Nurse was born, conflict between East and West was at its peak (two general trends may be

discerned—Islamists and the westernizers, with wide range of compromise and confusion between them). In general the West had overwhelmed to a large extent, the Muslim world on the whole was itself in confusion, as the Western Civilisation and culture had inflicted cursing defeat to the Muslim world. Most of the institutions of Muslim world were crumbling, e.g. political, educational system, Judiciary etc, rather, was all losing its battle against the West. However, the process of secularisation in the other parts of the Muslim world was gradual and surreptitious but in Turkey it was unparalleled in their radical and explicit nature. The entire fabric of traditional Islamic life of Turkey was torn apart expeditiously by the leaders of secularisation led by Mustafa kemal Pasha (Ataturk). The dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, the abolition of the Caliphate in 1923, and their replacement with a secular Turkish republic were momentous event in the history of the Islamic world. The promotion of an extreme nationalism, the replacement of the Shari'a by importing European codes, the elimination of an independent *ulama* class and the Islamic endowments (*waqf*), closure of religious schools (*madrassa*), the substitution of the Roman for the Arabic script, the proscription of the Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqats*), and various sumptuary measures were taken to dethrone Islam from public life.³

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi occupies a special place in modern Turkey and Islamic thought. He led movement for the revival of Islamic belief and faith, and displayed a rare combination of integrity, dedication and clarity of thought. He emerged as one of the leading religious scholar of the highest standing who had wide knowledge of modern science and many areas of modern life and learning, to say that he stands like a colossus above twentieth century Muslim scholarship in Turkey is no overstatement. He is regarded as the *mujadid* and is deemed to be the saviour of an Islam in Turkey, and the most proficient Turkish Muslim theologian and exegete in the modern era who interpreted the tenets of the Qur'an in accordance with the understanding and demands of the day. Throughout his life he endeavoured to defend the Islamic faith

and responded the challenges Muslim world facing. He fought for the defence of Islam and the Ottoman *Khilafah* in the battle field. He fought also with his pen, producing many works, writings too for newspapers and journals. He gave sermons and speeches and addressed gatherings large and small. His *magnum opus*, the *Risale-i Nur*, is for all intents and purposes a commentary on the Qur'an; it is not a work of exegesis in the technical sense of the word, though he was clearly an exegete. *Risale-i Nur* is his main contribution which he left for posterity, which continues to satiate the thirst of many for belief and knowledge in Turkey and outside it.

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi was born in the small village of Nurs, in the province of *Bitlis* in eastern Turkey. The year of his birth is given as 1293 according to the Rumi calendar then in use in the Ottoman *calipate* which is equivalent to 1876. However, there are different dates given for Badiuzzaman's birth, the consensus is on above mentioned date.⁴ At time of his birth he showed some extraordinary signs and was given the name Said.⁵ His mother was called Nuriye, and his father, a villager with a small holding of land, was Mirza. They were a Kurdish family. His parents were devoted and virtuous, in later years, Said used to say, "from my mother I learnt compassion, and from my father, orderliness and regularity."⁶ Said was the fourth of seven children. While there are reports that he himself claimed that he was descended from the Prophet (SAAS) through both of his parents, there is no official record of his family being *Sayyid*.⁷ Badiuzzaman Said Nursi spent his early life with his family in the village Nurs, a life close to the natural world, in harmony with its rhythms and cycles, full of natural wonders for an aware and responsive child like him. He was unusually intelligent, always investigating things, questioning and seeking answer.

His education began at the age of nine, having no school in his town he accompanied his elder brother, Molla Abdullah, to Molla Mehmed Emin Efendi's *madrassa* in the village of Tag, near Ispart, but did not stayed there for long and returned back to his town Nurs. Throughout his childhood and youth Said Nursi displayed a

precocious talent and arrogance that caused him angrily to leave one *madrassa* after another. For about one year's stay at Nurs he, once again, set off to continue his studies first to the village of Pirmis, and then to the summer pastures of the Hizan Sheikh, the Naqshbandi Seyyid Nur Muhammad Efendi. After remaining a while longer with Seyyid Nur Muhammad Efendi, Nursi went to his village of Nursi with his elder brother, Abdullah. Since it was summer, they then left the village for high pastures of shaykhan, attended the Tag *madrassa* of Shaykh Abdurrahman Tagi, were again he had argument with the teacher Mehmed Emin Efendi and returned back to Nurs. That winter he spent in home village of Nurs, during that period he had a powerful dream in which saw the Prophet (SAW). Inspired by this vision and filled with a renewed desire for education, he decided in 1888 to leave Nurs once again going first to the village of Arvas and from there to Shaykh Emin Efendi's *madrassa* in Bitlis. Not getting proper attention from the teacher there in Bitlis because of tender age, Said set off for the Mir Hassan Veli *Madrassa* at Müküs (Bahceseray), whose principle was Molla Abdülkerim. Unhappy with the fact that the new, lower grade students were accorded no importance, Nursi left for Vastan (Gevash), near Van. After a month there, he set off with companion called Molla Mehmed for (Dogu) Bayezit, a small town in the province of Erzurum and it was here that his real studies commenced, and his educational nomadism ended.

Said Nursi resumed his studies in the [Dogu] Bayezit *Madrassa* under the congenial guidance of Shaykh Mehmet Jalali, within three months he completed the entire course of study current in the *madrassa*. To complete the course under normal conditions took the average student fifteen to twenty years. Said Nursi was fourteen years old at that time, the astonishing number of works that he read, memorised and digested in this short period of time shows his remarkable power of memory, and exceptional intelligence and understanding.⁸ Whichever of the book he studied he would understand it without seeking any body's assistance, and was able to study and master the difficult and voluminous works

like *Jam 'ü'l-Jawami'*, *Sharhu'l-Mawaqif*, and *Ibn ü'l-Hajar uin* in twenty-four hours. During that period he cut off from outside world and passed much of time and even the nights in the mausoleum of the Kurdish saint and literary figure Ahmad Hani. Along with his studies he imposed upon himself extreme discipline and solitude. At the end of the course he obtained his *icazet* (diploma) from Shaykh Mehmed Jalali, the Principle of the Beyazid Madrassa; thereafter he was to be known as 'Molla Said'⁹.

After receiving *icazet* (diploma), he intended to visit the tomb of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani in Baghdad, one of his main spiritual influences, although prevented himself becoming involved with the sufi *tariqah*, the influence of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani remained from his childhood and throughout his life and continued to receive spiritual guidance and assistance through his saintly influence.¹⁰ On his way to Baghdad, he passed through Bitlis, where he attended the lectures of Shaykh Mehmet Emin Efindi. Instead of going to Baghdad Said Nursi, now Molla Said, began to move from village to village and town to town in the Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, spending time with a number of famous local scholars and 'ulamâ' engaging in outspoken debates with the 'ulamâ' of Shirvan, Siirt, Mardin, Bitlis, and Tillo. In all his debates he accepted challenges and defeated his opponents, his reputation became firmly established. In Siirt, the famous Molla Fethullah Efendi examined Said Nursi on the text he had read and learnt, he was amazed by the latter's response and said, "for this degree of memory and intelligence to be combined in one person is indeed rare."¹¹ Thereafter the people of Siirt regarded Molla Said as something of a 'Vali', or saint. It is from this point onwards he became known as '*Said-i Meshur*' – the famous Said.

As the Said Nursi's popularity and fame was growing, so was his difficulties, he was often expelled from a city after the conclusion of the debate mostly because of the jealousy of the lesser scholars and students of the area. It was in Tillo, where he had gone to confine himself to memorise an Arabic Lexicon, the *Qamusu'l-Okyanus*, and later worked among the tribes as

conciliator and a man of religion. Said Nursi relates, there, he dreamt of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani who instructed him to go to Mustafa Pasha, the head of the Miran tribe, "and summon him to obedience to the Shari'a: to cause him to stop his acts of lawlessness and to begin praying"¹², this he did accordingly without any fear and peremptorily conveyed the message. Thereby moving on to Mardin, where besides contests of successful scholarly debates with *'Ulama*, he came across several personalities who according to his own words, "awakened him politically" and became aware about the wider issues facing the Islamic world. There he studied the works of Namik Kemal (1840- 88) ¹³especially '*The Dream*'. It is written in the form of an address to the nation by a heavenly representative of 'Freedom' and urges liberation from despotism, struggle in the way of nation, progress, and the prosperity of the fatherland (*vatan*). Thus, it was at this time in Mardin that young, Said Nursi first became aware of the struggle for freedom and constitutional government which the Young Ottomans had been pursuing since the 1860's. Since then he espoused the ideas of Freedom, constitutional government, and the rule of law throughout his life.¹⁴ He also got acquainted with the ideas of other Islamic thinker like Sayyid Jamal al-Din al- Afgani and Sanusi leaders in Mardin. He then moved to Bitlis and on the insistence of the Governor, Omer Pasha, he stayed there for two years in his residence. During these two years Said Nursi was able to greatly augment his knowledge of Islamic sciences. He embarked upon the comprehensive study of all the Islamic sciences, with a mature brain, these include such as Logic and Arabic grammar and syntax, as well as the main sciences of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*). He committed to the memory around forty books in two years, including works on theology (*kalam*), like the *Matali'* and *Mawaqif*, and the work of Hanefi fiqh, *Mirqat*. In Batlis he began to memorise the Qur'an, by reading one or two *juz* each day, he learnt the greater part in this way, but did not complete it. Simultaneously he engaged in the study of '*ilm al-kalam* and modern science and it appears that he began to sense the growing

need for a fresh exposition and defence of the Qur'anic message in the face of modern materialism. The Governor's residence in Batlis provided a favourable environment to pursue this programme. Further more, Said Nursi had tremendous love for the great Shaykhs of Anatolia, such as Seyyed Nur Muhammad, Shaykh Abdurrahman Tagi, Shaykh Fehim and Shaykh Mehmed Kufrawi, from each of whom he had received lessons and instructions in different aspects of the spiritual life, and frequented them. And so also did he greatly love the leading 'Ulama such as Shaykh Emin Efendi, Molla Fethullah, and Shaykh Fethullah Efendi, who had taught him. From Bitlis, Said Nursi moved to Van, Where, at the initial invitation of the governor, Hassan Pasha, he was to stay for the next fifteen years. After the appointment of Hassan Pasha's successor, Tahir Pasha, Nursi accepted to move into the governor's residence. With the exception of his visit to Istanbul, he was to stay there off and on studying and teaching, and travelling among the tribes as a conciliator and man of religion until he left for Istanbul at the end of 1907. Tahir Pasha was a respected official of the sultan Abdulhamid II. A renowned patron of learning, he owned an extensive library and followed developments in modern science and technology with great enthusiasm. He was the first state official to recognise Said Nursi's considerable talent and potential, and continued to give encouragement and support until his death in 1913. Staying in the Governor's residence, Said Nursi had opportunity to mix with the government officials and took up reading the newspapers and journals provided for Governor's office. He was able to gain knowledge thereby of the broader problems facing Ottoman society and the wider Muslim world. Taking advantage of the facilities, he himself took up the study of the modern science, including history, geography, mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and philosophy. Said Nursi continued to study the Islamic sciences in depth, during that period he memorised approximately ninety important books which he considered as steps to ascend the truths of Qur'an. After memorising them, rather ascending to those truths, he said: "I saw that each verse of the

Qur'an encompasses the universe. No need then remained for anything else, the Qur'an alone was sufficient for me."¹⁵ It was at this time that as a result of these feats of learning and prodigious amount of knowledge he was acquiring, traditional as well as modern, Said Nursi now became widely known as 'Bediuzzaman' ('nonpareil of the times' or 'wonder of the age'). Bediuzzaman Said Nursi had his own *madrassa* in Van, at the foot of the citadel, called the *Horhor Medrasa*, with sometimes as many as sixty students, and it was during his stay in Van, that he developed ideas of educational reform and created his own particular method of teaching. The basis of this method was to 'combine' the religious sciences and modern sciences, with the result that the positive sciences would co-relate the truths of religion. Thereafter he followed this method when teaching his students.¹⁶

Said Nurse's eventful life of eighty-seven years embrace the final decades of Ottomans caliphate and the first 35 years in the life of the Turkish republic, and reflects the fundamental change that has taken place in the twentieth-century Turkey. Said Nursi himself used, indeed, to divide his life into the period of the "Old Said" (*eski Said*) and the "New Said" (*yeni Said*), the change coinciding approximately with the institution of the republic. Said Nursi responded to the modern challenges in a scholarly pattern. Envisaging the growing effects of atheism and materialism in the society, he engaged in the study of *'Ilm Al-Kalam* and modern science at an early age of 17 years during 1890/ 1892 in Bitlis and Van under the support and encouragement of Tahir Pasha, then the governor of Van. Thereby, he was able to gain knowledge of the broader problems facing Ottoman society and the wider Muslim world. It was probably at this juncture that he realised for the first time that traditional Muslim theology alone was unable to answer the doubts concerning Islam that has been raised as a result of the growth of materialism, and that a study of modern science was necessary. It appears that he began to sense the growing need for a fresh exposition and defence of the Qur'anic message in the face of modern materialism.

He also showed an increasing interest in the inner life (spiritual life), and frequented various prominent Sufi Shaykhs of eastern Anatolia. Although he was not Sufi in the traditional sense of the word and never submitted formally to the guidance of any Shaykh, one may be justified in calling him a 'non-order – affiliated Sufi'. He regarded the structure and concern of the *tariqah* as inappropriate to the circumstances of the age, the influence of Sufism upon him was profound, and can be seen to have permeated the entirety of his writings. He was deeply imbued with Sufi spirituality, had enjoyed the company of Sufi shaykhs, and frequently quoted from Sufi writings, above all the *maktubat* of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624). But he declared that under the conditions of the present Dark Age there were more pressing concerns than the cultivation of *tasawwuf*. The whole basis of faith was threatened and the practice of the *sharia*'s prerequisites for all authentic Sufism – suspended. According to him;

Since the reality of the matter is thus, my conjecture is that if persons like Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani and Shah Naqshband and Imam-i-Rabbani were alive at the present time, they would expend all their efforts in strengthening the truths of belief and tenets of Islam, for they are the means to eternal happiness. If there is deficiency in them, it results in eternal misery. A person without belief may not enter paradise, but very many have gone to paradise without Sufism. Man cannot live without bread, but he can live without fruit. Sufism is like fruit; the truth of the Quran, basic sustenance. In former times, through spiritual journeying from forty days to as much as forty years, a person might rise to some of the truths of belief. But now, if through Almighty Allah's mercy there is a way to rise to those truths in forty minutes, it surely is not sensible to remain indifferent to it.¹⁷

It is clear from Said Nursi's own words, that, given the socio-cultural context of his society, the way of the Sufis was difficult to follow and, as a method of reaching the truth, slow to produce results. He concluded (*The Letters*, 40) that the twentieth century

was not the time for Sufism.¹⁸ Therefore, according to Said Nursi, with the advent of modernity and atheism, many people have either lost or are in search of faith, and the only method appropriate today is one which appeals to both the heart and the intellect.

Said Nursi developed his ideas on educational reform and created his own method of teaching, combining the religious science with modern science. He also conceived the project of a religious university by the name of *Madrassat al-zehra* where the revived science of religion should be taught and cultivated. The special characteristic of the projected *madrassa* was that the modern sciences were to be taught together with traditional subjects, for "the religious sciences are the light of the conscience, and the art of the civilisation, are the light of the intellect: truth becomes manifest from the junction of these two".¹⁹ The projected *madrassa* was to aid in the reconciliation and fusion of three antagonistic groups: the adherents of modern learning, the students of the traditional sciences and the followers of the Sufi Tariqahs. However he could not materialise this project, despite getting support and aid from the Sultan at Istanbul (nineteen thousand liras were allotted for the construction of the *madrassa*, and a site was selected for it on the shores of Lake Van, but before building could begin, Balkan war broke out, and the project was to remain unfulfilled.²⁰

Throughout his life, Said Nursi, emphasised the need for Islamic unity and to prevent the fragmentation of the Muslim world, following Jamal al-din al-Afghani's line in this respect. In the Damascus Sermon he said: 'for the strongest bond of Arabs, Turk, Kurd, Albanian, Circassian and Laz, and their firmest nationhood is nothing other than Islam'. He believed that working towards Islamic brotherhood and unity was a religious obligation and one of the most important means of societal change. For Said Nursi, nationalism of any kind was a secular political phenomenon which would break the Islamic bonds between Muslims. He supported the idea of pan-Islamic unity, rather than Western notion's of nationalism. He rejected the unqualified adoption of the western ideals for their own sake, without thought for their deleterious

impact on Muslim societies.²¹

Said Nursi did not remain indifferent to the politics in the capital of Turkey, even though playing no important part in it. He was a champion of freedom, constitutional government, and role of law throughout his life. However, he claims that he was “awakened politically” by the works of Namik Kemal, and by two students, one among them was the follower of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1255/1839 - 1315/1897), (who in the summer of 1892 was brought to Istanbul by Sultan Abdul Hamid in order to use him in furthering his pan-Islamic politics) and another member of the Sanusi movement, which played an important role in north Africa²². Nursi was not entirely hostile to the Sultan Abdul Hamid, but he appears to have favoured the Society of Union and Progress and supported the rebellion of July 1908 against the Sultan that resulted in the re-establishment of the Ottoman Constitution. Later he was disappointed with the Society of Union and Progress as he saw the liberty claimed by the movement assuming an anti-religious aspect. He countered this by contributing articles to the news paper *Volkan*, organ of the group known as the Ittihad-i Muhammadi, (this organisation was led by a Bektashi dervish from Cyprus called Vahdeti) having its aim the regeneration of the Ottoman State on the basis of Islamic lines. As far as the Constitutional Movement in Turkey is concerned, he supported the constitution only to be based on shari’ah and argued, as long as it was consonant with the corpus of Islamic injunctions, it would be ‘means of upholding the might of Islam and exalting the word of God’²³. In Salonica he delivered speech in the defence of Constitutionalism and its essential compatibility with Islam. He even attempted to arouse sympathies for the constitutional cause among the masses. As it is quoted that he has said “so that the *shari’ah* might be elevated through the constitution and the constitution strengthened through the *shari’ah*”. According to him monarchical government tended to deprive the Muslims of responsibility for their own affairs; everything was left to the Sultan, and a loyalty was accorded him that belonged properly to Allah. He never

supported the use of force, for example, during the uprising of April 1909 in which Ittihad-i-Muhammadi organisation played a significant role, Said Nursi wrote a number of articles for the Istanbul press, on the one hand urging the soldiers to abandon their mutiny and on the other stressing the essential legitimacy of their demand. In 1925 when there broke out a full-scale insurrection against the regime in Ankara, led by the Naqshbandi Shaykh Said. Said Nursi had no connection with the revolt, but it is recorded that he attempted to dissuade the rebels from shedding the blood of the soldiers, who were, after all, fellow Muslims, irrespective of the nature of the regime.²⁴ He wrote the following to Shykh Said:

The Turkish nation has for centuries been the standard bearer of Islam. It has produced many saints and given many martyrs. Weapons may not be drawn against the sons of such a nation. We are Muslims, they are our brothers. We may not set brother against brother. It is not permissible according to the Shari'a. The sword may be drawn against an external enemy; it may not be used internally. Our only salvation at this time is to offer illumination and guidance through the truths of the Qur'an and belief; It is to get rid of our greatest enemy, ignorance. Give up your attempt, for it will be fruitless. Thousands of innocent men and women may perish on account of a few bandits.²⁵

In 1934 when Said Nursi was brought to trial and accused of establishing a secret religious society that had as its goal the subversion of the foundation of the republic. He conducted his own defence, and laid particular stress upon the absurdity of the prosecution claim that he was "exploiting religion for political purposes" in response to that, he said: 'the Quran uncovers the talisman of existence; its scope embraces the entirety of being. How then could religion be made the tool of the narrow and limited sphere of politics? It would be like confining the ocean in a jar²⁶. So, to say, Said Nursi's appeal lay in his uncompromising belief that it is belief (*iman*) which must be renewed and protected, and that other endeavours must be approached with the primacy of

belief in mind. That is why he repudiated the dubious art of politics – and, more importantly, the dubious art of politicking that is buttressed by religion. As he himself averred, serving Islam by means of politics is of little significance when compared with serving it through belief.²⁷ However, it may be mentioned here the old Said was more political than the New Said, and practically took part in war against Russians to defend Ottomans Turkey.

In 1923 after the war of independence the new forces came to power, Said Nursi delivered lecture to the assembly. In it he laid the stress upon the necessity of continued adherence to Islam as the condition of national unity. Islam was the only strength of the Muslims and abandonment of it would be an act of treason. European culture was on the point of collapse and it would be folly to replace Qur'anic civilisation with the bankrupt norms of Europe. However, in Ankara, Said Nursi realised much to his chagrin that the government was pursuing the politics of secularisation, atheistic ideas of philosophic materialism were being propagated and lacks attitude towards Islam and its obligations. Failing to change the situation he left Ankara.

Realising the state of affairs he retreated from the arena of disputation and a disengagement from political activity, remained in isolation, regularly withdrew from social life, seeking solitude in places far from Istanbul life. He devoted himself to the reading of the Quran, *Futuh al-Ghayb* of Shykh 'abd al-Qadir Gilani and the *Maktubat* of Shykh Ahmad Sirhindi. Under the influence of these readings he felt all darkness dispelled within him, and the light of the Quran pervading his whole being. Consequently he concentrated on his dream project of writing the *Risala i Nur – (The Treatise of Light)*. The task was to occupy him for the rest of his life, and by the time of his death 130 separate section of the *Risala- i Nur* had been written. The reason for embarking on it at this stage of his life was his realisation that the abominable current of atheism was treacherously attempting to subvert, poison and destroy their morale. Said Nursi had been conscious for several years of the rise of scepticism and materialism and its challenge to

the traditional primacy of belief. He realised the need for a new Qur'anic commentary- one which, he believed, would prove the truths of belief by a new method which blended science with the truth of religion, and which would address the mentality of modern man and confront the dangers of materialist philosophy. The real need of the age, he was convinced, was to save people from the inauspicious direction in which they were going; to shed the light of the Qur'an on their path so that they might see "the impure and pestilential swamp" that lay ahead of them unless they reverted to the straight path of Islam. Turning away from all political concern, and fortified by an intensification of the inner life, Said Nursi remained, in his own words, "face to face with Qur'an", immersed himself in its luminous wisdom, and sought to refract some of its light through the prism of his own writings.

Thus the New Said started silent struggle against the forces of irreligion. So he embarked upon the task of strengthening the belief of people which had been shaken rather than engaging into political disputation. In the terminology of Sayyid Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi, which he used in his book,²⁸ *Ridatun-Wala Abubakarlahah (the New Menace and its Answer)*. According to him, a good number of Muslims have lost their faith and they have become apostate, apparently they seem like Muslims but they do not practise Islam. And of the Muslims how to address this new menace should be concern the Muslims. It seems that during his stay in Ankara, Said Nursi had realised this situation of weakening of the faith and belief and, therefore, any attempt to ameliorate the situation politically or to make any effort, to push for change would be fruitless and wastage of energy and resources, given that the policies of the new Turkish republic were based on secular materialism. This New Said undertook to renew the belief of Muslim individuals, a build of the individual character of man (*insan sazi*) and who can form an "Islamic society", (*islami ma'ashirah*) rather than to advocate the idea of re-establishing the political structure of the Islamic world. His main concern now was the strengthening of the individual's belief and the search for solution

to the important questions thrown up on human existence. He dealt with the irrefutable truths of belief and demonstrated the logical absurdity of modern materialist philosophy, making it possible for man to attain belief so firm and certain that it could withstand any doubts caused by science or philosophy. Emphasizing that the Qur'an was the only truth and reality, and that man's true happiness and progress could be achieved through adoption of new forms of education and theology.²⁹

Notes and Reference

- ¹ Shireen T. Hunter, ed., *Reformist Voices of Islam* (Pentagon Press, New Delhi , 2009), p. 9.
- ² Bernard Lewis. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) P. 13.
- ³ Hamid Algar, "Said Nursi and the *Risala-i Nur*: An Aspect of Islam in Contemporary Turkey," in *Islamic Perspective* , Kurshed Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari, eds. (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1987) p. 313.
- ⁴ Sukran Vahid . *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Ankara. Ihlas Nur Nesriyat, 2004) p.11.
- ⁵ Edip, Esref, Said Nursi, Hayati, Eserleri, Meslegi, 17 as quoted in Ibid. P.11.
- ⁶ Sahiner, Necmeddin, *Nurs yolu*. Istanbul, 1977, p.69 as quoted in Sukran Vahid . *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*, p.12.
- ⁷ Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 5.*
- ⁸ Sukran Vahid . *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*, pp.18-19.
- ⁹ Ibid. P.20.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. P.13.
- ¹¹ Ibid. P.22.
- ¹² Badiuzzaman Said Nursi [tarih«e] *Risale-i Nur Külliyati Müellifi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. hayati, Mesleki, Tercüme-i Hali*. Istanbul, Sozler Yayinevi, 1976, as quote in Ibid. P. 26. And also see Hamid Algar, "Said Nursi and the *Risala-i Nur*:", *Op.cit. p314*
- ¹³ Namik Kamal is best known in Turkey as the apostle of two ideas: Freedom and Fatherland. In a long series of articles, essays, novels, plays, poems he brought to the Turkish Muslim readers these two characteristic ideas of the French Revolution, but in a form adapted

to Muslim tradition and attitudes. Despite his fervent patriotism and liberalism, he was a sincere and devoted Muslim, and the Fatherland, of which he speaks, though he uses a term denoting territory and not community, is Islamic no less than Ottomans. Throughout his life he remained firmly attached to traditional Muslim values and beliefs, and was often sharply critical of the men of the *Tanzimat* for their failure to safeguard and preserve the best of the old Islamic tradition...he upheld Islamic values and defended Islamic achievements against European belittlers, and even advanced the idea of a pan-Islamic unity, under Ottoman leadership, to accept, adapt, and diffuse modern civilisation through Asia and Africa, and thus create an Eastern balance of power to counter that of Europe. Bernard Lewis. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. Pp. 141-42.

¹⁴ Sukran Vahid. *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*. *Op.cit.* PP. 32-33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p 40.

¹⁶ Badiuzzaman Said Nursi [tarih«e] *Risale-i Nur Külliyyati Müellifi*, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, *Op.cit.* P. 45. quoted in *Ibid.* P41.

¹⁷ *The letters 1997, 41*, as quoted in Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), p.89. and also see *Said Nursi, Hakikat nurlari {Istanbul, 1960}* p47 much of this work is devoted to a discussion of the Sufism. On the same topic see also *Munazirat* pp59—64.as quote by Hamid Algar p-329].

¹⁸ *op.cit.* Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc. Pp. 86- 90

¹⁹ Said Nursi, *munazarat* Istanbul, 1958, pp.71-76. As quoted in Hamid Algar, "Said Nursi and the *Risala-i Nur*: An Aspect of Islam in Contemporary Turkey" in *Islamic Perspective*, Kurshed Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari ed.(Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1987) p.315 *Op.cit.* Hamid Algar, p. 317.

²¹ *op.cit.* Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, , p, 95.

²² Sukran Vahid . *The Auther of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Ankara. Ihlas Nur Nesriyat, 2004) p.33.

²³ Sukran Vahide, 'The Life and Times of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi' in the *Muslim World (Special Issue: Said Nursi and the Turkish Experi-ence)* 89 (1999), p 216 as quoted in Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, p 14. On Bediuzzaman's ideas on constitution and freedom also see Sukran Vahid . *The Auther of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*, pp.84—90.

²⁴ Hamid Algar. P, 319.and also see Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc. p. 22.

²⁵ Sahiner, N. *Said Nursi*, 254-5 quoted from the personal notes of zubeyir Gunduzalp, one of Bediuzzaman's closest and most influential

- student in the last ten years of his life. As quoted in Sukran Vahid .
The Auther of the Risale-i Nur Badiuzzaman Said Nursi. p.294.
- ²⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: *Hayati, mesleki, tercume-i hali*, Istanbul 1960. Pp203 -210), as quote in Hamid Algar. P 32f.
- ²⁷ Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *P-3 and p,34.*
- ²⁸ Abul hasan ali Nadwi, *The New Menace and its Answer*, (Nadwatul-Ulma, Lacknow. Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, n.d.).
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp33-34.