بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ.

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST BENEFICENT, THE MOST MERCIFUL.
“The Ottoman state is pregnant with Europe and it will give birth to a European state one day. And Europe is pregnant with Islam; one day it will give birth to an Islamic state.”

(Bedîuzzaman Said Nursi)
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved husband. The care and support he showed throughout the research was indeed incomparable. Without his endorsement I could never have accomplished this journey successfully, so the saying “behind every successful man there is a women” goes reverse in my case.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praises and gratitude goes to Almighty Allah, The Most Beneficent and The Most Merciful, Whose countless blessings were the major support at every stage and level throughout this long and difficult journey. After Him the person who deserves my thanks is my beloved mother. I would like to express my gratefulness for her unconditional support and prayers. She looked after my son more affectionately while I had to be away for the research work.

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Shumaila Majeed
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INTRODUCTION

Islam is the final and universal religion, presented in a complete form before mankind by Allah the Almighty, as declared in the Quran:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ فَإِنَّمَا مَاتَ الْأَمْثَالُ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَاحُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ الْاَمْرَ اَتَّبَعُوهُ وَأَجَابُواْ لِلَّهِ مَا أَرَادَهُ وَاللَّهُ لَا تَحْمِلُ عَلَى الْأَمْثَالِ ثَلَثَاءً حَسَنَاءً فَرَاحَ بَعْضُهُم بِبَعْضٍ إِلَّا مَاتَ الْأَمْثَالُ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَاحُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ الْاَمْرَ اَتَّبَعُوهُ وَأَجَابُواْ لِلَّهِ مَا أَرَادَهُ وَاللَّهُ لَا تَحْمِلُ عَلَى الْأَمْثَالِ ثَلَثَاءً حَسَنَاءً

―This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you and have chosen for you as religion Al Islam‖

Since Islam is a complete religion for every nation and for all times to come, its followers face different conditions in different eras. Allah has bestowed on the believers a few means of “divine arrangements for the existence of Islam” to enable them to face varied circumstances. Firstly, believers have been blessed with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which have the capacity to face the challenges of all ages. Secondly, as per the divine scheme, there emerges a mujadid (revivalist), whenever Islamic teachings are either corrupted or come under suspicion. The mujadid restore the teachings of Islam in their purified form and expel the doubts in such a way that it again becomes acceptable for people. This is what has been referred to by the prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعُثُ لِهذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ عَلَى رِئَاسَ كُلِّ مَائِثَةِ سَنَةَ مِنْ يُحْدِدُ لَهَا دِينَهَا

“Allah will raise, at the head of each century such people for this Ummah who will revive its religion for it”

---

1 Qur’an 5:3.
4 Abu Dawud, Sunan Abu Dawud, book of Battles, 1(4291), accessed August 20, 2016, http://sunnah.com/abudawud/39. Although few scholars of hadith are dubious about the transmitters of this tradition. However, there are many other sayings of Prophet whose validity is questionable but historical experiences have confirmed their accuracy see Maulana Abdul Bari Nadvi, Jaame Al Mujaddidin (Lahore: Almaqtaba tul Ashrafiya, n.d), 22.
The names of some prominent figures who were charged with the duty of revival in the history are: Umer bin Abdul Aziz, Ahmad Ibn e Hanbal, Abul Hasan al-ash’ari, Imam Ghazali, Ibn e Taimiya, Mujaddid Alif Sani, Shah Wali Ulla, and many other savants like these generated same efforts under the specific conditions and demands of their respective ages, consequently their endeavors resulted with the revitalization of Islamic beliefs.\(^5\)

The renewal of Islam is still an on-going process and the need for reconstruction is more pressing than ever before. The political downfall the Muslim nation experienced towards the end of nineteenth and early part of twentieth century allowed Western Civilization to engender an unprecedented turmoil which was not limited to a particular Muslim country; rather impacted the whole Muslim world. Also, there was another factor that made such attacks on Islam more lethal than ever before. In the past, the Muslims led the world but now they were subjugated in political, cultural and intellectual field, which had left them suffering from inferiority complex and defenseless against the anti-Islamic forces. During this period Muslim scholars in different regions have been rendering their services according to their capacities for revitalization of Muslims’ belief. The names of Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979) and Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) in Subcontinent, Hassan-ul-Banna (1906-1949), Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and Muhammad Abduhu (1849-1905) in Egypt, Rashid Rida (1865-1935) in Ottoman Syria, and many other leaders are very well-known in this successful defense. The person who discharged this duty in Turkey in twentieth century is Bediuzzaman Said Nursi who undoubtedly is one of the great personalities of the century. The way Islam got revived in Turkey as a result of his efforts is really unique perhaps in the whole Islamic history. When the process of Westernization began in the result of Tanzimat reforms, the dominance of the western thoughts had made utility of religion doubtful in the eyes of one social class of Turkey. After the collapse of Ottoman Empire unluckily those people rose to the authority who considered Islam responsible for the decline of Empire. So they generated such a revolution in Turkey against the religion which was unprecedented in the entire history of Islam. As a result, in Turkey which had itself been a fighter country for Islam through ages, the future and survival of Islam was at stake. It is the real dignity and

importance of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi that he became the torch bearer of Islam in those
gruesome and unfavorable conditions and after an incessant struggle of twenty five years
through which he had to face so many problems of imprisonments, banishments and trials, he
succeeded in changing the status of his country ‘Turkey’ from an anti religious state into
once again a follower of Islam. In Sarwat Saulat words:

“This act of his is such a great achievement as one cannot find another
example like this in the whole Islamic history except Mujaddad Alf Sani. And
when we observe that the conditions confronted by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi
were more dangerous than those of Mujaddad Alf Sani, the significance of the
achievements of Nursi becomes more unparalleled.”

History of Islam witnessed three types of such situations when there came a time of decline
for Muslims in which revivalists emerged to compete those conditions, in order to save
Muslims’ beliefs and practices. i: people indulged in any form of shirk (polytheism); ii,
people got involved in any form of asceticism (rahbaniyat); iii: or they denied God’s
influence in this universe due to the affects of atheism. A revivalist normally faces any one
of three different sets of circumstances. Nursi was faced with the third one. When due to the
impact of materialist philosophies, skepticism penetrated in the ideas of Ottoman Muslim
intelligentsia. As Soon As they were raised to the authority, they established an aggressive
secular state in which religion stood the matter of past. In such conditions the biggest
challenge was to save the beliefs of Muslims.

**Said Nursi as Reconstructionist:**

Maulana Maududi describes some qualities of a revivalist the main characteristics are as
follows:
i: Diagnosis of the current ailments: to examine thoroughly how and to what extent Ignorance
crept in.
ii: Scheme for reformation: to determine exactly where to strike the blow.
iii: Intellectual revolution: to shape the ideas, beliefs and moral view-points of the people
into the Islamic mould.

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8 Ibid., 24.
One can observe all the above qualities in the personality of Said Nursi. He very rightly diagnosed the ailments of his society. The basis of Badiuzzaman Nursi’s strength lies in the fact that he had grasped his difficulties and pitfalls and very realistically evaluated the conditions which Muslims were suffering from. The age in which Nursi lived is considered the most critical period in human history. The most diverse incidents occurred one after another as had never been experienced by mankind. For instance, in his youth Nursi witnessed the age of dying Muslim state and various efforts for the survival of the Empire. Then he experienced terrible disasters of World War I, which was followed by the collapse of great Empire. This was also followed by the establishment of an aggressive secular state (Turkish Republic) which carried out a huge campaign of eradicating religion from all spheres of life. Then he also experienced the pain of Second World War. Finally, he observed the era of multi party regime in Turkey. The variety of circumstantial changes faced by Nursi had hardly been faced by any other Muslim thinker or scholar. Nursi’s greatest quality lies in the fact that he shaped his approach to reconstruction according to the change in circumstances. His life has accordingly been divided into three phases: Old Said, New Said and Third Said. In each of these phases his scheme for reformation is different but corresponds to the changed socio-political situations. In Old Said phase, he used political means to save the Ottoman Empire from decline because reconstruction was possible only through such means during that time. But, when conditions changed and a secular government was established, Nursi changed his strategy and discontinued his struggle to bring change with political means. The challenges he faced in the second phase made the use of political means not only futile but also counterproductive. Maryam Jameelah⁹ has comprehended his mission absolutely. In her letter to monthly magazine “Nur”, America, which was published in the magazine in October 1975, she describes the distinctions of Said Nursi among his contemporaries in following words:

“Unlike other Muslim revivalists, he did not prepare splendid plans for the Islamic universal political, social and economical systems which cannot be put into practice in the near future… Bediuzzaman with his visionary insight

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⁹A convert Muslim female and author (1934-2012) of numerous books on the topic of Islam and west, her real name was Margaret Marcus, she belonged to a Jewish American family, embraced Islam in 1961 and afterward permanently settled in Pakistan.
had comprehended it fully that it would be meaningless to participate in practical politics in such conditions. He understood that political revolution was not a way to Islamic revolution, as such a revolution may be countered back with some other revolution and the result of this conflict would be more torture and cruelties. Therefore he quite wisely, refrained himself from establishing a rigid and inflexible organization because such an organization can easily be banned by some dictator in the helm; ... Unlike this, Said Nursi strengthened the roots of faith in the hearts of millions of Turks through his preaching and his writings. This was such a revolution as could not be banned and even a despotic dictator could not constraint its teachings. The methodology of Nursi movement is quite suitable for the people who are compelled to live under the system of coerciveness, which now has become the fate of Muslim countries. Unlike other Islamic movements of different countries, this movement has proven its capacity of growing up even in hostile environment. It is no exaggeration to claim that survival of Islam in Turkey today is due to the tireless efforts of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi."

Nursi adopted the method of ma’navi (metaphorical) jihad in the second phase which was a silent, non aggressive struggle against the threats of his time. He started writing Risale-i Nur. It was the need of the time to focus on the savior of an individual’s belief and intellectual revolution with purpose to mould one’s ideas moral view into Islamic pattern. According to him, the two ailments responsible for the downfall of Muslim world were the weakness of faith and unprecedented attacks by materialists and atheists in the name of science and development. Therefore, he only concentrated on the revitalization of faith and jihad of the word for the reconstruction of Muslim society. His commentary on the Quran Risale-i Nur explains to modern mind the basic tenets of belief and the truths of the Quran. Further, it presents a critical analysis of belief and unbelief, proving through logical arguments that the truths of belief i.e. God’s existence and unity, prophet-hood and resurrection are not only rationally justifiable but also the only logical explanation of existence, man and the universe.

He argues that the spectacular discoveries of science support and confirm the truths of religion.

The term ‘reconstruction’ has been used in the title of the thesis as an equivalent to revival (tajdid), the idea to select ‘reconstruction’ for tajdid was derived from Allama Iqbal’s *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.\(^{11}\) Iqbal employed this term to mean system of repair\(^{12}\) and tajdid. The other reason for using the term reconstruction is that the term implies the search for the solutions of the problems of Muslim community in the light of Islam in terms of contemporary settings, so that they could develop some conformity with modern ideas. “In which the irreversible world culture of science and technology could not be ignored.”\(^{13}\) Said Nursi revived the basic tenets of Islam and reconciled these creeds with innovative ideas keeping in view the contemporary settings of the world. For this reason the term ‘reconstruction’ is more suited to Nursi’s program of revival. And one of the Nursi experts Sait Ozerverli frequently mentions this term for Nursi’s project of revival\(^{14}\). Vahide, another Nursi expert, also sometimes employs the same term.\(^{15}\)

Because of Nursi’s unparalleled services, the revival of Islam occurred not only in his life but also continues till now. His movement is a text based movement in Turkey which does not have any membership process. Who so ever starts reading Nursi’s magnum opus Risale-i Nur he becomes the member of Nur community.\(^{16}\) It is also considered that the current trend of

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16 Unlike other Muslim movements Nur community does not have any system of leadership and membership it is a hundred percent volunteer organization. The only requirement to become the part of this community is to read Risale on daily bases (at least half an hour to one hour) with family members, friends or neighbors. It is due to Nursi’s call to his followers to make their houses Risale-i Nur madrasah which seems to have been
de-secularization in Turkey is rooted in the influence of Nur movement. For this reason a
detailed study of Nursi’s approach to reconstruction of society is very important. Secondly,
in Turkey the study of Nursi’s thought and Risale-i Nur are recognized as a complete
discipline named as ‘Nursi Studies’. A great amount of work is being carried out on different
dimensions of Nursi studies at different universities. Istanbul Foundation for Science and
Culture (IFSC) has been holding national and international conferences on Nursi’s thoughts
since 1990 and conducting symposiums once in every three years, in which scholars and
students from around the world participate and many of them present their papers.
Symposiums and conferences are conducted in Turkish, Arabic, and English languages
simultaneously. Thanks to these services of IFSC, Nursi’s work was introduced in Arabic
and English speaking world and a great deal of work on Nursi has already been done in these
two languages. Moreover these academic symposiums have played an important role to
increase the interest in Nursi Studies at international level, which also resulted in the
translation of main volumes of Risale-i Nur in different languages. So far Risale has been
partially translated into 52 different languages. There also has been an increased interest in
Nursi studies at different worldwide universities and institutes in their departments of
theology and inter-faith studies i.e Hartford Seminary USA have introduced Nursi studies in
their curriculum. Likewise in John Carroll University USA, there is Nursi chair in Islamic
Studies department. In Pakistan, however, very little work was carried out on this subject
leaving a vacuum and a comprehensive research work on this subject was needed to fill this
vacuum. Thirdly, it is a timeless quality of Nursi’s thoughts that they are as relevant today as
they were in his own time. The analysis of Muslims’ problems he presented almost a century
ago and the solutions he suggested for those problems remain relevant today. There is a clear
guidance in Nursi’s thought for the reconstruction that Muslim societies need today. While
reading his writings one feels as if the author is addressing the problems Muslims are facing
in this age and time.
After an in-depth analysis of all these points and deep contemplation, the researcher chose
the topic ‘Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Approach to Reconstruction of Muslim Society: An

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dr. Faris Kaya, Personal interview, January 5, 2014.
Analytical Study’. The purpose has been to present a detailed introduction of Nursi to Pakistani society and analyze his great services so that any movement for the revival of Islam in Pakistan may also benefit from Nursi’s method and thoughts.

**Aims and Objectives:**

Major aim of this research is to investigate the methodology or strategy which Bediuzzaman Said Nursi adopted for the reconstruction of society. This will be attained while focusing on following sub objectives:

- inspect the nature of socio-political and historical conditions Nursi faced and the problems he identified along with their solutions
- examine how the changes in the circumstances impacted Nursi’s strategy for the reconstruction of the society
- explore both the common grounds and dissimilarities in his strategies during the different phases of his life
- study effects and outcomes of dynamical strategy
- scrutinize his plans for educational and socio-political reformation
- examine his methodology for the revitalization of Muslims’ beliefs

**Literature Review:**

The written works on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in English language are mainly on biographical account of the great scholar. However a few works provide explanation of his different thoughts, and only a little number of works are conducted to explain the major themes of Risale-i Nur. Here a literature review is given which will help to get the idea which type of works have been conducted so far on Nursi studies in English language and in Pakistan.

The works considered authentic on Nursi’s biography are mainly inscribed by Sukran Vahide, her book: *The Author of the Risale-i Nur collection Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*\(^\text{17}\) and its revised version *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*.

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with an Introduction by M. Abu-Rabi, both are the most detailed and comprehensive sources on Nursi which explain the scholars' life in the light of historical conditions of that time. Besides, some academic papers of Vahide are also significant in this regard i.e. “The Life and Times of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.”19, “A Chronology of Said Nursi's Life”20 and “Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi”21 are very significant sources on Nursi’s life. Similarly, Serif Mardin’s works are also important in this regard. His book Religion and Social change in Modern Turkey the case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi22 explains Nursi’s life in the context of socio-political conditions as well as the influence of main spiritual orders of that time. This is considered the initial scholarly analysis on Nursi’s life in the academic of Nursi studies in English language. His research article “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1873-1960): The Shaping of a Vocation”23 is also a very important source on Nursi’s life. These works of Vahide and Mardin also provide details of social-historical background with political and educational conditions of that time; as well as offer insights on Nursi’s social, political and educational thoughts. In addition Hamid Algar’s works are also among the initial academic sources which introduced Nursi studies to English speaking world. His research publication “Said Nursi and the Risala I Nur an Aspect of Islam in Contemporary Turkey”24 is a detailed life account of Nursi which covers different dimensions of his life. In addition the works of M. Abu-Rabi, who is also considered the pioneer of Nursi studies, also

provide an in-depth insight on Nursi’s life and thoughts. For instance his edited book *Islam at the Crossroads on the Life and Thoughts of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*25, his introduction in the beginning of the book, and his paper “How to Read Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur” in the same book; furthermore his introduction in one of other edited works of him *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur*26, as well as his Introduction in Vahide’s *Islam in Modern Turkey* all are very helpful to understand Nursi’s life, ambitions and different dimensions of his thoughts. Additionally the book *Makers of Islamic Civilization Said Nursi* by Colin Turner & Hasan Horkuc27 also offers a detailed account on Nursi’s life and thoughts particularly on culture, society and politics. This book describes well some of the principle themes of Risale-i Nur. Likewise *An Introduction to Said Nursi, Life, Thought and Writings* edited by Ian Markham & Suendam Birinci Pirim28 provides an overview of Nursi’s life, his concepts of God and the Qur'an, his thoughts of spirituality, and his approach to pluralism. Moreover a detailed work on major themes of Risale by Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*29 also contains chapters of Politics and Civilization, which offer explanation of Nursi’s thoughts in these areas.

Few other sources which cover Nursi’s social and political thoughts include: academic papers of Farid Alatas, “An Agenda for Nursi Studies: Towards the Construction of a Social Theology”30, “The Social Theology of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Critique of Modern

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Civilization”31, and a paper by Sait Ozervarli, “The Reconstruction of Islamic Social Thought…”32 All these provide insights into social thoughts of Nursi. The works Said Nursi’s Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding,33 and Insights from the Risale-I Nur34 are such books in which research essays by Thomas Michel, presented at different conferences and symposiums on Nursi, have been combined; as well as Markham’s Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi35 all the three works offer details on Nursi’s socio-political and ethical teachings and also give details on Nursi’s vision of inter-faith relations. A few further significant sources to understand Nursi’s socio-political thoughts are: Zeki Saritoprak, “Islam and Politics in the Light of Said Nursi’s Writings”36 and a research essay by Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet T. Kuru “Apolitical Interpretation of Islam…”37 both papers examine Nursi’s political thoughts in the context of political situation of that time, and also explain the reasons of Nursi’s indifference to politics. Research paper by Huseyin Celik “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Ideal of Islamic Unity”38 and Ahmed Davutoglu,

“Bediuzzaman and the Politics of the Islamic World in the 20th Century” are also very relevant works pertaining to detailed analysis on Nursi’s socio-political thoughts and efforts. Moreover, a chapter “Print-Based Islamic Discourse: The Nur Movement” in Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* offers an in-depth analysis of Nursi’s socio-political thoughts, with particular focus on the influence of Nur movement in Turkey. Some other informative sources on Nursi’s thoughts about Nationalism are Gokhan Cetinsaya, “Rethinking Nationalism and Islam…” and a book by Camilla T. Nereid, *In the Light of Said Nursi: Turkish Nationalism and the Religious Alternative* are very informative sources. Besides, proceedings of all symposiums on Nursi from 1990 to 2013 in published form, which are available online as well, are also very important for understanding different thoughts of Nursi. A special issue of *The Muslim World*, published about Said Nursi, containing important papers by some leading Nursi scholars is also very significant to understand different dimensions of Nursi’s thoughts.

The sources which explore Nursi’s educational views and features of his Medresetu’z- Zehra project include: Gozutok “The Risale-I Nur and Educational Principles and Methods,” Adem Tatli, “Bediuzzaman’s Education Method” and Alparslan Acikgenc, “An Evaluation of the Risale-I Nur from the Point of View of Knowledge and the

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43 http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/issue/archive


Categorization of Knowledge. Like wise two more papers which provide details on Nursi’s ideas on science and religion: “The Conception of Science in the Risale-I Nur” by Alparslan Acikgenc, and “The Religious Impact of Science and Natural Science in the Writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” by Bekim Agai, are also very relevant. One of unpublised works by Zeyneb Sayilgan “The Medresetu’z-Zehra--Explorations into its Nature and Significance” provides very significant analysis of Nursi’s dream of establishing Medresetu’z-Zehra university. She also proves in the light of Nursi’s statements that the system of dersane (Risale-i Nur study circles) in Turkey, established in the life of Nursi, is the embodiment of Nursi’s dream university. The sources which provide analysis on Nursi’s ideas and contribution on ilm ul kalam (Muslim Theology) are: Ozerverli’s paper “Said Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing Contemporary Islamic Thought,” al-Hamid’s “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Kalam Scholar of the Modern Age,” and Yusuf Sevki’s essay “Said Nursi’s Views on the Science of Kalam…”

On ethical and moral thoughts and teachings of Nursi the book Globalization, Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi edited by Ian Markham and Ibrahim

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Ozdemir\textsuperscript{52} is very relevant work comprising a wide range of essays which explore Nursi’s teachings in the context of ethics. Similarly, the book \textit{Theodicy and justice in Modern Islamic Thought The Case of Said Nursi} edited by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi\textsuperscript{53} offers Nursi’s views on wisdom behind resurrection and tragic conditions in man’s life. It also provides a comparative study of Nursi’s ideas on resurrection and justice with Christian theology. Another work \textit{Seeds of Change} by Mohammed Asim Alvi\textsuperscript{54} provides details on Nursi’s moral and ethical teachings. A recent work by Tubanur \textit{A Muslim Response to Evil, Said Nursi on the Theodicy}\textsuperscript{55} provides a detailed analysis of Nursi’s thoughts on wisdom behind worldly tragedies. In addition Colin Turner’s \textit{The Quran Revealed} also contains some chapters which explain different ethical and morals teachings of Nursi. A chapter “Practical Wisdom and Pastoral Theology” explains Nursi’s perception of wisdom behind dreadful conditions in man’s life.

Some other sources provide comprehensive analysis of Nursi’s perspective of jihad i.e. “Jihad in the Modern Age: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad” by Vahide\textsuperscript{56}; "Reconsidering Jihad: The Perspective of Bediüüzzaman Said Nursi," by Turner\textsuperscript{57}; "The Sufi Conception of Jihad: The Case of Said Nursi," by Hakan Yavuz\textsuperscript{58}. Besides, there are separate chapters on Nursi’s vision of jihad in the books \textit{The Quran Revealed} and \textit{Makers of Islamic Civilization}. The source which offers detailed analysis on Nursi’s spirituality is \textit{Spiritual}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52}Ian Markham and Ibrahim Ozdemir, eds., \textit{Globalization, Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi} (England: Ashgate,2005).
  \item \textsuperscript{53}Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, ed., \textit{Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi} (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010).
  \item \textsuperscript{54}Mohammed Asim Alavi, \textit{Seed of Change Thrilling Leadership Lessons from the Life of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi} (Istanbul: Vakif Yayinlari, 2013).
  \item \textsuperscript{55}Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, \textit{A Muslim Response to Evil Said Nursi on the Theodicy} (England: Ashgate, 2015).
\end{itemize}
Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur\(^59\) edited by M. Abu-Rabi. It contains detailed essays by Colin Turner, Sukran Vahide, Ian Markham and Marcia Hermansen, on spiritual thoughts of Nursi, which are best to understand this aspect of Nursi’s ideology. Bilal Kuspinar’s paper “Nursi’s Evaluation of Sufism”\(^60\), and Algar’s “Sufism and Tarikat in the Life and Work of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi”\(^61\) also offer details on this subject. Likewise, a chapter in The Quran Revealed also explores the theme of spirituality in Nursi’s thoughts.

As far as the sources on principle themes of Risale-i Nur are concerned, The Quran Revealed by Colin Turner is the first comprehensive source which provides detailed explanation of the major themes of Risale. It is the best source to get deeper understanding of Risale-i Nur subjects and this work can be placed among the expositions (sharah) of Risale. It takes an extensive study of a number of themes i.e. Divine Unity, Prophet-hood, Hereafter, Belief and Unbelief, Nature and Causation, Human I, Divine Determining and Free Will, Worship and Righteous Actions and so on. Before this, Tuner with his co-writer Horkuc, discussed some themes in his work The Makers, which have been mentioned earlier. Some other works which provide details on Nursi’s key method (Belief through investigation) in Risale-i Nur are the following research papers: Sukran Vahide “The Book of the Universe…”\(^62\); Umit Simsek, "The Style of Reflective Thought in the Risale-I Nur"\(^63\) and Ali Mermer, “The Ways to Knowledge of God in the Risale-I Nur.”\(^64\)

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As far as Nursi’s contributions as revivalist are concerned there is no book or research available on this aspect of Nursi’s struggle. There are some articles, however, which only partially discuss one or the other aspect of his contributions i.e. Sait Ozervarli’s academic paper “The Reconstruction of Islamic Social Thought in the Modern Period…”65 evaluates Nursi’s endeavor of reconstruction focusing only the social area of Nursi’s efforts. The study is a good impetus to take a start on Nursi’s social reforms. Ozervarli’s another article “Said Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing Contemporary Islamic Thought,”66 focuses on Risale-i Nur’s contribution in the area of tafsir and kalam. It studies synthesis of science with religion with examples from Risale. It is the best paper to understand the methodology of kalam in Risale-i Nur. Likewise, Sukran Vahide’s paper “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Approach to Religious Renewal and its Impact on Aspects of Contemporary Turkish Society”67 mainly focuses on Nursi’s efforts for revitalization of belief and ethical renewal. She also gives an analysis in the second section of the main features of Nur movement and their mode of struggle in secular society. John Obert Voll’s research essay “Renewal and Reformation in the Mid-Twentieth Century: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Religion in the 1950’s”68 is an attempt to prove that Nursi’s method, like early postmodernists, is a middle way. This study only aims to establish that Nursi neither was extremist nor was under the influence of modernist theories, which visualize science and religion as competing opposites rather he chose the middle way. Oliver Leaman’s research paper, “Nursi’s Place in the Ihya’ Tradition”69 provides a comparison of Nursi’s efforts and his method of answering materialist philosophy with Allama Iqbal’s and Imam Ghazali’s methods of dealing with materialist philosophy. Hamid Algar’s paper “The Centennial Renower: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Tradition

65 Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction."
66 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing."
67 Vahide, "Nursi’s Approach to Religious Renewal."
of Tajdid” tries to locate Nursi in the category of revivalists with description of different attributes of a revivalist (mujadid) as well as areas focused for revival by revivalists (mujadideen) of different centuries in history. Similarly, Dr. Colin Turner tries to explore in his paper “Renewal in Islam and Bediuzzaman” whether Nursi was mujaddid or not in the light of the definitions of tajdid and significance of mujaddid. Simeon Evstatiev’s paper “Said Nursi And Tajdid (Renewal): Changing The Public Sphere Through Shared Justice” is also an attempt to locate Nursi among revivalists like Turner and Algar, and he explores Nursi’s efforts for revival in the light of his thoughts on justice. There are a few other papers whose titles contain the terms revival or renewal, which apparently indicate that they may provide details on Nursi’s contributions as revivalist but their detailed study proves that they only offer a general reading on the subject, without going into in-depth explorations of Nursi’s revitalizing program; i.e. the paper by Khalil Ahmad, “The Movement For Renewal In Contemporary Islamic Thought And Bediuzzaman Said Nursi”; Abdulvedud Chelebi’s paper “Bediuzzaman's Method of Renewal and Reform” and the paper by Shahran, “Said Nursi’s Theologico-spiritual Framework in Risale-I Nur: Revivalism of a Religious Worldview through a Contemporary Approach.” A PhD dissertation by Hasan Horkuc

“Said Nuri’s Ideal for Human Society: Moral and Social Reform in the Risale-i Nur” can be considered a detailed study on Nuri’s life and social ideas, in many aspects for example it focuses on outlining Nuri’s views of developing an ideal Muslim Society. However, it seems that the methodology of this dissertation is very complex. For example author has given too many historical details which are not directly related to Nuri’s intellectual contribution to the scholarship. Moreover, the author explains social reforms of Nuri in the light of different author’s views with lesser examples from the Risale-i Nur.

The studies carried in Pakistan on Bediuzzaman Said Nuri are very few. Maryam Jameelah was the first writer to pen Nuri’s life and efforts. She devoted a chapter to Nuri’s life in her book Islam in Theory and Practice, which was first published in 1967 and later was translated into Urdu as well. The same author wrote a fifteen-page booklet A Great Islamic Movement in Turkey, which contained almost the same details that she had written in the book earlier. Sarwat Saulat is another name that deserves a mention here. He penned a detailed book on Nuri’s life titled Bediuzzaman Said Nuri Shakhsiyat aur Tehreek (Bediuzzaman Said Nuri Life and Movement). This is the first comprehensive account on Nuri’s life written in any language, according to the author, after consulting the original Turkish sources. Saulat also wrote the English version of his book in shortened form. But the books just mentioned are very difficult to find. English version of these sources, in particular, is unavailable. The researcher of this study could not find it even with the publishers, though on researcher’s request, they sent the rough prints of the book. Khalil Hamdi is another Pakistani author who translated into Urdu an Arabic essay on Nuri written by the Syrian scholar Dr. Muhammad Saeed. It was first published in a journal Tarjuman-ul Quran in 1963. Hamdi published the same in a booklet form in 1989 entitling it Turki ka Mard e

80 Sarwat Saulat, Bediuzzaman Said Nuri Shakhsiyat Aur Tehreek (Karachi: Idara e Maarif e Islami, 1997).
Mujahid (Mujahid of Turkey)\textsuperscript{81}, which is a compact but comprehensive work on Nursi’s life. Jadeed Turkey main Islami Baidari Said Nursi se Najm uddin Arbakan tak (Islamic Awakening in Modern Turkey: from Said Nursi to Najm uddin Arbakan)\textsuperscript{82}, a book written by Dr. Ubaidullah in 1999, is another work provides insights on Nursi’s life and historical details of that time. The Urdu translation of Vahide’s Islam in Modern Turkey is also available in the libraries in Pakistan, although it is a good effort but it leaves a lot to be desired as it is not nearly as good as the original work. Another book translated into Urdu by col. Masood Akhtar Shaikh, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi\textsuperscript{83} also provides comprehensive details on Nursi’s life.

Not much has been written on Nursi in Pakistan apart from the works just mentioned. The work that started with such distinguished authors as Jameelah and Saulat has come to a standstill. One main reason for this is the language barrier. As Saulat has mentioned that a considerable number of scholars in Pakistan are proficient in Arabic language and are aware of the movements and reforms in the Arab world; but there are very few who are familiar with the Turkish language. As a result of this, most of the people in Pakistan are unaware of the services of such a great reformer.\textsuperscript{84} There are some institutes in Pakistan engaged in Urdu translation of Risale-i Nur, i.e. Harmony Publications Islamabad and Risale-i Nur foundation Islamabad. But they are only translating from Arabic sources. Secondly, they are translating different treatises, rather than complete volumes.

The research conducted on Nursi in Pakistan before present discourse includes two thesis of Masters’ level. One is by Arif Bak al Turki “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi wa Falsafa tu Diniya” (Nursi and Philosophy of Religion) in Arabic, submitted in 1961 to Dept of Islamic Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Other is by Wajiha Kiran “Nursi Tehreek, Taarufi Mutalia” (Nursi Movement: An Introductory study) in Urdu language submitted in 2009 in the same

\textsuperscript{81}Khalil Ahmad Al-Haamdi, Turki Ka Mard e Mujahid Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (Lahore: Idara Maarif e Islami, 1989).

\textsuperscript{82}Dr. Ubaidullah Fahad Falahi, Jadeed Turkey Main Islami Baidari Said Nursi se Najm uddin Arbakan tak (Lahore: Islamic publications, 1999).


\textsuperscript{84}Saulat, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi Shakhsiyat Aur Tehreek, 13.
department. Both studies are merely introductory works. However, there has been a significant tendency for Nursi studies in Pakistani universities in the last three to four years, due to the visits and participation of some Pakistani scholars in Nursi conferences and symposiums organized by ISFC. As a result of this, there emerged a visible trend in some universities in Pakistan on Nursi studies and few dissertations have been also conducted on this subject. At the time of its approval in 2011, the topic of present study was the first one not only at PhD level but at any level of academic research in Pakistan. Since then there has been submissions of two Masters, one M.Phil and one PhD thesis in a few universities in Pakistan. At Masters’ level Mubashir Kazmi’s research “Al Manhaj al-tarbawi inda Bediuzzaman Said Nursi” (Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s method of training), was submitted to Minhaj University Lahore in 2013. This was an Arabic dissertation which focused only on Nursi’s method for the training of young people. An M.Phil Thesis by Ansar Jamal “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi ki Qurani Fiqr kaTahqiqi Mutalia” (Research analysis of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s thoughts on the Quranic understanding) was submitted to GC University Faisalabad in 2016. In this dissertation Nursi’s thoughts regarding sciences of the Quran such as Miraculousness, subjects of the Quran, and repetition in the Quran etc. were focused. It is a good study of Nursi’s thoughts on the Quranic understanding, conducted with the help of Arabic sources which has also been published by GC University in a book form. Another M.Phil research by Mubashar Kazmi, “Turki mein Islam ki Nash’at e Saniya mein Risale-i Nur ka Kirdar” (The role of Risale-i Nur in Renaissance of Islam in Turkey), was submitted in 2016 to University of Lahore. The areas focused in this study are reasons of Ottoman Empire’s decline, introduction of Nursi’s Life and Risale-i Nur, difficulties in publication and dissemination of Risale-i Nur. On Nursi’s contribution in renaissance this study only focuses on the influence of Nur Movement on youth, children, women and elders. A PhD thesis by Zakira Parveen entitled “Fiqr e Islami ki Tashkeel e Jadid mein Nursi ki Khidmaat, Mutalia o Jaizah” (Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Contributions in the Restoration of Islamic Thought: a study and analysis) was also recently (2016) submitted to GC university Faisalabad. This dissertation describes historical details in more length than was necessary. Also, it focuses more on social, political and educational effects of Nursi movement in Turkey and its impact on Muslim and non Muslim countries instead of presenting his teachings and thoughts themselves.
This literature review shows that despite the fact that there are many books and research articles which cover life and thoughts of Said Nursi and present his introduction and contributions, not a single one of them presents a comprehensive study of Nursi’s method by focusing on all aspects of his approach to the reconstruction of society. Even the research dissertations on Bediuzzaman as a reformist conducted both at Masters and PhD level in Pakistan mainly describe the impacts of Nursi movement assigning less space to his teachings. Some of the works mentioned in the literature review have discussed Nursi as a revivalist, but they too do not comprehensively explain the areas which Nursi focused on for the reconstruction of Muslim society. This thesis will be a great contribution in analyzing Nursi’s ideology of reconstruction in the area of Nursi studies and will be a great help in presenting this approach of his to Pakistani society.

**Methodology and Structure of Dissertation:**

The method of this dissertation is descriptive and qualitative. An introduction at the beginning as well as conclusion at the end of each chapter is given. English translation of Risale-i Nur has been consulted and quoted. However last three volumes which have not been translated from Turkish to English yet comprising Nursi’s Barla, Kastamonu and Emirdag letters, researcher has consulted and quoted from the works of Serif Mardin, Sukran Vahide, Sait Ozerverli, Ali Mermer, Colin Turner, Ian Markham, Zeki Saritoprak and Davatoglu. In whose works quotes in translated form have been presented from the original sources of Nursi. At few places in present dissertation, sources of above writers are also used to quote Nursi’s views. In all such cases the references to the original sources have been furnished. English translation of the Quranic verses has been given from Risale-i Nur. For footnotes and bibliography Chicago Style has been adopted.

Researcher started her work by looking through different libraries in Lahore i.e. Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre Library, Dept of Islamic Studies Library, University of the Punjab Main Library, Quaid e Azam Library, Dawatu Salfia Library, and a Library in Islamabad Dr.

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85 These are such scholars who are considered experts in the area of Nursi studies, they have explained Nursi’s thoughts and teachings in such an ideal way that some of these scholars’ works have been and are being translated from English into Turkish language. Their works stand at the place of primary sources in English language. In order to better understand Nursi’s view it is indispensable to consult and cite their works.
Hamidullah Library. For online research the websites consulted at the beginning of this research to get information on Nursi Studies are:
http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php
http://www.nur.org/en/
http://www.iikv.org/en/
http://www.bediuzzamansaidnursi.org/

On realizing that due to limited sources and access to literature on this subject in Pakistan this research cannot be justified while staying here, then researcher made numerous visits to Turkey to deepen her understanding on Nursi Studies and data collection. These visits were made with the cooperation of Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture (IFSC). During these visits the researcher attended different graduate conferences including a symposium in 2013 and presented papers in these conferences. The author of this study also attended Intensive week long course on ‘Modern Muslim Theology and Nursi’s Perspective’ April 20th-26th, 2014 organised by IFCS in Istanbul. For data collection researcher availed herself of a scholarship “research fellowship program” offered for PhD scholars by a Turkish Government Organization, Tubitak. http://www.tubitak.gov.tr/en and spent six months in Turkey (from Sep 2013 to Feb 2014).

During her stay in Turkey the researcher got the opportunity not only to access a wide range of literature, papers and dissertations on Nursi studies but also got the chance to have detailed discussions with Nursi experts from Turkey and other parts of world i.e. Sukran Vahide, Mehmet Firinci (one of the living students of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi), DR. Ismail Latif Hacinebioglu, from Suleyman Demirel University, Isparta; Dr. Sait Ozerverli, Yildiz Technical University Istanbul; Dr. Colin Turner from Durham University, UK; Dr. Faris Kaya, director of ISFC, Istanbul; Dr. Farid Alatas, National University of Singapore. Three months stay of the researcher at ISFC foundation provided her with wider opportunities to experience and participate in different activities regarding Nursi studies; participation in different official meetings of ISFC on upcoming strategies and work plans on Nursi studies; participation in different lectures of Nursi experts which they delivered to different student delegations from Malaysia, Indonesia, Iraq, UK and USA. Later on one had almost three
months stay at a Risale i Nur madrasah (darsane) to experience closely the culture and method of collective reading of Risale-i Nur which are named by Thomas Michel as ‘faith sharing centers’. The libraries researcher consulted during her stay in Turkey are: Library of Istanbul foundation for science and culture, Istanbul; Library of Istanbul University, Istanbul; Isam Library Istanbul (considered very rich for International sources); Library of Bilim Sanat Vakfı, Fatih, Istanbul; Library of Suleyman Demirel University, Isparta. The researcher also made visits to the places where Nursi stayed i.e. places in Isparta, Barla (the house where Nursi spent 7 years of his exile), and Sekerci Han in Istanbul where Nursi stayed many times on his visits to Istanbul. ISFC provided all the English sources either in hard or soft copy form and access to online sources and libraries. With bulk of literature and experiences after close observation of the world of Nursi Studies, the researcher of this study returned to her home country and started writing this dissertation. The online libraries which one consulted frequently during writing are:

http://golibgen.io/index.php
https://archive.org/
http://www.jstor.org/
http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/
http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/
http://iikv.org/academy/index.php/
http://kutuphane.istanbul.edu.tr/en/

This dissertation consists of five chapters. First chapter studies the life and works of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. It is divided into two main sections; first section examines Nursi’s life with particular focus on the formation of his personality. The method adopted to explain Nursi’s biography is thematic instead of chronological in which it has been tried to trace different developments and formation of his thoughts according to the changes in circumstances. At the end of first section a brief introduction of his works written in Old Said phase has been given. Second section provides the introduction of Risale-i Nur along with elaboration of the unique structure and volume wise introduction of main topics of Risale-i Nur. This chapter examines Old Said and New Said written works separately while
explaining which of Nursi’s Old Said works were later included by him as part of Risale-i Nur.

Second chapter explores reasons of Ottoman Empire’s decline in general and Nursi’s perspective in particular. For Nursi’s view on Muslims’ decline, a combined study of Damascus Sermon and other sources where Nursi explained the reasons of Muslims’ decline has been presented in the chapter. It also examines Nursi’s approach of reconstruction and his thought process of finding appropriate methodology for Reconstruction of Society. In the end it outlines the role of Risale-i Nur in the days of Government’s hostility and anti religious measures.

A worth mentioning point here is Nursi’s key method in Risale-i Nur ‘belief through investigation’ has been examined in this dissertation with two perspectives: ‘Belief through investigation’ on human’s outer world and ‘belief through investigation’ in man’s inner world. The dissertation has been structured in such a way that it does not discuss both these perspectives side by side, rather examines them at different places according to the context. This will be further clear in following structure elaboration.

Third chapter examines Nursi’s efforts for reconstruction in educational area. It is divided into two main sections. First section outlines Nursi’s objectives to establish the University Medresetu’z-Zehra along with the details of his efforts for the establishment and construction of this university. The last part of the section examines how Nursi’s lifelong struggle of Medresetu’z-Zehra turned into Medrese-i Nuriye in second phase of his life. Second section explores the objectives Nursi achieved through Risale-i Nur which he intended to achieve through Medresetu’z-Zehra i.e. Synthesis of science and religion, revitalization of *tafsir* and *kalam* (here Nursi’s notion of belief through investigation on outer world has also been discussed) and integration of spirituality in Risale-i Nur.

Fourth chapter outlines Nursi’s endeavors for reconstruction in social and political areas. It examines Nursi’s efforts in three different phases of his life so it is divided into three sections: Nursi’s endeavors for socio-political reconstruction of society in Old Said period, Nursi and struggle for socio-political reconstruction in New Said phase, and Nursi on socio-political reconstruction in Third Said phase. This chapter also examines Nursi’s concept of jihad and his indifference to politics.
Fifth chapter ‘Revitalization of belief and spiritual training of individuals through Risale-i Nur’ examines two different dimensions of spiritual training of individuals which Nursi suggests for the revitalization of their belief. This chapter is divided in two sections. First section examines Nursi’s notion of reaching the reality of the Creator through reflection on man’s inner world, the details and benefits of this method have also been outlined. Second section studies another aspect of Nursi’s method of spiritual training which is to raise the faith of individuals by guiding them for different life stages, conditions and behaviors. The difference between spirituality of Nursi and that of Sufism is also highlighted at the beginning of chapter.

At the end conclusion, recommendations and further scope for study have been discussed.
CHAPTER : 1
BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI’S LIFE AND WORKS

Introduction
1.1 Educational formation of Nursi’s personality
1.2 Nursi’s socio-political activism, intellectual development and early writings
1.3 Spiritual rebirth of Nursi and composition of Risale-i Nur
1.4 Risale-i Nur: Introduction, structure and volumes
   1.4.1 Introduction
   1.4.2 Structure
   1.4.3 Subjects of major volumes
      1.4.3.1 The Words
      1.4.3.2 The Letters
      1.4.3.3 The Flashes
      1.4.3.4 The Rays

Conclusion
Chapter-1: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Life and Works

Introduction

Bediuzzaman (Wonder of the age) Said Nursi¹ was born circa 1876 in a small village Nurs, situated in Bitlis, a province of eastern Turkey (Anatolia). The official name of the region where he was born was Kurdistan in Ottoman time because the Kurds constituted the majority of the populace. Nursi was also of Kurdish lineage. His father Sufi Mirza and his mother Nuriye were very devout and pious Muslims. Nursi holds a distinguished place among the Muslim luminaries and revivalists of the past century. In his long life, he witnessed all the crucial events of the late nineteenth and first half of twentieth century along with their ramifications. He lived through three epoch-making phases of Turkish history i.e. final decades of once magnificent Ottoman Empire till its collapse after World War-I (WW-I); establishment of Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1923-1950); and finally the Democratic Rule (1950-1960).

In view of these three periods, and to represent consequential transmutation Nursi went through, his life is divided into three distinctive phases, viz. Old Said, New Said and Third Said.² As Old Said he observed abysmal political situation of Ottoman Empire under the rule of third last Ottoman Ruler Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1908), followed by the Constitutional revolution of 1908 and ascendency of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). This rule ended with the collapse of the Empire in the wake of the WW-I. The last years of the Old Said witnessed the war of independence and birth of the New Republic of Turkey. During this period Nursi was a proponent of saving Muslims from decline through political means. Meantime he went through a spiritual crisis which resulted in his realization of inadequacy of the human philosophy. By taking up the Quran as his sole guide, he decided to serve humanity with the method of the Quran instead through political means. Thus, second phase of Nursi’s life named New Said, begins in the following years of WW-I which

¹The name بِدیع الزمان سعید نورسی (Badiʾ al-Zamān Saʿīd Nursī) is spelled as Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in Turkish letters which has been followed in all English sources therefore the same would be followed in this dissertation. The title Bediuzzaman was given to him due to his extra ordinary capacity of learning and acquiring of knowledge, he was blessed with photographic memory. And Nursi is due to the relevance of his birth place Nurs.

²Nursi himself divided his life into two phases of Old Said and New Said, later on the experts of Nursi Studies added the phase of Third Said, due to the change of circumstances again, and the minor change in Nursi’s strategy also.
coincided with the regime of New Republic whose objective was to westernize Turkey. In this period Nursi experienced the pain of exile and imprisonment which spanned twenty five years. Focus of Nursi’s all efforts in this phase remained on writing treatises of Risale-i Nur [hence forth Risale] in order to save his people from the effects of skeptical moves. Except writing and disseminating Risale, he kept himself away from all sorts of other social and political affairs. However after 1950 with the victory of Democrats in elections, the situation eased out for him to some extent and he emerged as Third Said. This is the period when he began to take interest once again in socio-political matters of the country but this time in a different way. He only offered his support and advice to the Government but did not take practical part in politics as he had done in the Old Said phase.

Thus, Nursi’s whole life seems to be a linear continuation of events, in which he went through a number of stages in his intellectual life. In other words he went through a continuous development and transformation of ideas and thoughts. Colin Turner named it “his developmental journey from the Old Said to the New Said and on to the Third Said”\(^3\). This does not mean that he changed his views due to different circumstances and continuous course of events around him. Instead, it was his relentless contemplation and imbibing sets of varied values and ideas that he emerged with more effective and appropriate strategies each time to combat the conditions and circumstances. However, in following chapter such events of his life will be focused which are relevant to the development and transformation of his approach towards revitalization and a revamp of his society.

Furthermore, the scope of this chapter will be within the confines of three kinds of cerebral developments he was engaged with: Educational formation of his personality; socio-political activism and its impact on his intellectual development and then his spiritual rebirth and development of new strategy for revitalization based upon the method of the Quran. With this end in view, it is important to approach his life history concentrating on such events as prompted him to think in the perspective of revival. So the major questions of this chapter would be:

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Since Nursi was not satisfied with the education system of his time, what was the reason of his dissatisfaction? He remained actively involved in socio-political matters till 1922, what stimulated him for this activism in his early period of life? Then after which events made him turn his back from the mentioned activism? He went through a spiritual turmoil, what was the reason? And what persuaded him to concentrate more on the revival of belief of individuals by writing Risale? First three section of this chapter would explore the answers of above questions with the following subtitles:

- Educational formation of Nursi’s Personality
- Nursi’s Socio-political activism, his Intellectual Development and his early writings
- Spiritual Rebirth of Nursi and Composition of Risale-i Nur

Whereas, the focus of fourth section of this chapter would be on Nursi’s magnum opus ‘Risale-i Nur’ which he wrote and completed under the testing conditions in exile, imprisonment and time of oppression. This section will cover the introduction of Risale, the structure of different volumes and main subjects of first four volumes The Words, The Letters, The Flashes and The Rays.
1.1 Educational formation of Said Nursi’s personality

Said Nursi commenced his studies at the age of nine with the understanding of the Quran. The process of acquiring education in Nursi’s life was unlike the normal practice of his region as he could not stay longer at any madrasah (religious school) in the first five years. A sense of unrest and dissatisfaction in the education system of his time began to appear in him at a very early age which did not allow him to study with interest. However, in the meantime he took lessons from his elder brother Abdullah who was a learned scholar and teacher. It was only the madrasah of Shaikh Muhammad Jalali, a well known scholar of that time, where Nursi took his studies with serious efforts. He completed the whole course in only three months, at the age of just fourteen or fifteen which usually took an average student fifteen to twenty years to complete. It not only demonstrates Nursi’s extraordinary power of memory and remarkable intelligence but also shows his discontentment with the curriculum comprising heavy commentaries, annotations and further expositions of original books. Nursi initiated from Molla Jami and completed all the works in turn. “This he did by ignoring all the commentaries and expositions, and by concentrating on only a certain number of sections in each work.” When his teacher asked him the reason of doing so, he replied “I am not able to read and understand this many books but they are all caskets of jewels, treasure chests, and the key is with you” Vahide comments “Said’s aim in replying thus was to point out the need for reform in madrasah education and to prevent time being wasted through the inclusion of so many commentaries, annotations and expositions.” He learned around hundred works here including Jam al-Jawami by Ibn Subki on the principles of fiqh, Ibn Hajar on the same, and Sharh al Mawaqif by Jurjani on ilm al kalam even studied the most difficult works sometimes in just twenty four hours. At the end of three months he obtained diploma from

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4 A commentary by Abd al-Hakim on a work on Arabic syntax called Al-Kafiya by ibn Hajib.
his teacher and got the right to wear scholar’s gown, which was a regional practice, though he declined.\(^7\)

Afterwards, Nursi decided to visit famous local Muslim scholars in order to broaden his knowledge. Therefore, he traveled around eastern provinces of Ottoman Empire i.e. Sirvan, Siirt, Bitlis, Tillo, Jizre, Mardin, Van etc. While roaming, he interacted with *shaikhs* (scholars) of different *madrasah* (religious schools), forming a surprising impact on them due to his extraordinary knowledge in a very young age. Few scholars even arranged a difficult questionnaire to assess the credibility of his knowledge, which he solved successfully and thus left them in amazement. Besides, he was given the title of Bediuzzaman first time during these years by Molla Fatehullah Efendi, a renowned scholar of Siirt. Time to time being challenged by local scholars, he proved himself successful in debates and answered their complicated questions very frequently. He also started to introduce himself as a teacher now onwards. Furthermore, he also learnt Arabic lexicon *Qamus al Muhit* till the fourteenth letter *Sin*.\(^8\)

A worth noting event of his life during these years regarding formation of his educational ideas is his stay in a place Mardin in 1892. Here Nursi was first time introduced to Jamal uddin Afghani’s “powerful ideas for arousing and uniting Muslims and revitalizing Islamic civilization, for which constitutionalism and education were crucial”\(^9\) Serif Mardin relates this experience of Nursi with “widening of his intellectual horizons”. He further elaborates “Afghani, one of the most striking reformists of Islam of the nineteenth century had devoted much energy to the defense of idea that there was nothing incompatible between Islam and scientific attitude. His (Nursi’s) abiding interest in the reform of Islamic


education derived from this stand.” This theme as one of the arguments, Nursi was to use in his own writings. 

After Mardin, his stay in Bitlis in 1892/3 at governor’s residence, who appointed Nursi as the tutor of his children, is also very crucial. This place provided him with an opportunity to improve his knowledge. Here he had a comprehensive study of classic Muslim sciences almost forty in number in just two years. These included “instrumental, such as logic, Arabic grammar and syntax, as well as the main sciences of Qur’anic *tafsir* (exegesis), *hadith* (narrations of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ), *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) and *kalam* (Theology).” He also started memorizing Qur’an but discontinued it after realizing the urgent need of learning the ‘truths’ Qur’an taught. He went through a new work here titled *al-Miqrat* (on principles of Hanafi *fiqh*), which he had not studied before because in eastern part people followed Shafī’i school. In addition, it was here that Nursi benefited from the last teacher of his life named Shaikh Muhammad Kufrevi who was a leading *Naqshbandi* (a spiritual order) scholar. A worth noting point here is that all the scholars from whom Nursi took lessons belonged to *Naqshbandi* order. Vahide gives a brief list of Nursi’s teachers i.e. Shaikh Emin Efendi of Bitlis, Molla Fatehullah of Siirt, Sayyid Nur Muhammad etc. She concludes from the list that “most of the leading ulama of eastern Anatolia at the end of the nineteenth century seem to have emerged from the Naqshi/Khalidi order.” 

Serif Mardin also provides a detailed account of the tendency of eastern part of empire being followed Naqshbandi/Khalidi order and Nursi’s inclination towards Qadri order contrary to the practice of his region. Nursi had

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11 Ibid., 70.
13 Vahide, "The Life and Times," 211.
15 Khalidi order got popularity in eastern region of Empire in 19th century which is linked to Maulana Khalid (1776/77-1827), a successor of Naqshbandi order. He traveled to India and studied there with a Naqshbandi teacher. He is also considered a regenerator of his time, emerged 100 years prior to Bediuzzaman. He propagated his revivalist ideas against imitative Westernization and Western imperialism. This order basically supplanted the previously popular Qadri order. See Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 51-60,66; Vahide, "The Life and Times," 212-13.
noticeable influence of Shaikh Adul Qadir Gilani’s teachings on his personality. He was also highly inspired by and had remarkable influence of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (regenerator of the second millennium) on his life and thoughts. In spite of deep influence of these sufi leaders on his personality, he never joined any spiritual order (tariqat) in his life. Rather he expressed in his writings that Sufism was not suitable for this age.16

As Nursi’s life moved on, his encounter with new conditions and variable situations kept on marking significant impacts on him regarding developments in his educational ideas. Nevertheless, Nursi realized very well the need for revivification of education system while roaming different areas of eastern provinces of empire. His visit and stay in Van from 1895 onward proved to be the final stone in shaping his ideology and future strategy for the revitalization of education system. Nursi stayed in Van for almost twelve years- first with the governor Hassan Pasha and afterwards with his successor Tahir Pasha on his residence. Tahir Pasha himself was a “patron of learning, followed developments in science, and owned an extensive library”. His residence was the “favorite center for government officials, teachers of the new secular schools, and other intellectuals” for debates and discussions on current issues. This new environment soon led Nursi to the realization of the terrible effects of “westernizing and secularizing reforms of the Tanzimat17” on the ideas of Ottoman elite class, particularly educated from secular schools (mektub). Who under the Europeans’ influence began to consider Islam responsible for the backwardness of Ottoman Empire. Besides, Nursi also realized incapability of traditional Muslim Theology (Ilm ul kalam) to reply recent attacks and criticism on Islam. According to Vahide: “This had brought home to Nursi the urgent necessity of reforming [madrasah] education and updating the Islamic sciences in the light of modern advances in knowledge. Until the beginning of the WW-I, it was with these issues that he was chiefly concerned.” 18

17 “(Turkish: “Reorganization”), series of reforms promulgated in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876 under the reigns of the sultans Abdulmecid I and Abdülaziz. These reforms, heavily influenced by European ideas, were intended to effectuate a fundamental change of the empire from the old system based on theocratic principles to that of a modern state.” Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Tanzimat," accessed August 20, 2016, https://www.britannica.com/event/Tanzimat.
18 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 27-33.
After realizing these facts, Nursi took the momentous step to study all the modern (social and physical) sciences of that time. “Taking advantage of governor’s library and the newspapers and journals supplied to his office, Nursi embarked on the study of such subjects as history, geography, mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and philosophy, as well as current affairs and developments in Ottoman life and the Islamic world”. He studied and mastered approximately ninety works here without the help of any teacher or instructor.\(^{19}\) This whole situation led him to the decision of working on the establishment of a university in eastern provinces of empire named Medresetu’z-Zehra on the model of Jaam-e Al Azhar. Nursi’s purpose of founding this university was on one hand to combine traditional religious sciences with modern physical sciences, on the other, to make an embodiment of three different educational streams i.e. Maktab, Madrasah and tekke (sufi lodges).\(^{20}\) Moreover Nursi founded his own madrasah named Horhor in Van “where he put into practice his ideas for educational reform, based on the combined teaching of the traditional religious and modern sciences”\(^{21}\).

Another important incident occurred here which brought a revolution in Nursi’s ideas which proved decisive for his strategy of revival and reconstruction of society in later years. He came to know about the threat of a British statesman Gladstone: “So long as the Muslims have the Qur’an, we shall be unable to dominate them. We must either take it from them, or make them lose their love of it.”\(^{22}\) In Nursi’s words this was the turning point of his life, when he decided to dedicate his whole life for the service of the Quran to prove its truths by taking the help of all sciences and knowledge which he had acquired. He decided to adopt two means for this service: establishing Medresetu’z-Zehra and writing Risale. But under the certain circumstances he could only achieve his target through Risale. This was also delayed till the emergence of New Said because he remained actively involved in

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{20}\) The necessity to establish this university in Nursi’s vision and its purpose will be discussed with higher details in third chapter.


\(^{22}\) Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 31.
socio-political matters to save Muslims and Ottoman Empire from decline. Meantime, he could only write *Isharat ul Ijaz* (Signs of Miraculousness) the first stage of Risla-e Nur.\(^\text{23}\)

1.2 Nursi’s socio-political activism, intellectual development and early writings

This section is aimed at the study of the nature of Nursi’s socio-political involvement and its impact on his intellectual developmental journey. The factors proved catalyst for the change of his strategy of revitalization in the following years will also be analyzed with a special focus on the nature of his written work produced during this period. The years from 1907 to 1922 of Nursi’s life were the peak of his social and political activism in multiple matters. He arrived in Istanbul in 1907. Though his objective was to get financial support from the Government for educational reforms but he encountered a relatively new situation. It was the time when Ottoman Empire was passing through the final years of its dynasty and Istanbul being capital was “home to numerous political intrigues”.24 Furthermore, movement for the restoration of Constitutionalism was on its extreme level. Here, Nursi came into close observation of political conditions of Empire. However, he already had the idea and inspiration for this movement when he came across the thoughts of Namik Kamal through his famous work The Dreams. Through which Nursi “first became aware of the struggle for freedom and constitutional government that the Young Ottomans had been pursuing since the 1860s.” The tendency of “opposition to despotism and support for freedom and constitutional government” which remained prominent in Nursi’s personality in later years was basically developed in Mardin in 1892.25 His meeting with two people also proved “instrumental in broadening his ideas”. One was the follower of Jamal uddin Afghani (as previously mentioned) and the other was member of Sanusi order. Both were the followers of “two prominent architects of the Muslim reformist tradition”.26 This interaction provided him with awareness of “wider issues facing the Muslim world”27 as well as his “espousal of Islamic Unity (ittihad I islam)”28

As far as political conditions of Istanbul and Nursi’s activism are concerned “The long reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II was nearing its end, and various forces that were to bring

24Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 14.
25Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 21-22.
26Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 74.
27Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 10.
28Vahide, “The Life and Times,” 211.
about his overthrow were gathering strength”. In the beginning, the Sultan had declared constitutional system of government but afterward suspended Parliament and Ottoman constitution in 1878. A movement of freedom from despotism was generated in reaction by certain thinkers and groups such as Young Ottomans’ Namik Kamal, CUP (Committee of union and progress) of Young Turks etc. When Nursi came here he could not “remain indifferent to the political struggle”. He supported Constitutional movement, because in his view “Ottoman Empire could be saved, its progress achieved and Islamic civilization be established, only through freedom and constitutional government” provided both would remain under the subjugation of Islamic law. Thus, in this whole period Nursi seems to be highly inclined towards adoption of political means in order to avoid further decadence, to save Ottoman Empire and to foster Muslim unity. For this purpose he focused his attention on two areas; constitutionalism and education. He adopted all relevant means to enlighten all sections of his society. He wrote books and numerous articles in newspapers, addressed public gatherings, had long discussions with tribesmen in the south east of Turkey, and joined multiple religious societies. He made concerted efforts to make political authorities realize the importance of the revivification of education system and also presented a petition for this to Ottoman Sultan, though he could not get favorable response at first.

When the Ottoman constitution was reinstated as a result of Young Turk revolution of July 1908 under the leadership of CUP, Nursi favored this revolt and delivered his famous speech ‘Address to Freedom’. But soon after he discontinued the support of CUP on realizing their anti religious tendencies and joined Ittihad-i Muhammedi (Muhammadan union for Muslim Unity). The aim of later organization was “regeneration of the Ottoman state on the basis of Islam and the promotion of Islamic unity”. “Nursi began contributing articles to the paper Volkan of this organization”. Vahide mentions:


30 Ibid.


“All his articles in the paper reiterate his views on education and ‘Islamic’ freedom and constitutionalism, or explain the unifying role of the Society. Its aim, through the revival of the Sunna and moral renewal, as well as strengthening the bonds of unity between all Muslims, was to activate the vast potentiality of the Umma and utilize it to achieve progress.”

A rebellion broke out in April 1909 by Albanian soldiers, who were stationed in Istanbul, against westernized inclinations of CUP. Taking it justified, some civilians and members of other units also joined this uprising whose slogan was ‘We want shari‘a’. Consequently a troop of army from Salonica was called by CUP to suppress this mutiny. They disposed of Abdulhamid II and replaced him with Sultan Mehmed Resad, and CUP now seated in power more firmly than ever. Many people were arrested, imprisoned and assassinated. Nursi was also arrested because of his support to Ittihad-i Muhammedi, writing articles in their newspaper and because of being invasive at “CUP’s betrayal of constitutionalism”.

He was Court marshaled and got acquittal after a strong defense speech. But all this made him disillusioned as he observed a negative aspect of civilization there. He did not stay there anymore and turned his attention towards ordinary subjects of Empire.

In 1910, Nursi traveled to remote areas of Eastern provinces with the purpose to persuade tribesmen on the benefits of constitutionalism and its necessity for the progress and survival of Ottoman Empire. Besides, he wanted to inform them about the significance and urgent need of educational reforms. Later on he converted his discussions with them into a book form titled Munazarat (Debates). Another work he wrote, with the purpose of guiding scholars, titled Muhakemaat (Reasonings). He also visited Damsacus in 1911 where he delivered a remarkable sermon famous with the title ‘Damascus Sermon’. In this sermon he identified the major reasons of Muslim’s decline and their solutions in the form of “remedies from the pharmacy of the Quran”. In 1911 Nursi once again tried to get governmental

35Algar, "Nursi and Risale-I Nur," 315-16. This incident is famous with the name of ‘31st of March incident’ because of the difference in the Ottoman and Gregorian calenders, CUP played key role in the backend to achieve their certain political interests; For details consult Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 71-81.
37Ibid; Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 80-81.
support for the establishment of Medresetu’z-Zehra. His proposal was accepted this time and he was granted financial support as well. However, it could never be accomplished due to outbreak of WW-I which followed with the collapse of great Ottoman Empire.\(^{38}\) Perhaps he was selected by The Almighty God for the service of revival with some other means.

This is a distinguishing feature of Nursi’s personality that he not only exerted himself verbally and theoretically to save Ottoman Empire from decline but also practically participated in WW-I as a last effort to save this center of Muslim’s union. He joined the army as a regimental commander to raise and lead a militia force in Eastern provinces. Interestingly enough he wrote his work *Isharat ul Ijaz* during terrible conditions of war. He fought in the forefront of war with his students, finally captured by Russians.\(^{39}\) After two years of captivity he returned to Istanbul in 1918 and received a warm welcome as well as war medal in recognition of his extraordinary services in war. He was also appointed as a member of Daru'l-Hikmet’l-Islamiye (Academy of Higher Islamic studies)\(^{40}\). He founded a few organizations too and worked as member with i.e. Madrasah Teachers Association in 1919 (aimed to maintain educational standards in madrasahs) and Green Crescent Society in 1920 (aimed to control liquid liquor and other addictions).\(^{41}\)

Following the Ottoman Empire’s defeat at the end of WW-I in 1918, empire was partitioned and occupied by allied forces of France, Britain, and Greece etc. Resultantly, a national movement was mobilized among Ottomans to liberate their country from foreign forces. This culminated into National War of Independence (1919-1923) under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Attaturk. Nursi not only supported this struggle of independence but also declared it a *jihad*. He combated the forces of occupation with his pen and wrote *Hutuvat i Sittе* (The Six Steps).\(^{42}\) When he was asked to help in establishment


\(^{40}\) For details of courageous actions of Nursi during war see Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 111-29.


\(^{42}\) Ibid; Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 150.
of autonomous Kurdistan, he refused by saying that it was important to revive Ottoman state instead of establishing Kurdistan,\(^{43}\) despite the fact that he himself was a Kurd. Meanwhile during these years, passing through certain spiritual crisis, Nursi spent almost one and half years in solitude in contemplation which ultimately ended with his transition from Old Said to New Said.

The victory of National Muslim forces in the war of Independence proved to be a ray of sunshine for Nursi. A New Republic was going to be established which was in Nursi’s opinion “the beginning of a new era and the means for bringing about a renaissance of Islam and Islamic civilization”. Therefore, he intended to assist new government to make it a center of Islamic civilization. With this hope he left for Ankara, the base of Grand National Assembly (A new parliament founded by Mustafa Kemal Attaturk in 1920), after receiving many invitations. Assembly gave him a warm official welcome on November 9, 1922. But he was extremely disappointed when he realized that government was pursuing the politics of Secularization. Deputies and officers who were going to establish new republic were under the terrible impact of westernization and atheistic ideas of materialist philosophy and had a lax attitude towards Islam and their religious duties.\(^{44}\) He warned them about that, had a detailed meeting with Mustafa Kemal, and as a last effort wrote two books with the purpose to disprove atheism, *Zeýl-ul-Zeýl* (The Appendix of the Appendix) and *Hubab* (Goals), but all this could not bring fruitful benefits.\(^{45}\) A point important to mention here is that Nursi had already concluded almost two years back through a spiritual suffering that he should take the methodology of

\(^{43}\)Turner and Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, 20. It was suggested by some of Nursi’s fellow country-men who were seeking to benefit from his influence on the Kurdish population of Eastern Anatolia. When British troops invaded Istanbul on 16 March 1920, they proposed to him that they should set up an independent Kurdish state. They thought that since the Empire had dissolved and an Armenian state was about to be formed, the Kurds should also set up their own state. Nursi refused and replied: 'Rather than setting up a Kurdish state, let us revive the Ottoman Empire. If you agree with this, I am ready to sacrifice my life for the cause’. See Ali Mermer, "Aspects of Religious Identity: The Nurcu Movement in Turkey Today" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1985), 509.


\(^{45}\)He also wrote a ten point circular on the necessity of performing prayers and distributed among deputies, as a result almost 60 deputies began to perform prayers regularly, but it drew to a severe reaction from the president of Assembly, Mustafa Kemal see Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 171.
the Quran for reconstruction of his society, which resulted into the emergence of New Said\(^{46}\). However his transformation of Old Said to New Said became evident after the visit of Ankara, according to Abu-Rabi:

“This is, perhaps, the most momentous event in Nursi’s life after his conversion to the ‘New Said’ several years before. He began to realize more acutely than ever before that Turkey was indeed at the crossroads, and that the political leadership of the Turkish nation represented by Ataturk and by his ideological cohorts was more determined than ever to get rid of the Shari‘ah as the source of governing, and to pave the way for Turkey to follow a strict secular and Westernized path that would disavow its past identity. This discovery was appalling, to say the least, and confirmed Said’s long-held suspicion that the intention of the new leadership was to kill the Islamic spirit of the Turkish nation.”\(^{47}\)

He realized that this situation could not be combated anymore in the realm of politics which was the method of Old Said; rather a new and innovative method for the revival of his people should be adopted as now the belief of his people was at stake. Therefore, despite being offered attractive jobs with heavy salaries by Mustafa Kemal\(^{48}\), he returned to Van and retired from all types of social and political life.

**Nursi’s early Writings**

Before moving ahead it seems important to have a look on Nursi’s writings up till now. These are called Old Said works\(^{49}\). It will help in getting the clearer understanding about the nature of Nursi’s endeavors in this phase. A quick analysis of these writings gives the idea that the subjects regarding social and political matters of Muslim society were prominent in these writings.

\(^{46}\)Nursi’s spiritual crisis, emergence of New Said and what was the new methodology, this will be discussed with detail in next section.


\(^{48}\)Mustafa Kemal was well aware about the influence of Nursi and his extraordinary services, he wanted to get benefit from his fame and to use that for his political objectives, Nursi understood this that is why he said before leaving ‘the New Said wants to work for the next world and cannot work with you’. Vahide, "The Life and Times," 223; Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 172.

\(^{49}\)Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 153.
For instance: *Nutuk* (Speeches) published in 1910 is based upon the public speeches which he delivered between 1908-10. “Mostly in support of the new constitutional regime of the CUP from an Islamist viewpoint”. Likewise *iki mekteb-i Musibetin Sehadetnamesi Veya Divan-i Harb-i Orfî ve Said-i Kurdi* (Testimonial of the Two Schools of Misfortune or the Military Court and Said-i Kurdi) published in 1911 “is the compilation of his defense speeches in the Military Court set up just after the 31 March Incident and also several articles he had published in different newspapers to advocate the Islamist view and the constitutional regime.”

*Hutbe i Samiye* (Damascus Sermon) 1911 is based upon the reasons of Muslim World’s Decline and their solution. Nursi focused upon social and political factors of decline and the failure in adherence to Islamic principles in these areas. *Munazârat* (Debates) published in 1913 also reflects Nursi’s thoughts on socio-political matters of that time. Constitutionalism, freedom, despotism were the major subjects Nursi dealt with in this work. Vahide notes:

“[Nursi] addressed the common people and set out what amounted to a series of radical ideas and proposals that could effectively thrust the Kurdish tribesmen into the twentieth century and make them active participants in their own social, economic, and political development and in the modernization of the Islamic ‘nation’”

Arabic version of this work is titled as *Rachatat al Awwam* (prescription for the common people). *Muhakemat* (Reasonings) published in 1911 on the principles of the Quranic exegesis. Nursi entitled the Arabic version of this work as *Rachatat al Ulama* (Prescription for the 'Ulama). These three works were originally written in Arabic by Nursi and later on he produced Turkish versions. Vahide describes these works as “prescriptions for the ailments afflicting the Islamic world.”

Nursi produced his incomplete *tafsir* (Interpretation of the Quran) during war in 1916 with the title *Isharat ul Ijaz* (Signs of Miraculousness) which was published in 1918. It is the only work of Nursi in which he explains the Quranic verses in the style of traditional Quranic exegesis. It starts with the explanation of sura al-Fatiha (first chapter) and ends at thirty

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51Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 84-85,92.
52Vahide, "The Life and Times," 218.
second verse of sura al-Baqara (second chapter of the Quran). This work was first written and published in Arabic language, and later in 1955 it was translated into Turkish by Nursi’s younger brother Abdülmecid Unlukul.

*Hutuvat-i Sitte* (The Six Steps) was written to support National Army forces in the war of independence against foreign occupation and to encourage people to be hopeful for success.

From 1920 to 1923 Nursi focused on the reasons of Ottoman’s decline in his writings the works i.e. *Sunuhat* (Inspirations) 1920, *Hakikat Cekirdekleri* (The Seeds of Reality) 1920, *Nokta* (Point) 1921, *Rumuz* The Symbol (1922) and *Isarat* The Signs (1923) all were mainly on the subject of decline.

Except *Tallikat* (Annotations) and *Qizil Ijaz* (Red Laconical), 1920-21 which are Arabic works on the subject of Logic. *Zeyl-ul-Zeyl* (The Appendix of the Appendix) and *Hubab* (Goals) were also written in Arabic to disprove atheism during his stay in Ankara 1922-23. *Tuluat* (The Rises) 1923 is also on Islamic perspective of socio-political matters.

*Lemeat* (The Gleams) published in same year is the explanation of Nursi’s own views which he discussed in semi-verse form in another work titled *Hakikat Cekirdekleri*. *Lemeat* is added at the end of Sozler (The Words) as appendix. Another Old Said work *Suaat* (Rays) written in 1923, discussed Holy Prophet’s miracles in order to prove the finality of Prophet.

Among these works *Hutbe i Samiye* (Damascus Sermon), *Muhakemaat* (Reasonings), and *Isharat ul Ijaz* have been translated into English. There are a few works which Nursi adjusted later as part or volume in the collection of Risale.

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54 Ibid; Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 151.
1.3 Spiritual rebirth of Nursi and composition of Risale-i Nur

This section will examine the reasons of Nursi’s spiritual development which resulted in the emergence of New Said, and the way he adopted afterward for the revival. Moreover, which circumstances he faced afterward will be discussed briefly. Nursi was facing severe spiritual and physical disturbance after his return from captivity of WW-I due to multiple reasons. Previously he was of the view “that European science and philosophy could be used to reinforce and strengthen Islam.”\(^58\) But after facing cruelties of circumstances i.e. miseries of confinement, stretches of war, death of his students, along with Ottoman defeat and foreign occupation, he underwent severe mental distress. A major factor of this agony was his realization of the fact that the philosophy he had been advocating and his higher knowledge brought no hope, rather left him in darkness with consequences of materiality.\(^59\) Despite this mental state of war he kept on fulfilling all his responsibilities as a member of Daru’l-Hikmet’l-Islamiye for almost two years. Finally, his spiritual crisis prompted him to withdrawal into isolation and almost one and half years of his life (1920-1921) he spent on this inner struggle which resulted in the emergence of New Said with “crystallization of his ideas”\(^60\)

During this solitude one day, while reading the book *Futuh ul ghayb* by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Gilani, these lines came in front his eyes and left him in amazement: “You are in the Darü’l-Hikmet, so search for a doctor to cure your heart.” Nursi took this as “Oh, you unfortunate! As a member of the Darü’l-Hikmet’l-Islamiye, you are as though a doctor curing the spiritual sicknesses of the people of Islam, whereas you are sicker than anyone. You first of all find a doctor for yourself, then try to cure others!” Nursi comments:

“I took him [Gilani] as my doctor and read the book as though it were addressing me. But it was terribly severe; it smashed my pride in the most fearsome manner. It carried out drastic surgery on my soul. I could not stand it. I read half of it as though it were addressing me, but did not have the

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\(^{59}\)Vahide, "The Life and Times," 221; Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 164.

Chapter-1: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Life and Works

strength and endurance to finish it. I put the book back on the shelf. Then a week later the pain of that curative operation subsided, and pleasure came in its place. I reopened the book and read it right through; I benefited a lot from that work of my first master.”  

Similarly another coincidence happened while reading *Maktubat* of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, when he came across two letters written to a person Mirza Bediuzzaman by Sirhindi. Nursi was also known as Bediuzzaman and his father name was also Mirza. It was like those letters were written for him containing the advice “Take only one qiblah!” That is, take one person as your master and follow him; do not concern yourself with anyone else. After remaining in a state of confusion for some period he finally understood that he should take only the Quran as his sole guide Nursi states:  

“This [to take only one qibla] most important recommendation did not seem appropriate to my capacity and mental state. However much I thought: “Should I follow this one, or that one, or that other one?” I remained in a state of bewilderment. Each had different characteristics which drew me, one was not enough for me. While thus bewildered, it was imparted to my heart by God’s mercy that “the head of these various ways and the source of these streams and the sun of these planets is the All-Wise Qur’an; the true single qibla is to be found in it. In which case, it is also the most elevated guide and most holy master.” So I clasped it with both hands and clung on to it.”

Nevertheless few years back when he came to know about Gladstone’s words, he had decided to dedicate his whole life for the service of the Quran, however due to certain circumstances and course of events, he had been distracted from his aim. Now the situation guided him to strengthen his earlier decision. Therefore, his ambition to explain the truths of

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62Ibid., 419.
63 This confusion led him to search for that only qibla, and through a process from philosophy to Sufism to finally Quran he reached the reality, that he should take only the Quran as his sole guide, this process will be discussed in 2nd chapter with detail.
64Nursi, *The Letters*, 419.
65Vahide, “The Life and Times,” 221.
the Quran was reinforced in order to save the belief of his people through Risale. Together with this, his meeting with deputies and members of National Assembly in Ankara (as previously discussed) also supported his view that the method of Old Said which was to make politics a means for the revival of Islam, would not be beneficial anymore. He understood that the “new leaders were to be combated not in the realm of politics, but with the immaterial sword of the Qur’an’s miraculousness.” Thus, having unquestionable fidelity to the Quran he left for Van, where he retired from public life altogether.

On his return from Ankara in 1923 Nursi settled in Van spending his time by teaching in a mosque. Here, he emerged with a relatively different approach because now he was concentrating more on “saving and strengthening religious belief”, instead of social or political matters “which would form the basis of renewal and reconstruction”. He wrote an important work here “Mesnevi-i Nuriye, to set the conceptual framework of his lifelong work, Risale-i Nur.” Meantime, the political structure of the country was also in changing process. The caliphate of Ottoman Empire was abolished by Grand National Assembly in 1924 and Turkey was declared as a new Republic. Office of Shaikh ul islam and shariah courts were brought to their end. Ankara became the capital of New Turkish Republic. “Within a short time, Bediuzzaman’s fears about the new regime began to be realized: the first steps were taken towards secularization and reducing the power of Islam within the state, and even its eradication from Turkish life.” In 1925 a rebellion broke out against the westernized trends of new Government. As a result, the government institutionalized very strict policies to suppress the revolt and further similar events. This included the closure of religious institutes and banning the writing of religious literature. For the enforcement of law

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66Ibid., 223.
67Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 177.
70This rebellion was led by a Naqshibandi Kurdish tribal Sheik Said from Palu tribe and the explicit aim of the rebellion was the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, where the Islamic principles, violated in modern Turkey, were to be respected. Nursi was also invited to join this revolt but he declined. See Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity, 155.
71Ibid.
hundreds of people were arrested in which men of religion were main targets and victims.\textsuperscript{72} Nursi was also arrested in suspicion and deported to a remote place. Following this “ordeal and trials of his life began in the form of continuous exile and imprisonments which cover 25 years of his life”\textsuperscript{73} from 1926 to 1950. This is the period in which he composed his monumental work Risale-i Nur, a thematic \textit{tafsir} of the Quran.

In 1926 Nursi commenced Risale by writing small treatises on different tenets of belief, “to answer the people’s religious needs, who were now deprived of all means of religious education”\textsuperscript{74}. He initiated with the piece ‘Resurrection of dead and hereafter’ which he placed later as tenth chapter of the first volume of Risale and continued writing small pieces on different subjects. These expositions were so applauded by the people since very beginning that despite severe threats of arrests and imprisonment, they continued reading and writing the copies. In the following years the Risale “silently spread and took root, combating in the most constructive way the attempt to uproot Islam, and the unbelief and materialist philosophy which was hoped to instil in the Muslim people of Turkey.”\textsuperscript{75} Government did not leave the growing popularity of these expositions unnoticed; therefore, the increase in Nursi’s followers also resulted in the increased pressure of authorities on Nursi and his students.

Nursi was exiled to three different places. First he was deported to Barla\textsuperscript{76}, where he spent eight and half years from 1926 to 1934. The house he stayed in is considered first “\textit{Nur Madrasah}, (Risale-i Nur school)” because here Nursi composed the maximum part of Risale, comprising almost three quarter, which includes first two volumes (The Words and The Letters) and few parts of third volume (The Flashes)\textsuperscript{77}. Second place where he was deported was Kastamonu.\textsuperscript{78} There he spent seven and half years from 1936 to 1943. Third time he was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 190-91; Vahide, "A Chronology," xx.
\item \textsuperscript{73}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{74}Vahide, "A Chronology," xx.
\item \textsuperscript{75}Vahide, "Words and Their Author," 805.
\item \textsuperscript{76}A remote and tiny village of only 15 to 20 houses in the mountains of Province Isparta near the northwestern shore of Lake Egirdir. This place did not have any motor road at that time, the only way to get there was on foot or by horse or donkey. Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 186.
\item \textsuperscript{77}Turner and Horkuc, \textit{Said Nursi}, 26; Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 189,96.
\item \textsuperscript{78}In the Ilgaz Mountains to the south of the Black Sea. See Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 227.
\end{itemize}
confined from 1944 to 1948 in Emirdag\textsuperscript{79}. Nursi was purposely deported to the remote areas so that lesser people could interact with him or get his influence. He was kept under strict surveillance whole time, “his movements were curtailed” and only occasional visitors were allowed to visit him “despite the difficulties in visiting him he attracted loyal students who assisted him with the writing of the Risale and its distribution”\textsuperscript{80}. He was also subjected to imprisonment three times in this period. First in 1935 for eleven months in Eskisehir; second time in 1943 for nine months in Denizli; and third time from 1948 to 1949 the harshest in Afyon, which spanned twenty months. Nursi continued writing treatises of Risale even during the hardest conditions of imprisonment. There came a time when he was not allowed to get paper and pen and he used chalk, paper bags or scrap papers, even matchboxes sometimes to write.\textsuperscript{81}

The charges Nursi stood accused of for imprisonment each time were almost the same i.e “founding a secret political organization; giving instruction in Sufism; opposing the principles of secularism and republicanism, and the reforms; and the possible disturbance of public order”, furthermore “exploiting religion with the idea of political reaction, with the intention of undertaking an enterprise which might breach public security”\textsuperscript{82} etc. In the wake of these allegations, the houses of Risale-i Nur students (dersanes) were raided to search the copies of treatises, hundreds of people were arrested if any copy would be found or sometimes in suspicion. Nursi replied to all the allegations himself in the court each time in a very powerful and logical way. Later on he included these defense speeches as part of Risale collection\textsuperscript{83}. Once a committee was set up to examine the different written pieces which gave a positive report stating that “90 percent of the Risale-i Nur was formed of scholarly explanations of the truths of belief and that these parts did not part at all from the way of scholarship and principles of

\textsuperscript{79} A small provincial town see ibid., 271.

\textsuperscript{80} Vahide, "A Chronology," xxi. For further details Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 189.

\textsuperscript{81} Turner and Horkuc, \textit{Said Nursi}, 30,32.

\textsuperscript{82} Vahide, "The Life and Times," 231.

\textsuperscript{83} Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 250-51,81. For details of Nursi’s defense speeches and his scholarly replies to all allegations see Ibid., 260-64, 92-95; Vahide, "The Life and Times," 232-34.
religion. There was nothing in these to suggest the exploitation of religion, the founding of a society, or that there was a movement that would disturb the peace.”

In spite of all these hard conditions the writing, duplicating and dissemination of Risale continued. Nursi used to dictate a particular piece to his close disciple, who brought the written pieces to nearby village, where further copies were written by hand because printing was banned. Copies were written secretly with day and night efforts in the houses of Risale students and then distributed. Nursi did not have any reference or book while writing, all he wrote down with his memory. In this way the treatises of Risale passed from village to village, gradually from town to town and ultimately spread throughout Turkey. Men, women, young old even children all showed a great enthusiasm in writing and making copies of these treatises. Even uneducated women also contributed in this service by taking up the financial responsibilities of their husbands and letting them free for the service of the Quran commentary. An estimated number of hand written manuscripts is 600,000, which is nevertheless considered by some an exaggerated figure, however “it is an indication that Nursi’s message was spreading around the country, and with it his following.”

The Risale-i Nur was spread to the maximum areas in Turkey and most of its parts had been accomplished till the end of New Said period. “Nursi gathered some of its sections into special collections and, in 1942 and 1943, had them typed out in the new Latin alphabet.” Besides saving and revitalizing beliefs of Turkish people, treatises of Risale contributed to some other important matters as well. Firstly, it played an important role in preserving the Quranic script in Turkey. When Arabic script

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84 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 266.
85 The process of duplicating copies by hand continued till 1956, when restrictions were lift up and Risale-i Nur was printed on modern press in the new latin script. However in 1946 a duplicating machine was arranged by one of Nursi’s students on which Nursi expressed his pleasure see Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 204-05.
86 Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 26.
87 Researcher had a personal experience during her stay in Turkey to visit such an old lady who was one of Nursi’s closest student Mutafa Sungar’s wife. She told with the help of translator how she took up financial responsibilities along with house hold and bringing up of nine children upon her. She even used to cut down woods from forest so that her husband could give much of his time for the service of Risale-i Nur.
88 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 204.
89 Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 26.
90 Ibid., 35.
was replaced with Latin script in 1928 by Mustafa Kemal. Nur continued writing in Ottoman script thus kept his nation fellows in touch with the script of the Quran. Secondly, writing and duplicating of treatises by hand played significant role in increasing the literacy rate. “Nur movement contributed significantly to increasing the literacy rate and raising the cultural level of thousands of people, quite apart from its function of preserving and renewing the Islamic faith”. Thirdly Risale became the source of guidance and reformation of many dangerous prisoners during Nursi’s imprisonment. That is why Nursi called prison “Medrese-i Yusufiye, the School of Joseph, recalling the Prophet Joseph (a.s), the patron of prisoners, and that prison was essentially a place of training and education.” He further comments: “Just as the Risale-i Nur strives to protect the truths of belief against atheism, so one of its duties is to preserve the letters and script of the Qur’an against innovations.”

Last 10 years of Nursi’s life from 1950 to 1960, named Third Said period, were somehow easier and slightly different from previous 25 years in a few respects. The basic reason was the victory of Democratic Party (DP) in the election of 1950, whose policies and tendencies towards religion were soft as compared to the previous government; Republicans Peoples Party (RPP). Lifting of many restrictions and easing out of the conditions ensured that “Nursi and his followers had greater freedom in pursuing activities connected with the Risale and the growth of the Nur movement.” The cases and court hearings however, continued in this period as well till 1956 when “Risale was finally cleared by Court. With Nursi’s permission, Nur students in Ankara and Istanbul started to have it printed in the Latin alphabet. Nursi called this the Risale-i Nur festival” having said “From now on there is no need for me to work in the service of the Risale-i Nur, That is to say, the Risale-i Nur and its students will perform my duties.” After this the Nur movement grew more rapidly with

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92 Ibid., 205.
opening of Nur study centers (dershane) all over the country.\textsuperscript{98} Nursi also paid special attention to the “training of young students and preparing some of them to lead the \textit{Risale-i Nur} movement in later years.” In addition “Nursi also began to read daily newspapers again, paying attention to social life and developments in Turkey and the wider Muslim world.” In general elections of 1957, Nursi openly supported Democrats and advised his students to vote DP in order to prevent the Republicans returning to the power. It is evident that he once again started to take interest in politics but this time his participation was not as a political activist rather as a supporter and advisor to DP, as he considered this party a hindrance for the movement of communism, aggressive secularism and materialistic atheism. Therefore, again “the change during this period in Said Nursi’s method of serving the cause of Islam was closely related to tendencies in society in general”. It is also important to keep in mind that Nursi prevented his students from taking part in any political activity with the name of the Risale-i Nur community. During the last span of his life he also put extreme importance on establishing and strengthening good relations of his government with the rest of the Muslim countries for the sake of attaining peace in the region. In this quest “he applauded the Democrat Government's decision to sign the Baghdad Pact between Turkey and Iraq, subsequently joined by Pakistan, Iran, and Britain in 1955.”\textsuperscript{99} Further, he sent copies of Risale and his students to different countries like Germany, Pakistan, Syria, Korea, Finland, America, Japan, India, Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and some African countries to spread the message of Risale. Many religious scholars and important figures from different parts of the Muslim World also came to visit Nursi. He even approached the Christians with the aim to create harmony among the Muslims and Christians and to fight against their common enemy; aggressive secularism and materialistic atheism. He sent a copy of Risale to the pope of Vatican in 1951 and received a letter of thanks from him. During the period of ending 1959 and early 1960 he made a series of visits to ‘dersanes’ (Nur study centers), which his students had established on his advice, and reached Urfa in southeastern Turkey. Here he suffered from illness and died on 23 March 1960, 25 Ramadan 1379.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{98}Vahide, "A Chronology," xxiii.
\textsuperscript{99}Turner and Horkuc, \textit{Said Nursi}, 36,42.
\textsuperscript{100}Ibid., 41-44; Vahide, "The Life and Times," 243-44.
1.4 Risale-i Nur: Introduction, structure and volumes

1.4.1 Introduction:

The monumental work Risale-i Nur of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi written in the years from 1925 to 1949 is basically an interpretation of the main Quranic truths. Though it is considered a commentary of the Quran but it is not like traditional commentaries “which expound all its verses giving the immediate reasons for their revelation and the apparent meanings of the words and sentences”. Risale is instead a thematic interpretation *ma’navi tasfir* “which expounds the meaning of the Qur’anic truths.”\(^\text{101}\) In Nursi’s description:

“[T]here are two sorts of Qur’anic commentaries: The first is the well-known sorts of commentary... expound and elucidate the Qur’an’s phraseology, words, and sentences. The second sort explains, proves, and elucidates with powerful arguments the Qur’an’s truths related to belief. This sort has great importance. Sometimes the well-known, externalist commentaries include this sort in summary fashion. But the Risale has made it its basis directly, and is a commentary on the Qur’an’s meanings which silences obstinate philosophers in an unprecedented manner.”\(^\text{102}\)

In addition, Nursi opines that “the Qur’an addresses all men in every age in accordance with the degree of their understanding and development; it has a face that looks to each age. The Risale explains that face of the Qur’an which looks to this age.”\(^\text{103}\) As every age has particular necessities and needs, and it is the miracle of the Quran to answer those particular needs of every age. In this regard the major issue of current age is belief being victimized due to materialism\(^\text{104}\) to such a degree as has never been faced in any other age; the loss and


\(^{103}\) Vahide, "Risale I Nur and Flashes Collection," 482.

\(^{104}\) Materialism is a philosophical ideology in which it is believed that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all phenomena, including mental phenomena and consciousness, are results of material interactions. In Materialistic view; all that exists is ultimately physical and nothing is metaphysical. See A Dictionary of Marxist thought, 2nd ed., Tom Bottomore (USA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), s.v. “Materialism,” accessed August 03, 2016, http://ouleft.org/wp-content/uploads/dictionary-of-marxist-thought.pdf; Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “Materialism,” accessed August 03, 2016,
damage to faith of an individual in current age is unprecedented in the whole Muslims history. Therefore Nursi drew from the Quran such principles for Muslim behavior which, on one hand revive and strengthen the faith of an individual through rational proofs and ‘belief through investigation’ (iman i tahqiqi)\(^{105}\) and on the other, logically refute the materialist philosophy. In this way it has “drawn from the Qur'an principles of Muslim behavior appropriate to our times.”\(^{106}\) This is the reason that Risale illustrates the verses of the Quran focusing on their relevance to the issues and question of modern age according to the understanding of the mindset of this age.\(^{107}\)

Risale is a thematic interpretation of the Quran in which the subjects relevant to Muslim faith have been illustrated. The verses of the Quran explained in are mostly related to the subjects of belief and its six tenets. For example divine existence, unity of God, prophet-hood, resurrection and the hereafter, divine determining, sacred books, angels, etc. In addition practical benefits of religious rituals i.e. daily prayers, fasting, alms giving, etc. have

\(^{105}\) “Iman-i tahqiqi” can be translated as ‘verified’ or ‘confirmatory’ belief; or belief ‘ascertained through enquiry’ or ‘resulting from investigation’. It is the opposite of “taqlidi iman,” or belief through blind imitation or habit”. See Sukran Vahide, "Jihad in the Modern Age: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad,” in Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the twentieth century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (Istanbul: Sozler, 1995), 134. This includes Nursi’s method of attaining investigative belief through reasoning on outer world i.e. reading the Book of Universe (will be discussed in second section of chapter three) and through reflection on man’s inner world (will be elaborated in chapter five).

\(^{106}\) Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 18.

also been discussed. Materialist philosophy which affected the belief of people on large scale, have been refuted with rational and overwhelming proofs. Each exposition is generally initiated with a verse of the Quran, then Nursi gives the explanation sometimes employing allegorical and parable way or some time in a question and answer form to make it more clear for readers. In addition reflective thought (reasoning and logical thinking) is a very important element of Risale based upon the Quranic method of persuading human intellect to observe his surroundings to get the reality of The Creator. A brief study of structure and major volumes will provide further detail on the subjects of Risale.

1.4.2 Structure:

Said Nursi’s monumental work comprises 14 books in Turkish language with the following titles:


First four volumes are considered the main books of Risale which are further divided into chapters or treatises. Each chapter is titled with a number (i.e. in first volume The Words first chapter is titled as First Word, second chapter as Second Word and so on) and followed by the sequence. However, a few chapters are also given additional titles in relevance of their themes. The literary structure of all books of Risale is very unique. First book Sözler (The words) contains thirty three words or chapters in it. Then second book Mektubat (The Letters) also consists of thirty three letters or chapters, each chapter of this book is also titled with a number as First Letter, Second Letter and so on. This book is basically a ‘supplement’ to the first book. Interestingly enough in this book the chapter Twenty-Seventh Letter does not contain any details rather it refers to other three books of Risale. It is mentioned under the title of Twenty-Seventh Letter that “these have been published separately as Emirdag
Lahikası, Barla Lahikası and Kastamonu Lahikası 108. Which are the last three books of Risale comprised of the correspondence of Nursi with his students during his stay in Emirdağ, Barla and Kastamonu, the places where he was exiled respectively. So he named these books in connection with the places. Similarly, Thirtieth Letter also refers to a separate book published with the title İşaratü'l İ'caz (The signs of Miraculousness) 6th book in the collection of Risale. This is one of Nursi’s Old Said works which he added later as a small volume of Risale. Same is the case with the chapter of Thirty-First Letter, which refers to another entire book Lem’alar (Flashes). 109

Lema’lar (Flashes) third main book of Risale also consists of thirty three flashes or chapters and all are numbered in sequence similar to the first two books. Like Mektubat (Letters) its structure also contains several others separate books of Risale in it. For example under the chapter Twenty-Seventh Flash, Nursi suggests his readers to consult his defense speeches in the court of Eskisehir, published as a part of Tarihçe-i Hayat (“Biography”) 110 which is 11th book of Risale. In the same way last three Flashes or chapters refer to other books of Risale. Under Thirty-First Flash the whole collection of forth main book Şualar (Rays) is being referred. Same is the case with Thirty-Second and Thirty-Third Flashes. Thirty-Second Flash refer to Leme’at (Gleams), “the last work of Old Said” which is placed in the end of Sozler (The Words). Whereas Thirty-Third Flash also refers to a separate work Mesnevi-i Nuriye (The Seedbed of Light), 111 the fifth book of the present collection.

As far as the structure of fourth main book Sualar (Rays) is concerned, it consists of fifteen treatises each is named Rays, but these are not arranged in sequence but randomly. Similar to the earlier volumes, it also contains explanation of some other treatises of the collection. For example Ninth Ray is explained as an addendum to the Tenth Word from The Words which is about resurrection and the hereafter. 112 Tenth Ray is left blank with the explanation that it consists of Fifteenth to Thirtieth Flashes and First to Ninth Rays. 113

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109 Ibid., 17.


111 Ibid., 455.


113 Ibid., 212.
Likewise ‘The Eleventh Ray’ also named as The Fruits of Belief, is “presented as the summary of the Risale-i Nur”.\textsuperscript{114} At the end of The Rays collection, An Introduction to The Damascus Sermon has been given.

There are some books in Risale collection which are not original works, rather reproduction or combination of some other parts of the collection such as 7\textsuperscript{th} volume Asa-yi Musa and 10\textsuperscript{th} volume İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri. The book İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri is based upon the combination of a few chapters from The Words (i.e first, second, twelfth words etc), a few from The Flashes and a few parts of The Letters. The purpose might be “to give a taste of the main arguments” of the first four books to such readers who cannot spend much time to read out whole collection.\textsuperscript{115} Whereas, 9\textsuperscript{th} volume Muhakemat is a work Said Nursi wrote in his early phase of life and later included as part of Risale like İşaratü’l Ī’caz. However, the 8\textsuperscript{th} book Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi is a selection of such letters and parts of Risale which shows significance of Risale and divine favors which were received during the whole period of composition of Risale.\textsuperscript{116} Thus, the whole work Risale is structured in a unique and inter-related manner. Nursi mentioned that this structure was divinely indicated in his heart.\textsuperscript{117} Due to its intricate structure it seems to be a ‘Chinese box’, as one volume contains either selected parts of other books or even entire other book of collection.

The Risale was originally written in Ottoman Turkish language in Arabic letters and later in Nursi’s lifetime as per his instructions was also converted into Latin alphabet. Since then the writing and publishing is continued in both scripts till the date. In 1980’s it began to be translated into English and other major languages. As far as the English translation of Risale is concerned, except the books Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi, İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri and last three volumes Emirdağ Lahikası, Barla Lahikası and Kastamonu Lahikası all books have been translated into English. Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi and İman-Küfür

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114}Mermer, "Aspects of Religious Identity", 138.
\item \textsuperscript{115}Serdar Poyraz, “Science Versus Religion: The Influence of European Materialism on Turkish Thought, 1860-1960” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University 2010), 190.
\item \textsuperscript{116}For details on structure of Risale-i Nur consult ibid., 187-90; Mermer, "Aspects of Religious Identity", 140-44.
\item \textsuperscript{117}Nursi, Emirdag Lahikasi, 40 quoted in Poyraz, "Science Versus Religion", 188.
\item \textsuperscript{118}Ibid., 189.
\end{itemize}
Muvazeneleri, as mentioned above, are not original works rather reproduction of certain parts of whole collection. Likewise, Tarihçe-i Hayat (Biography) written by Nursi’s close students in his life time according to his instructions, though has not been translated into English yet. But English biography by Sukran Vahide \(^{119}\) (‘The Author of The Risale-i Nur Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’ fifth book of English collection) has the same place in English language as Turkish biography has its place in Turkish language, because she prepared this biography by consulting original sources. Therefore, it can be concluded that except the last three books the whole collection is available in English language. English Collection contains following seven volumes translated by Sukran Vahide: (1) The Words (2) The Letters (3) The Flashes (4) The Rays (5) The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (6) Signs of Miraculousness (7) The Staff of Moses. Whereas the English translations of two books Mesnevi-i Nuriye (The Seedbed of the light) and Muhakemat (The Reasonings) translated by Huseyin Akarsu are also available separately.

\(^{119}\) Previously Mathilda, originally belong to England reverted to Islam in 1981 after reading few parts of Risale-i Nur, afterward she shifted to Turkey and got married to one of the closest Nursi’s Students Mehmet Frinci. She dedicated her life for the translation of Risale-i Nur into English. She has translated a large part and continues translating the remaining parts along with her doctorate dissertation.
1.4.3 Subjects of major volumes:
Here the main subjects of first four Volumes would be discussed because these four books are considered the major works comprising the crux of Nursi’s thoughts and teachings:

1.4.3.1 The Words

The first volume of Risale-i Nur which is considered the foundation and backbone of the whole collection, deals with the subjects of basic Islamic beliefs. As the main objective of Nursi was the revitalization of belief, therefore, belief and its tenets have been explained according to the mind set of modern man with rational proofs. It is translated into English by Sukran Vahide, it is also translated by Huseyin Akarsu with the title ‘The Words The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought’. The Words comprises of thirty three chapters, each chapter is titled as Word and followed by the number. Basically these are treatises or parts written in the years of 1926 to 1930 on different subjects and tenets of belief. First nine chapters are short pieces based upon the benefits and virtues of belief and worship, particularly Ninth Word explains the practical benefits and wisdoms of five daily prayers. Tenth Word which is based upon rational proofs of physical resurrection of the dead in hereafter was the first treatise he composed and placed as Tenth Word subsequently. In this exposition Nursi explains how the concept resurrection affects man’s personal and social life. He also proves the existence of hereafter and resurrection with the names and attributes of God. Divine existence, Unity and manifestation of Divine names are such subjects which Nursi explains in the whole volume with different perspectives. For example, Nursi has assigned three different chapters to prove the existence of God with three different sources which inform mankind about God. For instance “In the Nineteenth Word, the Prophethood of Muhammad is studied and He is shown as being one of the three main revealers of God to man. Likewise Twenty-Fifth Word “studies the Quran as a revealer of God to man, from forty different aspects of its miraculousness, and also “answers in particular criticisms made by atheists and scientists”. Similarly, Thirty-Second Word explains the third

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122 Vahide, "Words and Their Author," 807.
revealer of God which is the universe.\textsuperscript{123} Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Twenty-Second, Twenty-Forth, Thirty-Second, and Thirty-Third Word, all elaborate Divine existence, Unity and Divine Names in further aspects. Advantages of Belief have been discussed in Twenty-Third Word. Messenger ship of Muhammad\textsuperscript{116}, miracles of Prophets and ascension of Prophet\textsuperscript{116} are the subjects of Nineteenth, Twentieth and Thirty-First Words respectively. Twenty-Sixth Word illustrates Divine determining and man’s power of choice (concept of Qadr), whereas Twenty-Ninth Word consists of the immortality of man’s spirit, the angels and the resurrection. Thus, we can say “the subjects addressed by Nursi in The Words correspond roughly to the six requirements of belief” which is called iman e mufassal: Amantu bi llahi wa malaikatihi wa kutubihi wa rusulihi wal-yawm il-akhir li wa bil qadari khayrli wa sharrihi min Allahi ta’ala wal-ba’su ba’d al mawti. (I believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His prophets, the Day of Judgment, in destiny that the good and the evil are from Allah, and in resurrection). Poyraz comments: “It is of course, natural, that the central book of Nursi’s grand project of revitalizing the religion of Islam in modern Turkey emphasizes the fundamentals of Islamic belief and tries to make these beliefs palatable to the taste of modern man.”\textsuperscript{124}

Thirtieth Word secures a very significant space in this volume because it provides a comparison between revealed religion and philosophy in order to refute materialism and its fruit atheism. Nursi makes a comparison of both and proves how materialist philosophy misleads individual’s thoughts and damages his personal and social conduct in life. Furthermore, the concept of Human I and its connection with Divine names and attributes particularly how ‘I’ leads towards the knowledge of God’s attributes has also been discussed in detail. The comparison of the Quran and Philosophy has also been mentioned briefly in Twelfth and Thirteenth Words and partially in Twenty-Fifth Word.

\subsection*{1.4.3.2 The Letters}

The Letters is second main volume of Risale, translated by Sukran Vahide into English with the title The Letters. This is actually based upon the letters which Nursi wrote to his students as reply to their different religious questions during the period of 1930 to

\textsuperscript{123}Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 243; Mermer, "Aspects of Religious Identity", 130.

\textsuperscript{124}Poyraz, "Science Versus Religion", 194.
1934. This book is considered a supplement to the first Volume containing the detailed explanations of various issues rose in the minds of Nursi’s early students after reading the first book, which were either less explained or not addressed in the first book. The Letters also consists of thirty three chapters each starts with the title of Letter and continues with sequence. As far as subjects of this book are concerned, it comprises a wide range which is not possible to describe here. However, keeping in view Nursi’s project of revitalization, it can be brief in this way:

Twelfth Letter describes divine reason for the creation of evil. Sixteenth Letter is based upon the question why Nursi avoided politics in his New Said period and his detailed reply which is mainly to serve belief and the Quran; Eighteenth Letter explains Islam is based upon the Quran and Hadith not on sufi ideas. Nineteenth Letter describes more than three hundred miracles of Prophet Muhammad in a detailed manner; in Twentieth Letter Nursi describes very strong proofs of Divine existence and Unity, particularly while reading the Book of Universe. Twenty-Second Letter is on brother hood in which Nursi proves that the source of all bad morals in individuals are two vices; which kill sincerity in individuals and social life. This letter is also considered the base of Nursi’s social teachings. Twenty-Sixth Letter, third topic discusses social life and Nationalism; second section: How fasting affects man’s social and instinctual soul’s training, seventh section; why Nursi changed the style of Old Said which was to defend Islam against Europe in the manner of philosopher. In Sixth Section of the Twenty-Ninth Letter Nursi points out that among six groups of society i.e sick, elderly, weak, poor, children and the pious, it is only youth which is deeply affected by irreligion. A few letters also give information of Nursi’s life during exile and circumstances of the country during Republican’s rule.

1.4.3.3 The Flashes

Third book written in the series of Risale consists of thirty three treatises (flashes), also translated into English by Sukran Vahide. First Twenty Six Flashes “were written in 1934 and the rest in 1935.” The Flashes Collection also proves the main truths of belief and gives strong replies to the atheistic criticism on the truths of belief and the Quranic

verses. For example Twelfth, Fourteenth, and Sixteenth Flashes comprise the above subjects. Whereas Twenty-Third Flash titled Tabiat Risalesi (Nature: Cause or Effect?) as it is clear from the title, refutes with strong arguments the Naturalist and Materialist philosophy. Sixth point of Thirtieth Flash also elaborates this point.

Nevertheless, the major subjects of the Flashes Collection are the truths of belief. It is distinguished from other books of the Risale as “it considers social aspects of belief to a greater extent”. Here Nursi focused his attention on the training of individuals in terms of their different responsibilities as Muslims in different circumstances and conditions. Such as the Twentieth Flash which is on Sincerity, “demonstrates that sincerity is the means of healing the divisions in society and achieving union”. Likewise, the Nineteenth “encourages the important Islamic principle of frugality, for which Bediuzzaman himself was the finest example”. Similarly, the Twenty-Fourth explains the wisdom behind Islamic dress code for women. Whereas the Twenty-Fifth provides spiritual remedies and guidelines for the sick: how one should behave in this trial phase of one’s life as a Muslim. The Twenty-Sixth gives the instructions to the elderly people. To trace out the reason why Nursi focused on social aspect of Belief in this book to a larger extent Vahide notes:

“One explanation for this may be that Bediuzzaman removed from his place of exile in the isolated village of Barla in the summer of 1934 to the provincial centre of Isparta. The Flashes which include the above were written here, where the needs of the various sections of society may have impressed themselves on Bediuzzaman to a greater degree.”

Subjects of some other important treatises are as follows; Twenty-Third Flash bases on disproving European philosophers’ claims concerning the cosmos and science. Twenty-Seventh Flash comprises Nursi’s Defence speech of Eskishehir court, whereas Twenty-Ninth Flash is dedicated upon the principle methodology of Risale that is reflective thought, the heart of Nursi’s project of revitalization of Belief which he followed throughout Risale. Thirtieth Flash illustrates six names among Greatest Divine Names.

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1.4.3.4 The Rays

The forth main volume of Risale-i Nur, translated by Sukran Vahide in English, is basically a collection of such treatises written by Nursi during three terms of his imprisonment. It also includes the letters he wrote to his students and defense speeches he presented during his trial in courts. This volume consists of Fifteen Rays which are arranged randomly. This volume embraces the very significant and important mysteries of belief and affirmation of Divine Unity. Keeping in mind the revitalization aspect these treatises can briefly be analyzed in the following way.

Eleventh Ray named as Meyve Rasalesi (the fruits of belief) was written in Denizili prison in 1943-44. It comprises eleven topics which encompasses the six pillars of faith (belief in God, Angels, Books, Prophets, Divine determination and the hereafter) with irrefutable proofs. Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Ray is a collection of the letters Nursi wrote to his students and his defense speeches in courts. The defense he presented in courts was mostly the defense of Risale, the aim of which was to save and strengthen the religious belief. Nursi always pointed out that a small group of materialistic atheists had deceived and inflicted the mind of government and judiciary against him and Risale, as they were aiming to establish their own ideas of unbelief the atheism, ultimately causing a state of social disorder. Bediuzzaman always tried to prove in court the utmost importance of Risale to save the social bonds by strengthening religious belief to evade the state of anarchy. Moreover, he also repeatedly proved that it did not have any concern with secret political society, rather he prevented his students from all types of political activities. He wrote The Fifteenth Ray named as “The luminous proof” in Afyon prison in 1948-1949 for his fellow prisoners and students. It contains an explanation about belief in God, Surah Fatiha, Prophet Muhammad and attributes of God. Another aspect of Fifteenth Ray is very important with reference to revitalization of society at large and specifically for his fellow prisoners. In Fifteenth Ray many horizons were unfolded by him regarding the five daily prayers of Islam. Because of the wisdom of Nursi many of his fellow prisoners were enlightened with new dimensions of worship and started to perform daily prayers regularly.

130 Ibid., 683.
The Second to Seventh Ray and then Ninth to Eleventh Ray consist of luminous rationalizations of truths of belief in a very persuasive way, and involves the study of universe and nature of man in a very meaningful way. In addition the Seventh Ray named as ‘the Supreme Sign’ has greatest place in Risale collection. Nursi explains in the light of all the major organs of universe i.e. heavens, earth, seas, rivers, mountains, plains etc. that the Universe is purposely formed in this order so that it should be read with reflective thought to reach the reality of its Maker.

Conclusion:

A careful study of Nursi’s life shows that many factors combined to shape his thought process. His early disagreement with the education system had a pivotal role to play in his intellectual development in the years to follow. Like most people destined to leave an everlasting impact on the pages of history, he displayed exceptional talent for learning at an early age. His innate brilliance enabled him to acquire knowledge from diverse fields including religious and modern physical sciences. An in-depth insight into the three periods that his life is divided into, is a pre-requisite to understanding his person. They indicate that Nursi’s views were not stagnant but ever-evolving. This is evident in the emergence of The New Said in the wake of the WW-1. He tried to counter the hollowness of modern scientism materialism, with the Quran as his mentor. It would be misplaced to conclude that his views were a mere reaction to the external factors and not an outcome of his internal thought process. Evidently, it was a combination of the demands of the social changes and introspection that accounted for the constant revision of his views.

In the years of his socio-political activism he had been of the view to utilize all social and political means for the revitalization of Muslims. But over all circumstances left him in a state of disappointment and prompted him to review his strategy. His spiritual re-birth was an outcome of two factors i.e. his seclusion and contemplation; atheistic trends due to which he considered it more important to strengthen the threatened faith of the common people rather than engaging in political struggle. Therefore, New Said emerged with the focus this time on revitalization of faith. To achieve this purpose, he immersed in writing Risale-i Nur which proved instrumental in his movement of Reconstruction of Belief of individuals with the

\[131\] Ibid., 684.
method of the Quran. Nursi’s endeavor was applauded by a huge number of masses. On the allegations that his views were harmful to the political reforms during Republican’s regime in Turkey, the government turned against him, resulting in his frequent imprisonments and exile. In a way, these years of hardships proved rewarding for Nursi, because they allowed him sufficient time to write his monumental work Risale. Authorities took every possible measure to restrict the preaching of his ideas but they couldn’t crush the resilience of Nursi or that of his students. This comprehensive work was different from the traditional interpretations of the Holy Quran in many ways. Contrary to the traditional approach the main aim of this work was not to explain the verses in their historical perspective but to provide logical argument for the truthfulness of Islamic beliefs in order to prove the superiority of the Quran and its civilization. Risale went a long way in proving that the work of God (science) and the word of God (Quran) were not in disagreement with each other. Contrary to the materialist philosophy it is only the Quranic way which secures satisfaction and happiness in man’s individual and collective life. Towards the end of his life, change in the political environment and easing of conditions made it possible for Nursi to get his work published and disseminated on a larger scale even outside of Turkey. Since then Nursi’s followers had consolidated as a strong force and Risale played the primary role in resurgence of Islam by keeping the Islamic faith alive in Turkey.
CHAPTER : 2
MUSLIMS’ DECLINE IN NURSIAN PERSPECTIVE:
A STUDY OF HIS APPROACH TO RECONSTRUCTION

Introduction

2.1 Ottoman Muslims’ Decline and various responses: a short historical context

2.2 Ottoman Muslims’ Decline in Nursian perspective
   2.2.1 Education system as major reason of decline
   2.2.2 Weaknesses of Muslim sciences and Muslim intelligentsia
   2.2.3 Political factors of decline with a short political background
   2.2.4 Negligence of basic pillars of Islam and socio-moral sicknesses

2.3 Nursi’s approach to Reconstruction
   2.3.1 Process of finding appropriate methodology for Reconstruction of Society
   2.3.2 Nature of Nursi’s Quran based method

2.4 Government’s anti-Islamic measures and Role of Risale-i Nur

Conclusion
Introduction

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was born in a semi tribal region of Ottoman territory, however his mature thought was “the product of a confrontation with a process of Ottoman modernization and secularization which had begun far away from his birthplace.”¹ This process was initiated a few years before his birth in Ottoman capital with the name of Tanzimat reforms. The major changes in administrative, judiciary and educational policies of state were the results of these reforms. Nursi not only observed these developments but he also witnessed their consequences during his stay in Van, Bitlis and Istanbul as discussed briefly in previous chapter. All these developments played a crucial role in strengthening the decline of Ottoman Muslims which ultimately contributed in the collapse of Empire. Said Nursi is one of the eminent Muslim scholars who was too much concerned about Muslims downfall and devoted his life in figuring out the factors of decline and exerted himself for the revival of Muslims. This chapter intends to first look at the reasons of Ottoman Muslims decline in general and the responses which emerged for its solution of reformation. Then it will argue the reasons of decline in Nursi’s vision, and his suggestions for the reconstruction of Muslim society. The areas which were identified by him as the major manifestations of decline will be covered in brief that will serve as the basis of discussion on Nursi’s efforts of reconstruction in the coming chapters. Furthermore, a brief account of socio-historical changes and background will also be given where needed, which worked as a stimulus for Nursi to contemplate the reasons of Muslim decline. Nursi’s methodology for the reconstruction of society in Old Said phase was different from that of New Said phase, what the difference was? And what the reason of this difference was? The answers of both questions will also be explored here. Moreover, the following will also examine Nursi’s thought process of finding appropriate methodology for reconstruction of Society. This will help in getting a better understanding of Nursi’s Approach of reconstruction. In addition the answers of following questions would also be explored; what was the new method of Nursi for reconstruction in his second phase of life? And how this new methodology contributed during the time of new governments’ hostility against Islam?

2.1: Ottoman Muslims’ decline and various responses: a short historical context

Twentieth century proved to be the century of defeat and disgrace for Muslim world because of the biggest loss in the form of political decline with the collapse of magnificent Ottoman Empire, once the center of Muslims’ union and political authority since centuries. At a time when European powers had proved their military and commercial superiority, the Ottoman Empire was fast approaching its sad end while attaining the title ‘the sick man of Europe’. The Great Empire did not approach its decline in a vacuum rather it was the result of numerous factors in social, political and cultural areas which had been undermining its foundations for decades. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to grasp all the reasons and factors of decline. However the attention will be focused on one of the major reasons -the process of Westernization. Enlightenment process of modernization emerged in seventeenth century and gradually prevailed till eighteenth century in European/Western countries i.e. England, France, Germany, and America, this culminated into anti-religious Western ideologies like positivism and materialism. Eventually through colonialism and

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3 For details of causes of Ottoman Empire’s decline see Bernard Lewis, "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire," *Studia islamica*, no. 9 (1958); Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Lewis, *The Emergence*.
5 Ilhan Yildiz, "The Search in the Transitional Period (1924-1950) for a Religious Educational Model," in *Fifth international Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi The Quranic view of Man according to Risale i Nur* (Istanbul: Sozler, 2000), 413. For definition of materialism see chapter one, footnote 103, Positivism is a philosophical theory stating that positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations. Thus, information derived from sensory experience, interpreted through reason and logic, forms the exclusive source of all authoritative knowledge. Positivism holds that valid knowledge (certitude or truth) is found only in this derived knowledge. *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Positivism,” last modified 6 August 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positivism.
6 Colonialism, a political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world. The age of modern colonialism began about 1500, following the European discoveries of a sea route around Africa’s southern coast (1488) and of America (1492). With these events sea power shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and to the emerging nation-states of Portugal, Spain, the Dutch Republic, France, and England. By discovery, conquest, and settlement, these nations
Westernizing process, the religion opposing ideas of Western intellectuals penetrated into Muslim world in nineteenth century. This was the period when the entire Muslim world was facing a dilemma in the form of different Western ideologies as Turner and Horkuc depict:

“[It was] a period of great change in the Muslim world, with the rise of new ideologies and belief systems which, combined with the cultural and political hegemony of the West, had dealt a body blow to religious faith across the whole Muslim world. These changes occurred thanks to the establishment of direct imperial control of Muslim countries through the formation of new, Western-oriented, nationalistic state-systems. Materialism and communism were at their peak and the world appeared to be in psycho-spiritual crisis. Momentous advances in the field of the natural sciences were used in some quarters as a stick to beat religion, creating doubts about their most cherished beliefs in the minds of Christians, Jews and Muslims alike…. Society had begun to embrace multiple gods, hiding them under the umbrella of ideologies such as atheism or existentialism”  

Different Western ideologies caused much damage to religious matters for example “The Darwinist view implied that human moral nature and religion had both evolved naturalistically: now there was no need for a God or religion to explain life. Darwinism contradicted some ideas in the Scriptures and was viewed as a threat to revealed religions.”

Under the impact of Enlightenment process “faith and reason were often viewed as in


8 Darwinism is a theory of biological evolution developed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. Wikipedia, s.v. “Darwinism,” last modified 19 August, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwinism.

9 Ibid., 50.

10 A European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries in which ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and humanity were synthesized into a worldview that gained wide assent in the West and that instigated revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason, the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition.
conflict” because “clash between reason and revelation was an important part of the modern awareness”.11 Even existence of God had become a huge question mark which finally was resolved by replacing God with nature as Karl Popper illustrates:

“[…] the Naturalist revolt against God, which preceded the historians' revolt, replaced God with Nature. Apart from this, almost everything remained the same. Naturalism replaced theology, natural laws replaced Divine laws, natural will and power (the forces of Nature) replaced Divine will and power, and finally Natural Selection replaced the Divine order and judgement. Naturalist determinism replaced theological determinism, that is, Nature's being omnipotent and omniscient replaced God's being omnipotent and omniscient.”12

Therefore the Muslim World in general and Ottoman Empire in particular, “were in the grip of socio-psychological depression. Until then, the revealed religions had had a great impact on all kinds of relations, from governmental to societal, but now a new 'religion' had appeared, declaring that there was no need for messages or moral precepts emanating from beyond the confines of the visible world.”13 As far as the issue of how Western ideologies penetrated into Ottoman Society is concerned, the process of Westernization of Ottoman Society started in eighteenth century with the establishment of European style Military schools and academies. In another opinion the process began when new sources of taxation


13Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 50.
were introduced in order to support and restore the military power of Empire. As Shaw indicates: “The channels through which knowledge of the West and its ways penetrated the empire were many and varied… By far most important was the process by which military techniques and weapons were introduced to young Ottomans in the new corps and schools by European officers and technicians.” Gradually it extended from Military to government and other spheres of Empire particularly after the proclamation of Tanzimat in 1839.

Tanzimamt which literally means “Reorganization” is the name given to the period between 1839 to 1876. In which Ottoman rulers and “their leading ministers introduced a series of reforms in order to restore Empire’s fast declining power”. The focus of these reforms was to reorganize various institutes i.e. administration, judiciary, education, etc. on Western lines. The major effect of these Western style reforms was the secularizing of the institutes which resulted in the “separation of the religious and worldly functions of the state”. More over the new secular schools introduced with the name rusdiye “began to spread throughout Turkey” which “greatly increased the teaching of European languages, particularly French, and often involved the sending of students to Europe, both of which expedited the flow of contemporary European ideas into the Ottoman Empire.” Sait Ozerverli illustrates the situation and its impact in these words:

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16 For details Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 107.
19 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 34.
20 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 108.
21 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 34.
“Contemporary Turkish intellectual history has been the product of a long historical process of Westernization, initiated by the Ottomans before the creation of the Turkish Republic. During this process, the Ottoman intelligentsia praised the scientific achievements of Western civilization. Ottoman students sent to Europe, especially France, to pursue their studies, commented on the gap in scientific knowledge between the East and the West. In the late nineteenth century, Bafhoca Ishak Efendi published a four-volume encyclopedia entitled Mecmua-i Ulum-i Riyaziye, which dealt with the new approaches to physical science for the first time in Ottoman Turkish. This whole process culminated in the Tanzimat, a process of modernization in the Ottoman Empire that focused on the appropriation of Western science for the purpose of emulating European models of progress.”

In this way Enlightenment along with “various political, literary and philosophical ideologies” i.e. secularism, nationalism, capitalism, socialism, materialism, positivism, naturalism etc. took its root into Ottoman society “impacting considerably the Ottoman intellectual life.” Eventually there were also various responses “to the nineteenth century question of European modernity and threat it posed to the integrity of the Ottoman state.” These responses basically emerged to preserve Ottoman Empire from decline and to prescribe solution for its reformation.

First response came from the Westernists who aimed “to preserve Ottoman Empire without giving any central role to Islam in either society or politics.” According to this mind set the only solution to avoid decadence was to adopt Westernization in all the areas of life through “a radical moral and mental transformation” of society, moreover to “develop a new morality

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23 Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 51-52. See also Yildiz, "Search in Transitional Period," 413.
25 For details Berkes, Development of Secularism, 347-56.
based upon the Western system of values.”\textsuperscript{27} Due to the influence of Western civilization they began to consider religion a major obstacle in the way to progress and got the vision to eradicate all signs of religion from all the areas of life. Ozerverli describes this mindset as follows:

“Long before the foundation of the Turkish Republic, a tiny, but effective, pro-Western Turkish elite emerged in the Ottoman Empire, an elite that was deeply impressed by biological-materialist and Darwinist science, and was occupied with popular materialist literature, to the utter amazement of visiting foreign scholars. Original or translated European works by such scientists and philosophers as Ludwig Buchner, Ernst Heackel, J. William Draper, and Auguste Comte were read by students of newly established Western style schools, and especially in the famous Medical School (Mekteb-i Tibbiye). Scientific positivism was more practical for the reformist bureaucrats who were looking for an ideological base for transferring Western science. Therefore, nineteenth-century idealism seems to have been excluded by the Westernized Ottoman thinkers, as it was too abstract and speculative for their ambition of effecting urgent change.”\textsuperscript{28}

One of the prominent figures and defenders of this school of thought was “Besir Fuad (1852-1857), who was described as the first Turkish materialist and positivist intellectual, he tried to prove that life is merely a materialistic event.”\textsuperscript{29} Another defender of this ideology was Tevfik Fikret, an Ottoman poet (1867-1915), who is considered the founder of modern Turkish poetry.\textsuperscript{30} In his poems he criticized Islam by depicting it as passed history, also

\textsuperscript{27} Berkes, Development of Secularism, 338.
\textsuperscript{29} Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 317-18. Consult also Hanioglu, The Young Turks in Opposition, 16.
criticized God, His attributes and tenets of Islam. Abdulla Cevdet (1869-1932) also one of defenders of Westernization basically seconded and propagated Fikret’s ideas. In his views “there is no second civilization; civilization means European civilization, and it must be imported with both its roses and its thorns” These Westernists’ ideologies and their anti religious tendencies influenced greatly over time the policy makers of new Turkish republic particularly Mustafa Kemal Attaturk.

The second of these responses was that of the Turkish nationalists called Turkism who aimed at “cultural and political unification of Turks” and whose only concern was to bring all Turks under one umbrella on the basis of common language, customs and traditions. They were indifferent to both religion and empire. Nationalists were of the view that Turkish history should not begin with the advent of Islam rather it should begin with pre-Islamic Turkish civilization, because “Turks belong to a great and ancient nation with a cultural tradition which went back to Islam”. Therefore, they should “rediscover” and “return to Turkish origins and purify it from the influence of alien cultures” and languages, particularly Arabic and Persian. The most prominent among them were Ziya Gokalp, Yusuf Akcura, Ahmed Agayev (later Agaoglu), and Halim Sabit. A worth mentioning point about the defenders of Turkish nationalism is they “adopted some Western ideas in cultural developments and even borrowed certain terms from the French Revolution”, such as liberty, equality, progress, and

32 Berkes, Development of Secularism, 339.
33 Lewis, The Emergence, 236. For more on Cevdet’s views consult Berkes, Development of Secularism, 338-40.
34 Hanioglu, "Garbcılár," 146-47.
36 Berkes, Development of Secularism, 345.
37 “French Revolution also called Revolution of 1789, the revolutionary movement that shook France between 1787 and 1799 and reached its first climax there in 1789.” “It was a period of far-reaching social and political upheaval in France...The Revolution overthrew the monarchy, established a republic, experienced violent
brotherhood. Some of these terms were later reflected in the name of the group: Ittihad ve Terraki Cemiyeti (the Community of Unity and Progress, or CUP).”

The third response which was Islamism emerged partially as a reaction to the Westernist and Nationalist school. Many Muslim intellectuals turned against Westernization when they realized the colonial European ambitions. This was Islamism in nature that “opted to modernize the infrastructure of the Empire while preserving the status of Islam in society.”

These Islamists refuted the views that Islam was hampering progress and replied to the allegations against Islam leveled by the Westernists. Moreover they were “quite open to interpreting the Qur'an and classical Islamic sources in harmony with developments of modern science; however, they also reacted strongly to the materialist aspects of Western science. They read books on Western thought, literature, and science, mostly through translations, in order to understand the changes in new sciences.” In their views “a reinterpretation of the Qur'an was necessary in order to address the demands of modern life. The Qur’an was considered capable of re-energizing Muslims, so a new approach was required.” Among the leading figures of this school the names of Mustafa Sabri (1869-1954), Mehmed Akif (1870-1936), and Ismail Hakki (1869-1946) are very prominent.


39 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 318.


41 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 318.


43 Berkes, Development of Secularism, 340-43.
Mehmed Akif, a famous intellectual and poet, who also criticized Westernization and Nationalism in his poems, highlighted the need of reinterpretation of religion in the following words:

“Is it possible to meet our religious needs with books, Written seven hundred years ago? No, it is impossible. We have to get our inspiration directly from the Qur’an In order to express Islam to the mentality of the modern century. This cannot be achieved through empty claims, but requires knowledge.”

There were also some intellectuals who, however, were not among Islamists but still were the critics of Westernization as Ozerverli mentioned:

“There were also other intellectuals who tried to find a rapprochement between their Islamic/Ottoman identity and Western ideas and science. For instance, the Young Ottomans led by Namik Kemal and Ziya Pasa, although they did not contemplate any friction between Western science and traditional Islamic identity, still criticized the effects of Westernization on the Islamic social and moral system.”

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was also a well known religious figure who believed in making some urgent reforms in order to preserve the Empire. He stressed that the reforms should be based upon the principles of Islam. He dedicated his whole life to the cause of Islam. Nursi along with other intellectuals, “promoted the unity of all Muslims throughout the world. On the other hand, the supporters of Turkism advocated a unified Turkish state and managed to establish the CUP, which eventually overthrew Abdulhamid II (1876–1909).” They ruled the empire in backend till WW-I. Though there was an acting Ottoman Sultan, but he did not have any authorities. Later on the prominent figures of CUP particularly Mustafa Kemal

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44 For details of Modernization impact on Ottoman society and contribution of Ismail Hakki see Ozervarli, "Alternative Approaches to Modernization"

45 For details see Berkes, Development of Secularism, 342-43.

46 As quoted by Saritoprak, "Islam and Politics," 115.

47 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 318.


Ataturk played a major role in establishing Turkish Republic after the collapse of Ottoman Empire in the wake of WW-I. Nursi devoted his life to the savior of Muslims from decadence; therefore, it is important to first look upon the reasons which he identified for Muslims downfall, the following section will illustrate those factors.

\[\text{References:} \]


Ahmad, The Making, 2.
2.2: Ottoman Muslims’ Decline in Nursian perspective

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is one of those prominent Muslim intellectuals of the twentieth century who analyzed the factors that contributed to the downfall of Muslim World in general and Ottoman Muslims in particular, and suggested remedies for the same. The following section will depict the causes which, in Nursi’s vision, were responsible for the Muslims’ decline. In Nursi’s views, there was a positive correlation between Muslims’ adherence to the teachings of Islam and their spiritual and material growth. He believed that a true civilization was a combination of spiritual and material development of society which was encouraged by Islam. He maintained that history proved holding fast to the fundamentals of Islam saw Muslims prosper in these two areas and once their adherence to Islamic tenets weakened, they experienced abject defeat and decline in both.

Nursi was of the view that re-establishing the Islamic civilization was the only way through which Muslims could reclaim their lost glory. He was critical of the negative effects of the Western civilization on the minds of Ottoman intelligentsia. As discussed earlier he had observed it during his interaction with the government officials in Van that Ottoman elite class had misplaced views about Western civilization. He believed it was wrong to ascribe the economic and military superiority of the West to their civilization. He considered them only a product of their scientific advance. Through Tanzimat the Turkish rulers hastened the process of adopting Western ideals and discarding Islamic models. Rather than acquiring the benefits of science and technology, they internalized their evils and materialism. Thus, giving up religion and not even gaining the world. Although the intention behind this adoption of the Western civilization was to strengthen the Ottoman Empire and stop its decline, this trend proved counterproductive. The Ottomans were completely overpowered by the European civilization economically, materially and

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52 Ibid., 28.
54 Nursi, *Reasonings*, 38.
intellectually. As a result, they started viewing Islam not only opposed to science and religion but also blameworthy for the Ottoman decline.55

According to Nursi, Muslims’ biggest mistake was their failure to differentiate between the good and evil aspects of the Western civilization. To him, there was nothing wrong in embracing the industrial and material development of the West but Muslims also accepted and implemented the negative side of that civilization which did them untold harm. Nursi believed that Western civilization should be viewed as having two sides to it, one positive and one negative. The positive aspect consisted in its unearthing and exploring scientific knowledge for the betterment of humanity. He considered it has been emerged from the teachings of true Christianity. To Nursi, this first Europe was not a problem either for Muslims or for humanity. He took exception to the second aspect of European thought led by positivism and materialism. He opined that these were dark ideologies doing harm to humanity. Regretfully, intellectuals mistook these banes as blessings, thus guiding humanity to the life of misery and moral degeneration. In Nursi’s words:

“It should not be misunderstood; Europe is twofold, One follows the sciences which serve justice and right and the industries beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity; this first Europe I am not addressing. I am rather addressing the second corrupt Europe which, due to the darkness of the philosophy of Naturalism supposes the evils of civilization to be its virtues, and has driven mankind to vice and misguidance.”56

Nursi was of the view that present Western civilization has gone far from original teachings of Christianity and have founded its base on “Greek and primarily, Roman philosophy” because of this reason “in the West, the evils of civilization had come to

preponderate over its beneficial aspects." Moreover, in Nursi’s vision “through civilization’s iniquities prevailing over its benefits and its evils being preferred to its virtues, mankind has suffered two calamitous (disastrous) blows in the form of two world wars, and overturning that sinful civilization men have been so utterly disgusted that they have smeared the face of the earth with blood.”

In short it was primarily “the failure of the Muslims to observe the ordinance of the sharia,… and the abandonment of the virtues inherent in European civilization and the adoption of only its sins” which caused the decline and wretchedness of Muslims pushing their body politic further into the abyss of decline and subjugated them to Western civilization.

**Major factors of Decline in Nursi’s view:**

The responsible factors among Muslims of this whole situation, according to Nursi, were the education system of that time; weaknesses of Muslim sciences and “the utter inability of the traditional Muslim intelligentsia in late Ottoman society to deal with the issue of modernity”. As a result “Western modernity or Westernization succeeded in producing a small, but effective, class of Westernized Ottoman, and later Turkish intelligentsia who looked to Europe for intellectual and philosophical inspiration.”

Abu-Rabi describes further:

“Nursi points out that the main reasons behind this deterioration are ignorance, dictatorship, fanaticism, and the failure of the ulama to come to grips with the importance of modern sciences. 'My Muslim contemporaries,' referring to the ulama at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'are memorabilia from the medieval age. They have failed to catch up with the progress in modern human thought.' Nursi was right in singling out ignorance as the main cause of the decline of the modern Muslim world. He was enraged by the backward conditions many Muslims suffered. When referring to Eastern Turkey, Nursi

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57 Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 158.
60 Abu-Rabi, “How to Read Risale,” 75.
discussed a much worse situation characterized by overwhelming illiteracy due to the control of 'the men of religion.' As a committed Muslim, he was fierce in his rejection of the historical conditions of his people. He believed strongly that an overall reform through education was the best means to eradicate these problems.”

In addition Nursi also blames political conditions of that time, particularly despotism and nationalism to be the causes of decline. Besides, he identifies “various sicknesses in the social life of Muslims and in the field of morality” due to which Muslims as compared to other nations were left behind in the way to progress. And most importantly the negligent attitude of Muslims towards pillars of Islam is also a major factor contributing in their decadence in Nursi’s view. A brief analysis of these factors and their backgrounds will further elaborate why Nursi focused on these factors of decline.

2.2.1 Education system as major reason of decline:

In Nursi’s vision the downturn in the area of education was due to three different systems of education, working simultaneously in the Empire with their rivalries against one another. Among those three variant systems of educational institutes first was traditional religious schools or madrassah, second was modern schools or maktab and third was suffi lodges called tekke or zawiya.

As far as the first educational system is concerned, the curriculum being followed there was “virtually unchanged since the fifteenth century.” Although religious as well as theological sciences were included in the syllabi, the modern (natural and physical) sciences current at that time were totally ignored. Therefore, these institutes were producing such students who, on one hand were unaware of modern advances in physical and natural sciences, and on the other were unable to combat the threats of materialistic atheism. Moreover bad condition of buildings and lack of facilities for students at that time meant that these institutes had been

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61Ibid., 75-6.
62Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 161.
63Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 57.
64Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 44.
deliberately ignored by government and statesmen. The purpose was to lessen the influence of religious scholars and this neglecting attitude increased particularly in the time of Sultan Abdulhamid. Although other Ottoman Muslim scholars also realized and expressed this problem occasionally for instance Ali Suavi and Hoja Muhyiddin “but their ideas had not been applied.” However, the situation of madrassah in Eastern Anatolia, the region where Said Nursi grew up and acquired his education, was to some extent better due to the influence of Naqshbandi and its successor Khalidi order. But here also the focus was only on religious sciences.

The other system was maktab or in other words modern secular schools. Which were established as a result of Tanzimat reforms and a process continued by Sultan Abdulhamid respectively. The focus of this educational system was reverse to the classical madrassah, and it was particularly on physical and modern sciences. Religious studies were not taken into consideration rather the attitude towards religion was to an extent hostile. The reason of establishing the modern schools throughout the Ottoman regions was to fill the gap of scientific knowledge between the East and West. And for this purpose students were also sent to Europe especially to France to pursue their studies. More over original or translated works of European philosophers and scientists such as Ludwig Buchner, Ernst Heackel, J. William Draper, and Auguste Comte being included in the curriculum of “newly established Western style schools, and especially in the famous Medical School (Mekteb-i Tibbiye).” Resultantly, students of such schools began to believe life as a materialistic event. Thus a

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66 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 110-13; Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 44.
67 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 44.
68 Influence of Khalidi order in Eastern Anatolia have been discussed in first chapter for further details see ibid., 4-5,44; Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 54-60; Serif Mardin, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1873-1960): The Shaping of a Vocation," in Religious Organization ed. J. Davis (London: Academic Press, 1982), 72-3.
69 See for details Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 34-5.
70 Ibid., 34; Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 317.
71 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 317-18; also see Hanioglu, The Young Turks in Opposition, 16; for further details of secular schools and their expansion in Sultan Abdulhamid’s regime see M Sait Ozervarli, "Intellectual Foundations and Transformations in an Imperial City: Istanbul from the Late Ottoman to the Early Republican Periods," The Muslim World 103(2013).
mindset developed for blind imitation of European civilization to walk with modern age. It was basically this system of education which produced a “pro Western Turkish elite in the Ottoman Empire”\(^{72}\) who under the influence of materialist philosophy turned hostile towards religion and later on undermined the political system of Empire and finally succeeded in its abolishing and established a secularized Turkish Republic.

Third structure of educational system was that of *sufi tareeqa* or *sufi* establishments called *tekke*.\(^{73}\) It was an oral mode of education but was very influential in Ottoman society.\(^{74}\) This divergent system of education was not only the major reason of decadence of Ottoman Muslims but also proved to be the factor of disunity among them because people educated from one system of education turned hostile towards the others two. Nursi says:

“The people of the *medreses* accuse those of the *mektebs* of weakness in belief because of their literalist interpretation of certain matters, while the latter look on the former as ignorant and unreliable because they have no knowledge of modern science. Then the scholars of the *medreses* regard the people of the *tekkes* as followers of innovations.”\(^{75}\)

Under these circumstances Nursi felt the necessity for educational reforms and formulated his detailed educational plan which chiefly was based upon the foundation of a central institute in eastern provinces of Empire where all the three systems of education could be united and positive aspects of these structures could be benefited.\(^{76}\) Hence, this was the only solution to him to save “students of secular schools from becoming atheists and students of medreses from becoming fanatics.”\(^{77}\) Nursi reveals his experience when he came to Istanbul in the following words:

\(^{72}\) Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 317-18.

\(^{73}\) A *tekke* is a building designed specifically for the gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood.


\(^{75}\) Quoted in Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 48.

\(^{76}\) This subject will be dealt with higher details in third chapter.

“I saw and understood that Islam was behind, far behind the civilization of our times . . . There were three culprits of this decline: the Doctors of Islamic law, those who had not understood Europe [i.e. Westernist] and the members of mystic orders (tekke).”

2.2.2 Weaknesses of Muslim sciences and Muslim intelligentsia:

Another major factor of downfall of Muslims, Nursi realized, was weakness of Muslim sciences i.e Muslims theological science (Ilm al kalam) and Muslim science of the Quranic Commentary (tafsir). The traditional form of Muslim theology became weaker with the passage of time and had lost its power to defend Islam from the recent attacks of materialistic philosophy which raised doubts and criticism on the issues of belief. This also “led him to take the momentous step of learning the modern science- something unprecedented among the ulama of the eastern provinces.” In Nursi’s opinion:

“[P]revious texts of Islamic theology were mainly theoretical discussions at a philosophical level that could do nothing to answer the critical questions of modernity, and to satisfy the spiritual crisis of a transforming society.”

A point important to be mentioned here is that Nursi was anticipating an alarming danger to Muslim’s belief. He understood in early phase of life that the challenges of this age to Muslims were different from that of past. In former times it was ignorance which endangered Muslim’s belief, but now it is science and education which has threatened their Faith. He mentions “if misguidance arises from ignorance it is easy to dispel, but if it results from science and learning it is difficult to eliminate.” Therefore, he stressed on the urgent need of revitalization of Muslim sciences of kalam and tafsir. That is why he also penned Muhakemat (The Reasonings) to set the principles of the Quranic exegesis that should be

78 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 82.
79 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 27-8.
80 Quoted by Ozervarli, “The Reconstruction,” 537.
followed in present time\textsuperscript{82}, by following these principles he also wrote an incomplete interpretation of the Quran titled Isharat ul Ijaz (The Signs of Miraculousness). This vision of Nursi strengthened gradually with the passage of time. As far as Nursi’s opinion about current condition of kalam is concerned “he realised that the classical form and methods of philosophy and theology were inadequate for answering immediately and satisfactorily the doubts that had been raised in the modern age”\textsuperscript{83}

Likewise, Nursi also indicates the problem in existing Quranic commentaries and their methodologies which has attributed to Muslims decline. He points out in Muhakemat (Reasonings) the biggest mistake of commentators, that is to consult earlier non Islamic sources i.e. Isra’iliyyat\textsuperscript{84} and ancient Greek philosophy, which has made the reality of Islam ambiguous.\textsuperscript{85} He also criticizes another careless aptitude of Muslim scholars to focus more attention on the controversial matters which form only 10 percent of religious matters in their commentaries and books of jurisprudence compared to the “essentials of faith (arkan o ahkam-i zururiyya) which characterize the majority of the subjects in the Quran [that forms 90 percent of religion] and not the legal disagreements between scholars.”\textsuperscript{86}

\subsection*{2.2.3 Political factors of decline with a short political background:}

Nursi also saw political factors as contributing to the Muslim- downfall, just like the sad state of education. He believed that the most glaring of political causes was that the Muslim world was in the grip of despotism. He called it un-Islamic because Islam demanded that people be slave to one true God not to the worldly rulers. A true Muslim, according to Nursi, would not

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{82}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 193.
\item \textsuperscript{83}Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 537-38.
\item \textsuperscript{84}Isra’iliyyat: Narratives and traditions of Jews and Christians, about earlier prophets, creation of universe etc. These are teachings and stories that, having been introduced into Islam by scholars of ‘the People of the Book’ on their becoming Muslim in the early period of Islam, with time had been corrupted and become superstitions. \textit{The Encyclopaedia of Islam}, s.v. “Isra’iliyyat,” accessed August 03, 2016, https://archive.org/stream/BrillTheEncyclopaediaOfIslamVol5KheMahiVol51/Brill_\_The_Encyclopaedia_of_Islam_Vol_4_Iran-Kha\#page/n1/mode/2up. See also Wikipedia, s.v. “Isra’iliyyat,” last modified 5 July 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isra%27iliyyat#cite_note-EI2-2.
\item \textsuperscript{85}Nursi, \textit{Reasonings}, 3,16, 18-19. This will be further elaborated in third chapter.
\item \textsuperscript{86}Nursi, Sunuhat, cited in Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 322; see also Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 92, 162-63. These points will be further elaborated in chapter three.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
abase himself before anyone apart from God. The power of God could only be realized by gaining freedom from the tyrants, which will in turn free an individual from oppression and persecution.\(^{87}\) This was precisely why Nursi was against the absolutist rule of Sultan Abdulhamid, whose time saw Islam reduce to a state ideology.\(^{88}\) He joined Young Turks to further the cause of Constitutional reforms during his stay in Istanbul from 1907 onward. When Sultan Abdulhamid was enthroned in 1876, he promised a constitution and parliamentary system for his people. But he didn’t keep this promise for long and suspended the constitution in 1878 by dissolving the parliament. Thus became an absolute autocrat and ruled for about 30 years.\(^{89}\) The Young Turks Movement, which started as a secret organization in 1889 comprised dissenting students, officers and those intellectuals who were against Abdulhamid’s rule. The organization was renamed as Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P).\(^{90}\) Some of its prominent members included the important names like Enver Pasha, Jemal Pasha and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who would play important roles later in the Establishment of modern Turkey. The most important achievement of C.U.P was its successful army rebellion of 1908, known as Constitutional Revolution or Young Turk revolution, as the result of which the Sultan was forced to restore the Constitution.\(^{91}\) Nursi had supported constitutional revolution of CUP because he believed constitutionalism and freedom were essential for the establishment of Islamic civilization and progress of Ottoman Empire.\(^{92}\) However, he was soon disillusioned by the CUP’s policies of Turkish

\(^{87}\) For details see Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 56-7. For more explanation see and compare Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, 153-54.

\(^{88}\) Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, 153. Nursi was not completely against Sultan, it was that particular aspect of Sultan’s policies which Nursi criticized and exclaimed as non-Islamic see Algar, "Nursi and Risale-I Nur," 316.


\(^{91}\) Ahmad, *The Making*, 2.

nationalism and exploitative use of Islam. This was the parting of ways between CUP and Nursi, who started writing essays for a militant paper pan-Islamic of the Society for Muslim Unity (Ittihad-i Muhammedi). In his articles he criticized the policies of the government. The year 1909 saw the break out of a fierce rebellion against the oppression of CUP under the leadership of Sheikh Vahdeti, the head of the Ittihad-i Muhammedi, also joined by other civilians and intellectuals demanding the implementation of the shari’ah. On 9th April the operational corps controlled by CUP entered Istanbul, arrested the rebellion leadership and executed many people restoring the CUP government. They replaced Sultan Abdulhamid with Sultan Mehmed Resad (1909-1918), established their power more firmly than ever before and continued their rule until the defeat of Ottomans in WW-I. Nursi had no direct involvement in the rebellion, rather he convinced a group of soldiers to desist from rebellion and return to their barracks. Nonetheless, he was arrested for his connections with the Society for Muslim Unity which was deemed responsible for instigating rebellion. Nursi took this incident as an opportunity to support his cause and delivered inspiring speech as his defense propagating the virtues of constitutionalism and freedom. He was released later. This rebellion of 9 April 1909 is famous as 31st March incident. Yavuz mentions it as “a defining event for state-society relations in the late Ottoman Empire and the Republican period.” He illustrates:

“The CUP presented the rebellion, which was prompted by social and political discontent, as a “reactionary” event against a progressive government. Since then, almost all anti centralization and anti-Westernization opposition has been framed as “reactionary.” The discourse of “reactionary” became the popular tool for excluding religious people from politics and delegitimizing any form of religious entry into the public sphere.”

To support his view Yavuz relates Ismail Kara’s opinion which Kara personally told him in an interview. He quotes:

93Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity, 153.
94Ahmad, The Making, 2; Zurcher, Turkey, 76-7; Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity, 153; Algar, "Nursi and Risale-I Nur," 315-16.
95Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity, 153.
96This difference is due to the Ottoman and Gregorian calendars.
“Ismail Kara, the most prominent scholar of late Islamic thought in the
Ottoman Empire and the early Republic, [believes] the rebellion has been
construed as a “framework” for representing any form of opposition against
forced homogenization as “reactionary.”

Yavuz concludes:

“Indeed, this rebellion was “reconstructed” by Kemalist historians to
establish one of the key features of Turkish political culture by creating a
fixed dichotomy between the elite, with its “Kemalism, Westernism, and
secularism,” and the Islamic movement of the periphery.”

Disappointed by this whole situation Nursi left the Ottoman capital for his home town around
Van in eastern Anatolia. He continued his mission this time focusing common people
delivering speeches on the value of constitutionalism and freedom to “Kurdish porters”. “He
impressed on them that their threefold enemies of poverty, ignorance, and internal enmity
[the problems of the Muslim community] should be combated with “education, industry and
unity”.

Another important factor Nursi identified as undermining for both the Ottoman Empire and
Muslim world in general was Nationalism. It gained ground in the wake of The French
Revolution and provided an impetus for the separatist movements in the Balkans and Arab
territories of the Empire. These movements kept The Ottoman Empire in a state of turmoil as
they had to face challenges at both external and internal fronts. In response to these
nationalist movements pan Turkism, based on Turkish ethnicity, flourished. Ahmad
elucidates in following words: “For the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth,
until their empire was destroyed, the Turks tried to suppress one national movement after
another. In the end they too adopted nationalism, waged their own struggle and set up a
national state of their own.” Nuri was against all such movements that were based on
ethnic nationalism. Despite his Kurdish roots, he played down the importance of ethnic

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origin and emphasized the collective representation of Islam in the modern era.\textsuperscript{101} He disagreed with the notion that either race or ethnicity should serve as the basis of nation-formation on Muslims. Rather “ethnic conflicts [near him] were the only causes of disunity in society”\textsuperscript{102}. Therefore he called for Muslims including Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Albanians, Circassians and Laz to regard Islam as the foundation of their nationhood.\textsuperscript{103}

2.2.4 Negligence of basic pillars of Islam and socio-moral sicknesses:

Nursi opines Islamic civilization is true civilization because it is based upon revelation as compared to Western civilization which is based upon materialist philosophy. But the question is why Muslims have been materially defeated by Western civilization? To which Nursi replies: it is because of their negligent attitude towards basic pillars of Islam which is a serious mistake of Muslims\textsuperscript{104} due to which they suffered the calamities of WW-I. For example he says: “Exalted Creator wanted and commanded us only one hour for the five daily prayers, but we neglected due to laziness... so we received the punishment in the form of “performing prayers of a sort these last five years by constant twenty-four hour drill and hardship, being driven on and made to strive.” Similarly “[the Creator] also wanted of us one month’s fasting a year, but we pitied ourselves, so in atonement He compelled us to fast for five years.” Likewise neglecting of zakat and hajj also put Muslims into terrible conditions of the time and “this sinful nation took its ablutions with its blood”.\textsuperscript{105}

The question similar to above regarding Muslims material backwardness as compared to non-believers has also been dealt with detail in Damascus Sermon, where Nursi identified six dire [socio-moral] sicknesses as factors of this backwardness. Which are 1: The rising to life of despair and hopelessness in social life. 2: The death of truthfulness in social and political life. 3: Love of enmity. 4: Not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another. 5: Despotism (dictatorship), which spreads, becoming widespread as though it was various contagious (infectious) diseases. 6: Restricting endeavour to what is

\textsuperscript{101}Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 547-48; for further details see Abu-Rabi, "How to Read Risale," 62.

\textsuperscript{102}Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 548.

\textsuperscript{103}Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 83.

\textsuperscript{104}See for details Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 160-61.

personally beneficial.\textsuperscript{106}
Likewise, at another place in Damascus Sermon Nursi also identifies poverty, ignorance and (internal) conflict as major problems of Muslim world which is weakening its bases. Nursi suggests instead of blaming European civilization, Muslims should realize that it is actually these three enemies which are causing immorality and bad conduct among Muslims, preventing them from upholding the word of God, moreover producing strife and hatred by attacking their union.\textsuperscript{107} In addition Nursi also states that these three elements of Muslims’ behaviour are “a root cause of their social upheaval”\textsuperscript{108}. Two practices are very common which have provoked self worshiping among them. One of them is “So long as I’m full, what is it to me if others die of hunger,” the other is, “You suffer hardship so that I can live in ease; you work so that I can eat”\textsuperscript{109} These two practices have perpetuated, Nursi argues, on one hand the prevalence of usury and interest among Muslims, and on the other the abandonment of Zakat which ultimately create a disharmony among the upper and lower classes of society. Nursi comments:

“[I]n the absence of zakat, the upper classes will descend on the common people with cruelty and oppression, and the common people will rise up against the upper classes in rancour and rebellion. There will be a constant struggle, a persistent opposition between the two classes of men. It will finally result in the confrontation of capital and labour, as happened in Russia."\textsuperscript{110} Therefore, Nursi asserts the application of the Quranic ordinance of almsgiving and prohibition of interest to avoid these social upheavals.\textsuperscript{111}
These were the decline factors which Nursi expressed time to time in his Old Said phase through writing articles and books, discussions and public speeches, addressing gatherings, “applying to authorities on certain questions”\textsuperscript{112} and to combat these he proposed to work in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{106}Nursi, \textit{Damascus Sermon}, 26-7. The solutions of these sicknesses will be discussed in 4\textsuperscript{th} chapter.
\bibitem{107}Ibid., 85.
\bibitem{108}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 160.
\bibitem{109}Nursi, \textit{The Letters}, 533.
\bibitem{110}Ibid., 319.
\bibitem{111}Ibid., 533.
\bibitem{112}Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 540.
\end{thebibliography}
two areas; re-establishing constitutional regime based on the principles of Islamic shari‘ah, and making major reforms in educational area. Nursi continued his efforts till WW-I, but afterwards particularly from 1925 onwards, one observes a vivid change in his strategy of reconstruction. He turned his back on all types of political activism, and only indulged himself in writing Risale-i Nur and disseminating it. In the next section the reason and form of this methodological change would be explored.
2.3: Nursi’s approach to Reconstruction:

Nursi in his Old Said Phase identified different reasons of Muslims decline and exerted himself to save Ottoman Empire mainly with twin tools\textsuperscript{113}; political reforms, particularly restoration of constitutional system of Government and educational reforms. But unfortunately his efforts could not be fruitful and in the wake of WW-I Ottoman Empire saw its end which was followed by the establishment of Turkish Republic through which another phase of Turkish history commenced. The challenges of this epoch were somehow different from the challenges of previous one. Now “Ottoman modernists” became the “Policy makers of new state” for whom as Turner explains:

“Islam and the Islamic way of life were deemed responsible for centuries of backwardness and lack of development in science and technology. There was only one solution: Islam had to be removed from social, public and political structures. Therefore, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, religion was duly excised from public life, while positivist-materialism, secularism and atheism gradually began to take root”\textsuperscript{114}

Nursi had already anticipated the upcoming danger during his visit of Ankara as discussed in previous chapter, and had reached to the conclusion that the upcoming challenge would be of different nature so methodology should also be different. This is considered the turning point of his life when he emerged as New Said with a revived methodology for reconstruction. In his early phase particularly before 1925, “Nursi saw the Islamic solution in the upholding of political Ottomanist authority and he tried to make politics serve religion.” But after getting the awareness that “serving the Islamic cause through political involvement under a totalitarian regime of one party government” would not be possible anymore. He turned his attention on the “revival through faith based issues”. That is why the works of Old Said and New Said are different to an extent from each other. In subsequent works Nursi sought to

\textsuperscript{113}Turner, \textit{The Quran Revealed}, 519.

\textsuperscript{114}Turner and Horkuc, \textit{Said Nursi}, 51-3.
“iman-ise society, rather than to Islamicise the political authority and institutions, as in the Makkan period of Prophet Muhammad’s life.”

Therefore, in New Said phase Nursi focused his attention entirely on reconstruction of belief by just concentrating on the training of individuals. The methodology he adopted for an individual’s training was of spiritual sort. But here spiritual does not mean Sufism which does not have any role of ‘reason’ in it. Instead Nursi’s spiritual training works with an alliance of heart and mind both by purifying the former and illuminating the latter. He disconnected from all sorts of political activism and also guided his disciples not to participate in political matters. In addition, the nature of Nursi’s method for reconstruction in this phase was bottom up as compared to the earlier phase which was top to bottom; In order to get a true understanding of Nursi’s approach and strategy of reconstruction this section aims to explore following questions 1: Why Nursi turned his attention to the revival of Belief? Why he focused his attention on the training of Individuals? Why the nature of training is called spiritual or what is meant by spiritual training?

In New Said Phase Nursi turned his attention to the savior of belief because the truths of belief were under severe attack as depicted by one of Nursi’s students Zubeyir Gunduzalp:

“This century, the enemies of religion and Islam made the weakening of the bases of belief and the plan to destroy them the first matter in their programmes. Particularly this last twenty-five years [Republicans’ period], the conspiracies against the pillars of belief under various disguises and in dissembling fashion in a way hitherto unseen in history, have been quite dreadful; they have been carried out in most destructive fashion. Whereas, doubts or denial that arise in the pillars of belief were very often much more disastrous and harmful than indifference in the secondary matters of religion. It is because of this that the most important matter now is to strengthen belief by transforming it from imitative belief into certain belief; it is to reinforce belief, to save it. To be occupied with the fundamentals of belief over and

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above everything is an absolute necessity and compelling need; it has become essential.”

Nevertheless, the religious beliefs of people were already under threat due to the modernizing efforts during Ottoman rule which Nursi and other Islamists were pointing out; however in that period common Muslim populace remained mostly unaffected. But after the establishment of Turkish Republic whole Muslim population of the country came under the harmful effects of political and institutional reforms of Mustafa Kemal, Ayduz explains:

“It was a period in which every sort of religious enterprise was labelled ‘a reactionary movement’; religiously minded people who performed worship even privately were disturbed; when both reading and teaching the Qur'an were forbidden; blameless religious scholars were sent to the scaffold due to unfounded suspicions; and severe penalties were inflicted for the teaching of religion. Yes, it was a time when the religious schools and Sufi meeting-places were closed down, which for hundreds of years had been the watchmen of this nation's spiritual life, honour, and all they hold sacred; when anywhere thought to be a place of religious learning was extinguished; when all religious instruction was prohibited; and when some shaykhs and religious scholars were intimidated into 'selling themselves' and accepting various positions...”

Therefore “such conditions presented Nursi with a golden opportunity to develop his discourse and aim to reconstruct society on the foundations of true belief in the Qur'an”. Furthermore, “Nursi was provided with fertile ground on which to sow his ideas concerning

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the total involvement of the individual in Islam.”\textsuperscript{119} And for this purpose Nursi “spent his energy in a one-to-one channel of communication” \textsuperscript{120} by focusing more on individuals because “in his approach society cannot change towards improvement without self-controlled individuals, whose hearts are replete with moral satisfaction. In fact, the primary aim of the Qur’an is to encourage humans towards engaging in higher pursuits and direct them towards the achievements of moral perfection. This was actually the main reason behind the shift of his concentration from politics to the conversion and perfection of individuals.”\textsuperscript{121} Serif Mardin explains Nursi’s notion of preferring individuals for training in following words:

“Bediüzzaman does not have a holistic understanding of society: He sees society as made up of persons. … These persons are not real but ‘virtual’ persons. They are defined not as individuals, but as positions or roles that those persons would fill. The ‘Good Society’ is one where this pyramid of rules — derived from the Qur’an — is constituted.”\textsuperscript{122}

Consequently, in second phase of life, Nursi focused his attention on inner dimension of individuals as Yavuz describes:

“he concluded that the rejuvenation of Islamic consciousness had to be carried out not at the state level but at the level of individuals. He shifted his emphasis to the inner dimension of individual spirituality and the development of a new, reflective Islamic consciousness. He saw the mind of the reformist elite as having been invaded by skepticism and positivist philosophy. In order to counter this skepticism, he sought to ‘bring God back’ by raising Islamic consciousness in everyday life. He no longer believed in societal transformation through political involvement saying that it was necessary to develop an ‘intellectually able group’ to create a counter discourse of Islamic identity and morality. The goal thus became the construction of an Islamic consciousness and a new map of meaning to guide everyday life.”\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120}Ozervarlı, "The Reconstruction," 540.
\textsuperscript{121}Ibid. Nursi’s aloofness from politics and its reasons will be further discussed in 4\textsuperscript{th} chapter.
\textsuperscript{122}Mardin, \textit{Religion and Social Change}, 171.
\textsuperscript{123}Yavuz, \textit{Islamic Political Identity}, 154.
The nature of his training was of spiritual sort due to the fact that the destruction caused by the modern philosophies of naturalism and materialism was mainly “spiritual (ma’navi)” therefore “such destruction needed to be healed spiritually.”124 However, “Nursi’s notion of spirituality is different from those understood by the Sufi tariqahs (orders) which were dominant especially in Turkey before his time”. His “understanding of spirituality emphasizes more on the role of reason” in it125; therefore “the method of presentation has to be based on both the heart and mind.”126

To sum up, Nursi’s plan of action for the reconstruction of society was changed in New Said phase. Previously it was top to bottom now it became bottom to top127 because instead of bringing change through working on educational institutions and political system, it turned towards individuals’ spiritual training particularly on the revival of their belief and their moral conduct. According to Horkuc: “This was the first and most important step of the iman-isation process of society and the cure and the solution for the times. The discourse starts with an individual but aims to iman-ise society in general.”128 The change in Nursi’s strategy was of course due to the changes in conditions of time. Besides, he went through a process of “spiritual awakening” which led him towards his “enlightenment”129 helping him in figuring out the most appropriate strategy to meet the challenges of his age. This process will be explained ahead.

124Saritoprak, "Islam and Politics," 118.
129Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 164,66.
2.3.1 Process of finding appropriate methodology for Reconstruction of Society:

In his early phase Nursi was of the view that the harms materialist philosophy of Europe had created, should be combated with their own weapon which was a “rationalist method”\(^{130}\). So “European science and philosophy could be used to reinforce and strengthen Islam”.\(^{131}\) As Vahide describes “[in early phase] Nursi had filled his brain with the philosophical as well as the Islamic sciences,” therefore in that phase “he tried to find consolation and a ray of light in his learning and the things he had studied for so many years for he thought that the philosophical sciences [with positive impact] were the means to spiritual progress and enlightenment.”\(^{132}\)

That is why Nursi’s early writings were very philosophical. “Muhakemat (Reasonings) (1911), and Munazarat (Debates) (1910), are the ones in which Nursi deals with contemporary Islamic issues using philosophical method.”\(^{133}\) But during the phase when he went through a spiritual turmoil, as previously described, he got disturbed and went into isolation of two years, that time he spent on contemplating. He came to the conclusion that these sciences could not help him to solve his spiritual problems rather “he found that they had dirtied his spirit and been an obstacle to his spiritual development.”\(^{134}\) Thus he felt these sciences were unable to solve the spiritual problems of people in this age. He furthermore realized that since these were purely based upon reason, so whenever only reason was used, it raised nothing except doubts and skepticism.\(^{135}\) After this realization the next path which Nursi examined to find out appropriate methodology for reconstruction of society was Sufism.\(^{136}\)

\(^{130}\) Vahide, "Nursi’s Approach to Religious Renewal," 58.
\(^{131}\) Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 164. Nursi differentiates philosophy in terms of its negative and positive impacts. As Horkuc mentions: we might describe him as an Islamic philosopher who, on the one hand, rejects the harmful outcomes of (negative) philosophy, but on the other hand welcomed other [positive] outcomes of philosophy such as reason, science and progress. See Horkuc, "Nursi’s Ideal", 175.
\(^{132}\) Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 164.
\(^{133}\) Horkuc, "Nursi's Ideal", 173; Bolay, "Bediuzzaman’s View," 255.
\(^{134}\) Nursi, *The Flashes*, 305. for further explanations consult Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 166-64.
\(^{135}\) Horkuc, "Nursi's Ideal", 175; Bolay, "Bediuzzaman’s View," 277.
\(^{136}\) Horkuc, "Nursi's Ideal", 175-77.
Sufism had been an attractive path for Nursi and he was under its influence since his childhood\textsuperscript{137} because of the significant influence of different sufi orders in eastern Anatolia, the region where Nursi was born and brought up. He also “appreciated the [historical] role played by the \textit{tariqah} movement (institutionalized Sufi order) in enhancing the religious understanding of the Muslims in Turkey.”\textsuperscript{138} Moreover, “he benefited from Sufism and respected the historical Sufi masters,”\textsuperscript{139} as mentioned earlier that he searched help for his spiritual ailment in Shah Abdul Qadir Gilani’s \textit{Futuh ul ghayb} and Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi’s \textit{Maktubat} during the phase of spiritual unrest. While in “methodological search”\textsuperscript{140}, he found this method also incapable in solving rational issues of the time and challenges raised by positivism and materialism.\textsuperscript{141}

In former times, believes Nursi, faith had never been endangered as it is in present time\textsuperscript{142}, thus peoples’ belief in God was firm and whoever needed to increase further his level of belief, he used to consult Sufism. Therefore, Sufism was consulted to increase the level of faith which was undoubtedly a long and hard way to go.\textsuperscript{143} Whereas in present age it is faith which is in danger due to the materialist attacks of philosophy, so not to speak of increasing its level the crucial task is to save it first.\textsuperscript{144} Subsequently, the method of Sufism is inappropriate for solving the present time issues because of two causes; Firstly “Sufism requires total submission, which is extremely difficult for the people of modern age.” And

\textsuperscript{137}See for examples Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{138}Shahran, “Nursi’s Theologico-Spiritual Framework,” 272.
\textsuperscript{139}However he never joined any particular Sufi order in his life and he made it clear that his faith-based movement was something new and different from Sufism See Kuru and Kuru, “Apolitical Interpretation,” 111; Ozervarli, “Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing,” 321.
\textsuperscript{140}Horkuc, “Nursi's Ideal”, 175.
\textsuperscript{141}Kuru and Kuru, “Apolitical Interpretation,” 105-06; Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 166.
\textsuperscript{142}Nursi, \textit{Damascus Sermon}, 23.
\textsuperscript{143}Nursi, \textit{The Letters}, 510.17.
\textsuperscript{144}For the explanation of Nursi’s notion of faith being in danger as compare to the past see Algar, “Nursi and Risale-I Nur,” 320-21; Hamid Algar, ”The Centennial Renewer: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Tradition of Tajdid,” \textit{Journal of Islamic Studies} 12(2001): 305-06; Horkuc, ”Nursi's Ideal”, 179; Kuru and Kuru, ”Apolitical Interpretation,” 105-06.
secondly “today’s Muslims, Nursi emphasizes, need rational proof to support their faith”\(^{145}\) whereas the method of Sufism is solely based upon heart (intuition)\(^{146}\). Due to this fact “Nursi regards Sufi order as one of the forms of religious practices which is not something so necessary as compared to substance of religion which is the faith.”\(^{147}\) In Nursi’s words:

“If persons like Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani (May God be pleased with him) and Shah Naqshband (May God be pleased with him) and Imam-i Rabbani (May God be pleased with him) were alive at the present time, they would expend all their efforts in strengthening the truths of belief and tenets of Islam…. A person without faith will not enter Paradise, but very many will go there without Sufism. Man cannot live without bread, but he can live without fruit. Sufism is [like] the fruit, [whereas] the truths of Islam [are like bread which is] basic sustenance.”\(^{148}\)

Therefore, Nursi found Sufism inappropriate to solve the rational problems of his age and it was a hard and lengthy way to manage for the people of his time. Whereas philosophy, he already concluded, was inappropriate for the solution of spiritual matters. He was in search of such method which could address man’s both rational and spiritual problems. Finally, his search was resolved on finding out the Quranic method\(^{149}\), Nursi illustrates:

“While thus bewildered, it was imparted to my heart by God’s mercy that ‘the head of these various ways and the source of these streams and the sun of these planets is the All-Wise Qur’an; the true single qibla [direction] is to be found in it.’”\(^{150}\)

Thus Nursi’s enlightenment in Vahide’s words “occurred in three stages: In the first, he realized the deficiency of the human philosophy he had studied and how it had been an obstacle to his enlightenment and progress. In the second, as he himself confessed, through the bitter medicine of Shaikh ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani’s Futuh ul ghayb “I understood my faults, perceived my wounds, and my pride was to a degree destroyed.” Then [in the third] to
complete the process of his transformation into the New Said, he understood through the Maktubat of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi that he should take the Qur’an as his sole master.”¹⁵¹ Nursi elaborates the process of his methodological search in following words:

“Sixty years ago, I was searching for a way to reach reality that was appropriate for the present age. That is, I was searching for a short way to obtain firm faith and a complete understanding of Islam that would not be shaken by the attacks of the numerous damaging currents. First I had recourse to the way of the philosophers; I wanted to reach the truth with just the reason. But I reached it only twice with extreme difficulty. Then I looked and saw that even the greatest geniuses of mankind had gone only half the way, and that only one or two had been able to reach the truth by means of the reason alone. So I told myself that a way that even they had been unable to take could not be made general, and I gave it up.... Then I had recourse to the way of Sufism and studied it. I saw that it was truly luminous and effulgent, but that it needed the greatest caution. Only the highest of the elite could take that way. So, saying that this cannot be the way for everyone at this time, either, I sought help from the Qur’an. And thanks be to God, the Risale-i Nur was bestowed on me, which is a safe, short way inspired by the Qur’an for the believers of the present time.”¹⁵²

This is what Nursi was in search of - that he could proceed through an association of heart and mind. Thus he found the way of employing both human faculties through the guidance of the Quran. And before curing any other, this method cured Nursi’s own “wounded spirit and heart, and silencing Satan and the evil-commanding soul, rescued him from doubts and skepticism.”¹⁵³ This was actually the New Said’s Quran and faith based method which he followed in Risale.

**2.3.2 Nature of Nursi’s Quran based method:**

The chief element of Nursi’s method in Risale is reflective thought (tafakkur) which is derived from the Quran. In which the Quran invites human intellect to observe his

¹⁵¹Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 166.

¹⁵²As cited in ibid., 167.

¹⁵³Ibid.
surroundings. On the basis of this Quranic method Nursi forms his method of ‘belief through investigation’ (iman i tahqiqi). Basically Nursi’s intention was “to gain for people a dynamic, living faith” which is achieved through “conscious affirmation and verification”. This is the “opposite of belief by imitation (iman i taqlidi) which can be easily dispelled by doubts”. The key concept of this method is “mana-i harfi (other indicative or the significative meaning of things), a term he borrowed from Arabic grammar by which he meant considering or reading things for the meanings they express and on account of their Maker; in other words, the Qur’anic viewpoint or way of looking at things. This is in contradistinction to materialistic science and philosophy, which look on beings as signifying only themselves (mana-i ismi – the nominal meaning of things).” In addition “Belief by investigation may be attained through reasoning reflective thought on the divine works and names, and rises in degree and strength to the number of the names and cosmic truths that are thus comprehended.”

In this way the whole universe, according to Nursi, can be observed rather read as a book which he called ‘Book of Universe’. Not content with that point, Nursi’s method of reflective thought also includes reflection on man’s inner world in order to reach the reality of the Creator.

This method of Nursi served on different fronts: Firstly, it answered the questions raised by materialism against religious beliefs, for example regarding nature and causality; thus this method played the role of Muslim theology (ilm al kalam). Secondly, this method also played such an important role as revitalization of belief of individuals. Thirdly, it also satisfies human spiritual faculty. This is the reason why Risale satisfies intellectuals, spiritual, religious all needs of a person. Vahide comments: “These and other features of Nursi’s writings made them readily accessible to all sorts of people, whatever their level of understanding.”

Nursi’s method, propagated through Risale, proved very beneficial in the circumstances following the establishment of Turkish Republic. At a time when all possible

155 The subject Nursi’s Quran based method of belief through investigation will be dealt with details in third and fifth chapters.
156 This point will be elaborated in fifth chapter.
157 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 193.
158 Ibid., 193-94.
means of acquiring religious education were banned, Risale was a beacon of hope for people to quench their religious thirst. Following section will throw light on those terrible conditions and role of Risale.
2.4: Government’s anti-Islamic measures and Role of Risale-i Nur:

The defeat of Ottoman state in WW-I (1918) was resulted in its dissolution by allied forces of Britain, Italy, France and Greece who occupied different regions of Empire. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk reunited Muslim forces and battled a War of Independence (1919-1923) to liberate Turkish territories from foreign invaders. The battle proved successful and this was culminated into the formation of a new Assembly in Ankara by Ataturk named Grand National Assembly. This was also followed by the establishment of a political party named Republican People’s party. After the victory Ataturk abolished Ottoman rule and declared Turkish Republic in 1923. This time onwards, Turkey became a ‘secular nation-state’.159 Mustafa Kemal, the president of the new Turkish Republic, was of the view that “Turkey could only be rebuilt and take its place in the civilized world through rapid modernization, and modernization meant Westernization which in turn meant complete secularization.”160 Islam was seen as backward, regressive and responsible for Turkey’s decline. Therefore, the task was set to replace Islam with Western civilization and nationalism in every sphere of life. The Sultanate, the Caliphate, Shari’ah courts, office of Sheikh ul Islam and madrasahs were all abolished. The law of unifying all education systems under a department of government was approved. Following the Shaikh Said (from Palu) Revolt in 1925 a law of “closing down all dervish lodges and Sufi meeting places” was also approved. “The [sufi] orders were disbanded. The tombs of saints were also closed.” Mustafa Kemal ordered people to dress up in the Western fashion with compulsion of European style hats. In 1926 Swiss civil code and Italian criminal law were adopted.161 Witch-hunts of the religious minds became common; scores of people who plotted against the regime were put to death. In 1926 The Western Gregorian calendar and twenty-four-hour

159 For details see ibid., 133-36; Lewis, The Emergence, 239-60; Berkes, Development of Secularism, 435-56; Zurcher, Turkey, 151-68. See also Wikipedia, s.v. “Turkish War of Independence,” last modified 29 July 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_War_of_Independence#cite_note-Britannica-41.

160 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 189. See also Berkes, Development of Secularism, 463–64.

clocks were introduced. In 1928 Constitution was amended to banish Islam as a state religion, writing script was changed from Arabic to Latin Alphabet, and Turkish language was ‘purged’ of Arabic and Persian words which is according to Vahide: “A more effective way of cutting off an entire nation from its religion, its roots, and its past could not have been devised”\textsuperscript{162}. But the step that created most public fury was the conversion of Azaan (call for prayers) from Arabic to Turkish in 1932.\textsuperscript{163}

In 1931 Kemal’s Republican People’s Party (RPP) merged with the state, making the country a single-party state. The Kemalist principles\textsuperscript{164} were not only incorporated in the constitution but also disseminated to grass-root level through educational institutes. In particular, secularism, nationalism and Western culture were propagated with great zeal.\textsuperscript{165} This totalitarian regime caused discontent and resentment among people. Mustafa Kemal failed to understand that due to differences between Islam and Catholicism, western secularism and scientific positivism at the expense of religion was misfit in Turkish society.\textsuperscript{166} In such unfavorable conditions it was Risale that helped Turkish Muslims to stay connected with their religious ties. Amidst such circumstances, Nursi was exiled to Barla in 1925. There he started writing Risale. In Barla, Nursi’s first treatise, which he termed as the Tenth Word, was on the life after death. The Tenth Word was inspired by the following Quranic verse dealing with the same subject.

\begin{quote}
فَانظِرْ إِلَى آنَاتِ رَحْمَتِ اللَّهِ كَيْفَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَمَّا يُحْيِي الْمُوتَى وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
\end{quote}

“So think on the signs of God’s mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death; indeed, He it is who will give life to the dead, and He is powerful over all things”\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{162}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 191.
\textsuperscript{163}Ibid., 191; Lewis, \textit{The Emergence}, 414-16; Berkes, \textit{Development of Secularism}, 473-78.
\textsuperscript{164}The six principles of Kemalism were republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and revolutionism (or reformism) see Zurcher, \textit{Turkey}, 181-82.
\textsuperscript{165}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 192; Zurcher, \textit{Turkey}, 176, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{166}Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 192.
\textsuperscript{167}Qur’an 30:50.
The treatise was printed and sent to Ankara to different government officials. Around the same time Council of education was about to inculcate ideas denying bodily resurrection. The officials thought Nursi was informed of their decision and wrote the article to counteract it. When the word reached Nursi, he contended that he had received no such information and the treatise was “bestowed upon him by Almighty God” due to the need. Nursi was right in his perception because due to the “education policy of new republic” religious beliefs were not only under attack in educational institutes but Media of all kinds was being used to attack beliefs and institutions, missing no chance to ridicule them. For instance a renowned monthly magazine undertook an “interview with a number of well known figures” of that time based upon the questionnaire entitled; do you believe in hereafter? Which was actually “provocative indeed in a country the great majority of whose people were still devout Muslims.” Abdullah Cevdet, “the famous proponent of biological materialism whose Westernizing ideas were influential in the early republic”, in his interview, openly denied the life of the hereafter while stating that “Belief in God was irremediably illogical”. In these conditions and circumstances Nursi claimed that the treatise of hereafter explained the truths about resurrection to ordinary people even to children for which even such a luminary as Ibn e Sina (Avicenna) failed to provide a rationale and said “resurrection cannot be understood by rational criteria.”

Despite its hostile measures ranging from imprisonment to exiles, the secular regime could not completely keep Nursi’s writings from reaching the members of public. Risale attempted to answer all the questions that created doubts and confusions in the minds of the believers. It was a befitting reply to the radical positivist modernization of the age. As Ozerverli comments:

“Nursi’s writings quickly grew into encyclopaedic volumes and were re-copied to be distributed piece-by-piece in each small town of country. Besides, through personal letters, Nursi continued to contact his students, who spread those writings in diverse parts of the country, and in some cases, abroad. The entire collection of Risale-i Nur was believed by his community

168Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 194-95.
169Nursi, The Words, 106.
to be in accordance with the expectations of modern man, who, whether Muslim or not, had been deeply imbued by materialist philosophy. They were regarded as answers to all questions, doubts and confusions that contemporary believers faced. In other words, they were read as explanations to the entire ‘why’s’ which hovered above the questioning mind of educated people, at the brink of losing connection with their religious culture. Therefore, in this aspect, the aim of Nursi’s social movement was to create a public awareness and a religious self-consciousness against the radical type of positivist modernisation."\textsuperscript{170}

As established that “Nursi’s highest ideal was to defend belief”\textsuperscript{171} it can be well observed in Risale that the Quranic verses interpreted in the Risale are mostly related to truths of belief. Thus, Nursi fulfilled the task of revitalization of belief by writing Risale and secured the belief of Turkish people. It was Risale that also ventured to the revival of those areas of decline which Nursi identified in the early phase of life and which he intended to revive through political and educational means. His treatises firstly drew attention of local people attracting villagers including young, old, women, and children. Then the number of his students and followers grew so rapidly that in 1940s it reached to 500,000 according to an estimate. And at the time of his death in 1960 his followers were around one million according to the \textit{New York Times} (24 March 1960).\textsuperscript{172} Owing to this service, he has been given the title of centennial revivalist (\textit{mujaddid})\textsuperscript{173} of twentieth century in the region of Turkey.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{170}Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 540-41.
\textsuperscript{172}Cited in Saritoprak, "Islam and Politics," 118.
This chapter attempted to first discuss briefly the decline of Ottoman Muslims and presented an analysis of the responses which emerged with the various solutions to save Empire from decadence. Then the Response of Nursi has been analyzed to throw light on the reasons and factors of decline in his view. The historical background was also briefly discussed where required to understand the situation and context of that time. Afterwards Nursi’s approach of reconstruction was elaborated which can be summarized as: in Old Said phase, Nursi’s strategy for the reconstruction of society was different as compared to the New Said phase. Previously his methodology was top to bottom in which he was seeking the solution of revival by reforming the institutions of politics and education. He was of the view that if these two institutes were reformed, Ottoman Muslims would certainly experience a reformed and better as well as just society. But later on due to the transformation of the scenario and situation after establishment of a secular state, moreover going through a spiritual awakening process to search appropriate method for reconstruction, Nursi realized that the need of that ‘new situation’ was to focus on the savior of ‘belief’ of ‘individuals’. Therefore, in next phase he dedicated his life in writing treatises of Risale to guide individuals on how to keep their faith safe and follow Islamic way of life in a strictly secular society. For that reason in second phase Nursi’s method turned to revive society through working on spiritual training of individuals. Thus it became ‘bottom to top’.

As outlined, Nursi’s new Quran based method proved to be very successful for the revitalization of faith in secular Turkish society and helped Muslims to stay in touch with their religion. And despite all measures of the government to prevent the treatises from the reach of public, the students and followers of Risale grew so rapidly. After an overall analysis of Nursi’s endeavor of revival and reconstruction, his efforts can be divided into three main categories; i. His efforts on the reforms of Educational system; ii. His efforts on revival of socio-political conditions; iii. Revitalization of faith and spiritual training of individuals through Risale. Therefore, the coming chapters will illustrate Nursi’s efforts of reconstruction in these three areas.
CHAPTER : 3

NURSI ON EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION OF
SOCIETY AND HIS MEDRESETU’Z-ZEHRA PROJECT

Introduction

3.1 Educational Reforms and Medresetu’z-Zehra
   3.1.1 Establishment of Medresetu’z-Zehra University
   3.1.2 Restructuring of madrasah education system
   3.1.3 Advice for Muslim scholars and teachers
   3.1.4 Recommendations for students
   3.1.5 Nursi’s Lifelong struggle for Medresetu’z-Zehra which ultimately turned into Medrese-i Nuriye

3.2 Accomplishment of Medresetu’z-Zehra project through Risale-i Nur
   3.2.1 Synthesis of science with religion and Risale-i Nur
   3.2.2 Revitalization of tafsir and kalam through Risale-i Nur
   3.2.3 Integration of spirituality in Risale-i Nur

Conclusion


**Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two sections. First section will demonstrate Nursi’s efforts and proposal for educational reforms, which was chiefly based upon the establishment of a university Medresetu’z-Zehra. Second objective of Nursi was to restructure the *madrasah* education system of that time. Thirdly, his educational plan intended to produce more competent and skillful Muslim scholars and teachers with improved method of instructions according to the requirements of modern age. And fourthly his plan was to counsel the students for their better training to cope up with modern times. All these features of his prescribed Medresetu’z Zehra project would be discussed in detail. Furthermore his endeavors for the establishment of the university till the end of his life would be analyzed in the last part of this section. Although Nursi’s dream of founding the university could not come true due to the bitter conditions of time but when one looks at his life and writings he can suggest that it has been accomplished with the writing of Risale-i Nur. His project of Medresetu’z-Zehra turned into Medrese-i Nurriye in New Said phase of his life. Therefore in second section it will be explored which of educational aims Risale could achieve which Nursi was intending to achieve through Medresetu’z-Zehra. Although, major objective of Risale was to renew the faith of individuals through the Quran based methodology, it played numerous other important roles simultaneously, and particularly the role it played in the area of educational revitalization is unique. Basic ambitions of Nursi behind the establishment of a central university were synthesizing of science with religion; revitalization of *tafsir* and *kalam*; reconciliation of three different educational systems of that time into one institute. All these aims came true through Risal-i Nur in a very effective way. Thus, second section of this chapter would examine the contribution of Risale in above educational reforms.
3.1 Educational Reforms and Medresetu’z-Zehra

Education is such a crucial element of a society that plays a vital role in building characters, behavior and ideology of a nation. The failure to develop this element rightly and according to indispensable requirements of time may result in the decline or ultimately the collapse of a society. Accordingly, every great scholar and intellectual in human history for instance Plato, Confucius, John Locke, Rousseau, as well Muslim scholars i.e. Al-Ghazali, Farabi and Ibne Khaldun etc. has given special attention to this building block of society. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi also expended all his efforts for the reforming of education system during his whole life. Having considered educational backwardness the main cause of Ottoman Muslim’s decline, Nursi got the opinion of making necessary reforms in this area. His biography indicates that due to his remarkable foresight he understood the problem of education system of his time at a very early age, while kept on moving from one madrasah to the other restlessly. The reason of his unrest in early five years of his education, that he could not stay longer in any madrasah, was his discontent with education system. Moreover his three months stay in Sheikh Jalali’s madrasah in Dogubayazit in the city of Agri in Turkey, his study through self-selection of particular texts from course books, and his reply to his amazed teacher, “The treasures (of learning) you control are in a strongbox. You have its key. What I need is a clue to its contents. I will choose whatever I find appropriate” all illustrates his dissatisfaction with the education system of his day.

On Nursi’s above reply, Mardin utters his amazement on “remarkably modern perception of such a peasant” i.e. village boy. He states: “We get a clue as to the reasons for his inability to settle in any madrasah…. He was finding the entire long-drawn curriculum too cumbersome.” Vahide also connects this statement of Nursi with his intention “to point

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1William Cooney, Charles Cross, and Barry Trunk, From Plato to Piaget: The Greatest Educational Theorists from across the Centuries and around the World (University Press of America, 1993).
3Serif Mardin, Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 68.
out the need for reform in \([madrasah]\) education and to prevent time being wasted through
the inclusion of so many commentaries, annotations and expositions.” \(^5\)

Nursi’s interaction with the government officials in Van in 1980 strengthened his
long-held view about the need for educational reforms. Secular schooling had promoted
atheistic ideologies among Ottoman elite and young Muslim graduates. These schools
promoted ‘Westernization and secularization’ at the expense of religious beliefs yet produced
a generation hostile to religion. Besides, Nursi also realized the incapability of Muslim
sciences of \(kalam\) (Muslim theology) and \(tafsir\) (Quranic exegesis) in answering the modern
criticism of science and philosophy to religion. In view of this situation Nursi decided to
learn modern sciences as well, first to do it among the scholars of Eastern Provinces. \(^6\)
Moreover three different systems i.e. \(madrasah\) (institutes of religious education), \(maktab\)
(centers of modern physical sciences) and \(tekke\) (based upon Sufism’s oral mode of
education), working parallel to each other, were also responsible according to Nursi for
fuelling disharmony and conflict among people.

After this realization “he formulated his ideas on educational reform and his own
particular method of teaching”. The cornerstone of Nursi’s educational reforms and teaching
method was the vindication of religious truth by applying a synthesis of religious and modern
sciences. He called on his learning and teaching experience in the fields of religion and
science and applied his method of teaching in his \(madrasah\) named Horhor in Van. \(^7\) In
addition, Nursi planned to establish a university named Medreset’z-Zehra in eastern
Anatolia. He also realized the urgent need of “reforming \([madrasah]\) education and updating
the Islamic sciences in the light of modern advances in knowledge.” Reconciliation of
different educational systems (\(madrasah\), \(maktab\), and \(tekke\)) was another aim which Nursi
developed so that the disunity and conflict emerging among Ottomans could be avoided.
These were the main issues Nursi was engaged with before the World War-I. Thus, with the
intention to present his proposal to the consideration of Sultan for the reviving of education
system, he decided to visit Istanbul. \(^8\)

\(^5\) Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 10.
\(^6\) Ibid., 27.
\(^7\) Ibid., 29.
\(^8\) Ibid., 33.
In 1908 Said Nursi presented a proposal to the court of Sultan, in which he requested to open a university in Eastern Provinces of Empire. This petition was later printed in a newspaper named “Sark ve Kürdistan Gazetesi (East and Kurdistan Gazette)”\(^9\) However, Nursi’s proposal was not accepted this time rather he was arrested and sent to hospital.\(^{10}\) There his conversation with doctor provides detailed information of his educational thoughts and which types of reforms he wanted to bring in education system. His ideas can be divided into four main categories.

- Establishment of Medresetu’z-Zehra University
- Restructuring of madrasah education system
- Advice for Muslim scholars
- Recommendations for students

### 3.1.1 Establishment of Medresetu’z-Zehra University:

First aspect of his Medresetu’z-Zehra project was to establish a central institute with three branches in three different areas of Eastern Provinces of Ottoman Empire, Van, Bitlis and Siirt.\(^{11}\) He named this institute Medresetu’z-Zehra. The chief purpose of establishing this university was to make an embodiment of education where religious and modern (natural and physical) sciences would be taught side by side. He basically “wanted to unite the sciences taught in modern schools and those taught in [madrasah], and to create a new curriculum.”\(^{12}\) This is because Nursi considered religion as representative of heart and conscience whereas he symbolized science as representative of reason, in his view both were equally important for mankind’s progress. He comments: “The religious sciences are the light of the conscience and the modern sciences (lit. “the sciences of civilization”) are the light of the reason; the truth becomes manifest through the combining of the two. The students’ endeavor will take

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\(^9\) Ibid., 42; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 79.

\(^{10}\) Due to his bold and courageous way of conversation in front of sultan, it might have perceived that he was mentally deranged, for details see Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 43-4; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 80-81.


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 396.
flight on these two wings. When they are separated it gives rise to bigotry in the one, and wiles and skepticism in the other.”

Second main purpose of this university in Nursi’s view was to establish a centre where three different structures of education (*madrasah*, *maktab* and *tekke*) could be reconciled and their positive aspects could be brought together to benefit from. In Nursi’s views none of the three divisions of Islamic education was self-sufficient. They could only answer the needs of the time by complementing each other. This was the main impetus behind the establishment of Medresetu’z-Zehra. This was to fulfill the need for a consultative council “through the mutual consultation [shura] of the three divisions of the army of Islamic education those of the [*madrasah*], the [*maktab*], and the *tekkes*”.

He proposed that obsolete ancient philosophy should be replaced by modern science in *madrasah*; religious sciences should be incorporated in secular schools; and learned Muslim scholars should be present in Sufi tekkes. Nursi saw the decline of Ottomans as a direct result of the disunity and conflict brought about by the three models of education. So their integration could heal “the rifts between them and the resultant divisions of society, which he felt had shaken the foundations of Islamic morality and spoil the harmony of progress.” Nursi believes “unity cannot occur through ignorance. Unity is the fusion of ideas, and the fusion of ideas occurs through the electric rays of knowledge.” Therefore the channel of education in Nursi’s view was an important element for achieving unity in Empire. Moreover, on a broader perspective Nursi’s Medresetu’z-Zehra aimed to “unite the three traditions in the educational system by representing the most superior [*maktab*] (secular school) by the reason, the very best

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16 Cited in ibid., 48.
17 Gozutok, “Educational Principles and Methods,” 396.
In the petition which Nursi presented to the Sultan, he first acknowledged the efforts of Government on opening up the schools in Eastern provinces, in order to support local people to be in harmony with the “age of progress and competition.” But he also criticized that the teachers appointed there were not familiar with the local language i.e. Kurdish. Therefore local people, who could not understand Turkish language, they were unable to take advantage of these modern schools so they had to depend on madrasah.\(^\text{20}\) Since madrasahs had long been neglected by the government, their curriculum was not producing anything creative and blind imitation was rendering students victims to doubts and suspicions.\(^\text{21}\) Moreover, the discrimination in education system was creating an “internal factional strife among the tribes”\(^\text{22}\) because of the divergent system of education as people educated from one system of education considered the students of other systems ignorant. So he drew the attention of government towards an expected danger which might result in “a ghastly blow for the Kurds in the future”. To avoid these consequences and to secure “the future of Kurds and unity of Empire”, Said Nursi proposed to establish three branches of University in different areas of eastern provinces which were the centers of different tribes. “Each should have at least fifty students, and their means of subsistence should be provided by the illustrious government.” And gradually “as a result of its unique value for the Islamic world, it would in time gain financial independence by reason of the donations and pious bequests it would receive.”\(^\text{23}\)

Nursi paid special attention to the education language of Medresetu’z-Zehra as well and recommended that it should be trilingual. Where Arabic should be compulsory, Kurdish should be permissible and Turkish should be necessary. He also suggested for the selection of teachers that Kurdish scholars should be preferred as they know local language. Because according to him “it was necessary to take into account the capacity and cultural level of the

\(^{19}\) Nursi, Munazarat, 61, 74 quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 37, 46.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{21}\) It will be explained ahead under the heading ‘suggestions for Muslim scholars’.

\(^{22}\) Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 80.

\(^{23}\) Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 43, 45-46.
community they were to serve.” Moreover such Kurdish scholars should be selected “who know both religious and modern sciences” as well as who are trusted by Kurds and Turks both. 24 “Also, these [madrasah] should be on an equal footing with the official secular schools, and like them, their examinations should be recognized” 25.

A further recommendation proposed that the university should also include “branches of specialization in addition to joint teaching.” Furthermore the fields of employment should be founded “for those graduating, and they should have equal rights and opportunities with those graduating from other state universities.” And “the teacher training schools should be centered for a certain period in this [madrasah] so that the order and progress of the one should pass to the other, and the virtue and religion of the other pass to the first.” 26

Nursi proposed to establish this university in eastern provinces because of its geographical location since it was the center of eastern Islamic world. 27 In addition “the university would be built on model of al-Azhar, the Arab center of higher theological studies in Cairo. Indeed at the turn of the century, the Azhar was being gradually modernized to serve a function similar to that which Said had in mind.” 28 Nursi related Meresetu’z-Zehra to be al-Azhar’s sister university:

“al-Azhar University is a universal [madrasah] in Africa, however much larger Asia is than Africa, Asia should have a place of learning, an Islamic university which is that much bigger, so that negative racialism should not corrupt the Muslim peoples, for example, the nations of Arabia, India, Caucasus, Iran, Turkistan, and Kurdistan. And so that it may be the means to a total unfolding of Islamic nationhood, which is true, positive, and sacred nationhood, and of the fundamental rule of the Qur’an: Indeed the believers

25 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 45.
27 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 172.
28 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 80.
are brothers.”

3.1.2 Restructuring of madrasah education system:

Said Nursi was much concerned about the restructuring of madrasah education system. Although the matter was already under debate in Ottoman Empire whether to upgrade “existing religious educational establishments” or to replace them “by the type of secular school introduced by the Tanzimat.” Nursi supported the first option because as mentioned earlier, a majority of masses was to depend upon madrasah for their education. His major concern for the revitalization of existing madrasah was to include modern sciences in the curriculum along with religious and theological sciences. Because the unchanged madrasah curriculum, and unawareness of the “modern developments in science” resulted in the emergence of such scholars “who believed, together with the Europeans, that there was a clash and contradiction between certain “externals” of Islam and certain matters of science.” One of the examples is the matter regarding the spherical shape of the Earth. At that time Muslim scholars began to believe that acceptance of the scientific fact of Earth being round shaped opposed “many truths of the religion”. Eventually the notion of considering clash between Islam and current advances of science had created hopelessness on one hand and on the other abandoned “the progress of Muslim peoples.” Nursi disapproved this conflict between Islam and modern findings of science. He held madrasah education system responsible for this external conflict. He stated: “this can no longer be so, and religious schools truly need to be revitalized.”

Nursi considers one of the reasons of decline of madrasah, to give more preference to “instrumental sciences” instead of “primary and exalted sciences.” He includes logic, linguistics, and philology in instrumental sciences whereas Jurisprudence, Qur’anic interpretation, and study of Hadith in primary sciences. Nursi states “The grammatical

30 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 80.
31 Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 58.
32 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The Reasonings (Muhakemat): A Key to Understanding the Qu'ran's Eloquence, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersy: Tughra Books, 2008), 46. Nursi explains that in previous centuries Muslim scholars have proved the spherical shape of Earth for details see ibid., 50-53.
analysis of Arabic texts has conquered minds, with the result that the study and knowledge of the primary or basic sciences have been considerably neglected.” Therefore he proposed primary sciences should be given priority in madrasah education system.

Another suggestion of Nursi for reviving the madrasah is to apply “the law of division of labor” in its education system. According to this concept a system of “Multi faculty” should be introduced in education system instead of “Single Faculty”. Which means teaching of a particular subject should be undertaken by one who is expert of that subject. When a number of experts of different sciences would come together under one institute, this “diversification” and “democratization of the [madrasah] system” would produce a quality education. Moreover, Nursi believes in harmony between “the principle of division of labor” and the divine law of creation because “the divine wisdom has sown different abilities and tendencies in human nature”. Therefore, Nursi relates the abandoning of this law as one of the reasons of madrasah’s decline. While explaining the benefits of this rule he comments:

“Craftsmen are obtaining significant wealth through co-operating in order to profit more from the products of their crafts. Formerly ten men who made sewing needles all worked on their own, and the fruit of their individual labour was three needles a day. Then in accordance with the rule of joint enterprise the ten men united. One brought the iron, one lit the furnace, one pierced the needles, one placed them in the furnace, and another sharpened the points, and so on... each was occupied with only part of the process of the craft of needle-making. Since the work in which he was employed was simple, time was not wasted, he gained skill, and performed the work with considerable speed. Then they divided up the work which had been in

33 Ibid., 48.
35 Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 59.
36 Ibid., 57.
37 Nursi, Reasonings, 27.
accordance with the rule of joint enterprise and the division of labour: they saw that instead of three needles a day, it worked out at three hundred for each man. This event was widely published among the craftsmen of ‘the worldly’ in order to encourage them to pool their labour.”  

In sum, Nursi stresses that converting religious institutes from ‘singlefaculty’ into ‘multifaculty’ institutions and applying the practice of ‘the rule of division of labor’ is the only wise way to move forward and is also in accordance with the laws of creation. The learning has suffered in these institutes for centuries due to ignoring these practices and ill-advised teaching methods which resulted in exploitation of learning and destruction of madrasah education system.  

3.1.3 Advice for Muslim scholars:  

Nursi does not ignore the role of Muslim scholars including preachers and teachers in his suggestions for the revival of education system. He indicates a few deficiencies in the methodology of Muslim scholars and recommends certain effective ways to cover this flaw. He feels if a teacher wants his claim to be accepted, he has to convince his audience with strong proofs. Otherwise simply asserting a truth cannot make his audience satisfied due to “increased skepticism”. In this age blind imitation of scholars no longer exists because the desire of investigation has been provoked among people. Moreover, while speaking they should keep in mind “the demand of situation and necessities of the time which is the requirement of eloquence” otherwise their claim will be weight less. Preachers should not treat people and their students in the frame of former times. Rather the requirement of the modern settings is to speak “in tune with [changing] conditions and time” Nursi states: “I want preachers to be both searching scholars, so that they can prove what they claim, and subtle philosophers so that they do not spoil the balance of the Shari’a, and to be eloquent and convincing. It is essential that they are thus.”  

39 Nursi, Reasonings, 46-47.  
40 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 81; Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 57.  
41 Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 62.  
42 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 82.  
43 As quoted by Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 62.
Nursi indicates another weak point of Muslim teachers in the following words: “by deterring from one thing and encouraging another, they reduce the value of something else more important. For example, they say that to perform two rak'ats of prayers at night is like circumambulating the Ka'ba, or that if someone indulges in backbiting, it is as though he has committed fornication.”⁴⁴ Night prayers and circumambulation both are important and have their separate place in sharia’h. It is not desirable to explain the importance of an act of worship by likening it to another one. It undermines the role of different religious practices, each of which has its own place.

In order to fulfill the needs of modern age Nursi seems to be in great favor of “debate and exchange of ideas” among teachers and students. In his views this is the only way to get rid of blind imitation of scholars. He is of the view that “it was scholastic despotism, an offspring of political despotism, that has opened the way to blind imitation (taqlid), and barred the way to searching for the truth.” Nursi believes that this problem could be removed if scholars would begin taking special care of “public opinion.” Therefore in order to fulfill the needs of modern age Nursi supports “constitutionalism among the ulama”⁴⁵ in which they should take special care of mutual consultation and others’ opinion.

It would be unjustified not to mention one of the prime works of Nursi, written in his Old Said phase, Muhakemat (Reasonings). Its Arabic version titled Rachatat al-Ulama (Prescription for the Scholars), as the title indicates, addresses Muslim scholars and guides them on certain issues. Basically Nursi inscribed this work to set out the principles of Quranic exegesis in which he drew the attention of Muslim scholars towards the point that it was to consult Israiliyat and ancient Greek philosophy while interpretation of certain Qur’anic matters which had obscured the reality of Islam and had kept his contemporaries in the Middle ages by preventing their progress. In this way the essence and real meanings of Islam have been neglected whereas external meanings have been more focused. He further elaborates as Greek philosophy is based upon parables and superstitions moreover “had been contaminated to a certain degree”, it has therefore led Muslim thinking towards imitation instead of verification. They have mistakenly supposed similarities between certain

⁴⁴ Ibid., 52.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 59-60.
philosophical issues and such Quranic matters which require the use of reason. Nursi comments “this was indeed a wrong way” because “the Book, which is clear in it and reveals all truth, is far removed from needing to be proven by such rational and reported knowledge”. What he suggests is to search for meaning of the Qur’an in wordings of the Qur’an. Thus in the first part he sets up few principles of how to clean up Islam from such accretions. Whereas in the second part he explains the importance of Arabic language’s eloquence in a way that the key to the miraculousness (I’jaz) of the Qur’an should be found only in the mine of Arabic rhetoric, not in the workshop of Greek philosophy. While the third part which was left incomplete, Nursi “sets out proofs and evidence for the four main aims of the Qur’an” which are i: Proof of the Maker, ii: Prophethood, iii: Bodily Resurrection, iv: Worship and justice. Nursi accomplished it later through Risale-i Nur as the basic subjects of Risale are these four aims of Quran.

Likewise in another work, Nursi criticizes further reckless behavior of Muslim scholars in a significant matter, what he considered to be “the most important cause of Islamic community displaying carelessness and negligence toward the precepts of religion”. He asserts that ninety percent of the religion expounded by the Qur’an and sunnah of Prophet is based upon the fundamentals of belief and pillars of Islam, whereas controversial matters that are open to interpretation (ijtihad) form only ten percent of religious matters. Muslim scholars have given more attention to those controversial issues in their commentaries and books of jurisprudence. Consequently the attention of believers has been occupied by those issues and “they have only thought of the Qur’an in a hazy sort of way. They have read these books in order to understand not what the Qur’an says, but what the authors say. As a result of this, the ordinary believer’s conscience has become accustomed to being indifferent, and has become lifeless and unresponsive.” Yet, Nursi believes, “If the Qur’an had been shown

46 Nursi, Reasonings, 3,16, 18-19.
47 Ibid., 16-19, 75,88. For the explanation of these points see Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 92.
48 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 92.
49 See Nursi, Reasonings, 11-12, 104.
directly in the fundamentals of religion, the mind would have naturally perceived its sacredness, which urges conformity to the precepts of religion, is the rouser of the conscience, and is the Qur’an’s inherent property. In this way the heart would have become sensitive toward it, and would not have remained deaf to the admonitions of belief.” What Nursi suggests is:

“[T]he fundamentals and essentials, which form ninety percent, should be sought from the Qur’an itself and from the Sunnah, while matters of secondary importance, which are open to interpretation and form ten percent, should be sought from the works of those qualified to interpret them, that is, the [mujtahidin]… the books of those qualified to interpret the law [jurisprudence] should be like means and display the Qur’an as though they were glass; they should neither act on its behalf nor obscure it… If that had been the case, the demand shown for these truly numerous commentaries and books on the Shari’ah and divided up between them would have been directed toward the Qur’an itself—indeed, the demand would have been greater because of need. And in that way the Qur’an would have been dominant and influential in its full meaning over the Muslim community.”

3.1.4 Recommendations for students:

Nursi wanted students to actively participate in lively debates, thus he stressed “the need for lively debate and the role of competition in revitalizing the madrasah.” He always encouraged critical thinking and questioning which he himself implemented in his student days. For example while staying in Sekerci Han (Istanbul), he wrote on his door, “here all questions are answered but none are asked.” Nursi intended to encourage asking questions freely, not to memorize everything but to go on deeper understandings. His practice of debating with scholars aroused opposition but he did not care because “by doing so he wanted to offer a practical example for a solution to the stagnation in the madrasah.”

Moreover, as Nursi suggested teachers to take care of public opinion, he recommended same for students. He mentioned:


52 Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 61.
“[I]n the same way, among the students, public opinion or the prevalent ideas emerging from debate and the exchange of ideas between students of varying disciplines should be taken as master. Nursi predicted that this would provide a strong stimulation and incentive for progress. Thus, just as public opinion predominates in the state, so too should the prevailing opinions of the ulama be mufti, and the prevailing opinions of the students be master and teacher.”  

Nursi strongly recommends for madrasah students “to choose a specialization for themselves in the non-religious sciences”54 “for which they have an aptitude, and in addition only study subjects that complement it.” Furthermore “It was through taking one science as a basis and only studying further subjects insofar as they would complement the main subject, that the students could study in sufficient depth and penetrate the subject as required.” 55 All this was because Bediuzamanman did not hold partial knowledge to be of much value. In order to understand the laws of universe, according to Nursi, a more comprehensive knowledge was required. 56 Nevertheless Nursi admits that a person cannot be expert in numerous disciplines therefore one should specialize in the subject of his interest after having a general knowledge of multiple disciplines, he further states:

“Every discipline has its own nature and form of subject matter and discourse, and specialization in it means being an embodiment of the nature and form of that science. If specialists in one branch do not use their extra general knowledge as a supplement to enrich their field of specialization, then what emerges from their knowledge will not be reliable, and may indeed be ludicrous.”57

A point worth mentioning here is Nursi also stressed on the issue of specialization for Muslim students in the preface of Isharat ul-I’jaz (Signs of Miraculousness) in which he

53 Ibid., 60.
54 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 90.
55 Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 59, 61.
57 Nursi, Reasonings, 25.
illustrates the principles that how the Quranic exegesis should be written in contemporary times. For the importance of specialization he explains the reason that since the Qur’an as divine speech addresses all men in every age therefore “it compasses many sciences and branches of learning related to the physical aspects of the world…which become manifest in time due to the discoveries of science… [And] knowledge of which is beyond the capacity of a single individual or a small group.” Because, explains Nursi:

“[A]n individual cannot be acquainted with and be an expert in all the exact sciences and the branches of knowledge concerned with the spiritual and material states of nations and peoples, all of whom the Qur’an addresses. And he cannot be free of bias towards his own profession and discipline that he might explicate the truths of the Qur’an impartially. Also, a person’s understanding is peculiar to him and he may not call on others to accept it. [Therefore] a commentary should be written after minute studies and researches by an elevated committee of authoritative scholars each of whom is a specialist in a number of sciences, [religious and modern both].”

Thus specialization in one of the natural/physical sciences is very important for Muslim students for this purpose. Another relevant point to be mentioned here is the objective of Nursi’s involvement in the Medrese Teachers’ Association (Jamiyet-e Mudarriseen) founded in 1919 aimed on one hand “to undertake the necessary enterprises for raising the teaching profession to the high level that is in keeping with the Islamic nation and civilization”; On the other, he intended “to produce students of the ‘ulama profession who would be thoroughly informed of the Islamic sciences and have knowledge of the modern sciences sufficient for the needs of the times.”

3.1.5 Nursi’s Life long struggle for Medresetu’z-Zehra which ultimately turned into Medrese-i Nuriye:

Nursi continued his struggle for the establishment of this university till the end of his life. As previously noted his first proposal was not accepted by sultan Abdulhamid and he was sent to hospital. Nevertheless, he was discharged soon with positive report by doctor. His

educational plan was considered positively by Sultan Resad (1909-1918) and he was also given financial support of thousand gold Liras. The construction was started on the shores of Lake Van but could not be completed because of the outbreak of World War-I.\(^{60}\) Afterwards in 1923, a ray of hope appeared when a bill proposing the foundation of Medresetu’z- Zehra was signed by 167 deputies, Mustafa Kemal was also one of them. 150,000 Liras were assigned “to the project in that year’s budget.” But “once again the building of the Medresetu’z-Zehra was overtaken by events.” At last after two years the committee rejected the proposal and sent it back to assembly on November 29, 1925. Meantime the rule for the unification of education and closure of madrasah was approved in March 1924, this was followed by the commencement of Nursi’s exile and imprisonments.\(^{61}\) Now the circumstances turned unfavorable for the establishment of any religious institute due to religious-opposing policies of government. This is the period when New Said emerged with revived and more relevant strategy of revitalization of his society which was the writing and dissemination of Risale and training of his students. However, in Third Said period when Democratic Party came into reign and Adnan Menderes (1950-1960) became the Prime Minister, Said Nursi once again tried to struggle for Medresetu’z-Zehra in 1951. “The plan was pursued by Nursi as late as 1951, when he is reputed to have sought the aid of Adnan Mendres.”\(^{62}\) But his effort could not bear fruit this time as well. Nursi mentions his life time effort for the University Medresetu’z-Zehra in these words:

“As I have worked for the reality of the Risale-i Nur, so too have I worked for a full fifty-five years for a university in the centre of the Eastern Provinces, which lie between India, Arabia, Iran, Caucasus, and Turkestan, which would be both a university, and a modern school, and a [madrasah], in the style of al-Azhar University and bear the meaning of the Medresetu’z-

\(^{60}\) Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 102.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 172.

Although physical Medresetu’z-Zehra could not be built but it was established in non-physical way that is to say ma’navi (informal, spiritual, immaterial) Medresetu’z-Zehra in the form of Risale study circles. Nursi himself suggested his students “to open a small Risale study center [dershane] at every place” to read treatises of Risale in groups thus a large number of the houses of Nursi’s students became embodiment of this informal madrasah. Where people of all age groups including children, young, old, women used to read and write Risale. Surprisingly in first decade of the Republican’s rule, these Risale madrasahs were opened and spread throughout Turkey and even to other parts of world. Nursi began to call Risale students, students of the Medresetu’z-Zehra probably with the hope that “God willing, the Risale-i Nur students will succeed in establishing the maddi (material, physical or formal) form of this exalted truth (the madrasah) in the future.” Sayilgan truly depicts the features of this spiritual Medresetu’z-Zehra in following words:

“The Medresetu’z-Zehra was now represented through the informal collective council of the Nur students. Its visible shape was non-existent but the content surely wasn’t. In his writings we see how the [madrasah] became alive. In this sense, the ma’navi Medresetu’z-Zehra had its center in Isparta. All other cities or villages like Sav (elsewhere also mentioned as Sava) were described as sections of the center. In calling his followers to turn their private homes into a [madrasah] he went beyond the classic understanding of the [madrasah]. This reminds one of the Qur’anic passage in which Prophet Moses is ordered by God to turn his people’s houses into places of worship (Quran 10:87).
Nursi, stating that he took the Qur'an as his sole guide, seemed to have been inspired by this model. This practice was also carried out by the early Muslim community, which suffered persecution in the Meccan period and therefore met in the safe space of *Dar al-Arqam* (The House of Arqam--a companion of the Prophet).”

One can realize thus, in the second phase of Nursi’s life his Medresetu’z-Zehra was turned into Medrese-i Nuriye.  

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70 Ibid.

71 Nursi himself called Barla as Medrese-i Nurriye, quoted by Gozutok, "Educational Principles and Methods," 397.
3.2 Accomplishment of Medreset’uz-Zehra project through Risale-i Nur

Previous section was based upon the analysis of Nursi’s ideas on educational reforms, his efforts for the establishment of Medreset’uz-Zehra University; and how Medreset’uz-Zehra ambition converted into Medrese-i Nuriye form in second half of his life. Now it is important to explore which of the educational aims came true through ma’navi Medreset’uz-Zehra i.e. Risale-i Nur which Nursi was determined to achieve through establishing a central institute. After an overall analysis of Nursi’s Medreset’uz-Zehra project one comes to the conclusion that it was mainly comprised of following objectives; firstly to combine modern and religious sciences; secondly to revitalize Muslim sciences of tafsir and kalam; thirdly to get the benefit from positive aspects of all three different educational systems (madrasah, maktab and tekke) in other words to integrate and re-conciliate different forms of knowledge under one umbrella. Nursi achieved all these educational goals through Risale. Therefore this section aims to explore the contribution of Risale in fulfillment of above three educational objectives.

3.2.1 Synthesis of science with religion and Risale-i Nur:

The main characteristic of Nursi’s Medresetu’z-Zehra project was to combine “Islamic disciplines (ulum-i diniyye) with contemporary sciences (funun-i medeniyye) and learning”\textsuperscript{72} That is to say he intended to merge the subjects taught in madrasah and maktab under one program of study. Nursi maintained that truth could not be attained if either religious sciences or modern sciences were ignored as the former was necessary for inner conscience and the latter for illuminating reason.\textsuperscript{73} He wanted to answer the questions posed by modern science without forsaking Islamic identity. Nursi achieved this objective through Risale in a very successful way. There are numerous treatises in Risale which elucidate the harmony of religion and modern sciences, looking at the ‘Book of Universe’ with mana-i harfi.


\textsuperscript{73} Nursi, \textit{Munazarat}, 72 quoted by Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 45-46.
In etymological studies the word science means any type of knowledge (ilm). But the word has different connotations in technical context. It is normally understood to mean “The intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systemic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.” In other words “A systematically organized body of knowledge on a particular subject”\(^74\) The term is further divided into natural/physical, social, human sciences etc. Natural or physical sciences include study areas like physics, chemistry, biology etc, whereas social sciences comprise sociology, history, anthropology, etc. Human sciences include; philosophy, psychology, ethics etc. In Islamic context the term ‘religious sciences’ is used to mean Islamic disciplines like ‘tafsir’ ‘hadith’ ‘kalam’ and ‘fiqh’.\(^75\) Nursi’s usage of the term modern sciences in Risale is to mean natural/physical sciences\(^76\) and his intention is not to elaborate these particular disciplines rather his purpose is to utilize these sciences as ‘means’ to achieve the basic aim of man’s creation which is to gain the knowledge of God, Alparslan explains:

“Since the questions of the physical sciences are frequently discussed in the Risale-i Nur, it gives one the idea at first that the work may be put into that category. But closer examination shows that these questions are not discussed as though they were part of the physical sciences. For example, blood circulation is discussed in the Risale-i Nur, but not as a question of biology; it is used as a means to the chief aim. Moreover, the fact that numerous questions to do with philosophy are mentioned in the Risale-i Nur does not mean that it is philosophy. For since its basic aim is guidance, which is also the chief aim of revelation, or to use Bediuzzaman’s frequently employed phrase “to save belief,” all these matters are used as means for the basic aim.”\(^77\)


\(^77\) Acikgenc, “Categorization of Knowledge,” 110.
Nursi’s thoughts on the modern sciences were shaped up by the requirements of his time and changes that had challenged the Muslim world. Due to the predominance of Positivist and Materialist conception of science, it was a common notion in Nursi’s time that modern science was the only source of knowledge that gave certainty and precision.\textsuperscript{78} Main reason for Nursi’s emphasis on the integration between science and religion was his belief that the conflict of science and religion emerged due to “contemporary materialistic movements which reflect modern sciences according to their atheistic views”\textsuperscript{79}. Nursi believes “[in] this century, materialism is so widespread, [and] materiality is thought to be the source of everything.”\textsuperscript{80} It was due to these tendencies, which held sway in scholastic world that supposed discrepancies between science and religion had emerged. “Newtonian mechanic worldview” and “deistic approaches of the Enlightenment toward religion” of nineteenth century allowed positivistic theories to flourish, which in turn left science in a very rigid frame. Eventually science alone became the sufficient source for seeking the solutions of all problems of man as well as society.\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, science only was considered “objective, universal, rational and based on solid observational evidence.” On the contrary, religion was being considered “subjective, parochial, emotional, and based on traditions or authorities that disagree with each other.”\textsuperscript{82} This wave of skepticism radiated from the West to the other parts of the world and caused cultural and intellectual chaos in these societies.\textsuperscript{83}

Nursi’s thought is developed on the conviction if purged from materialistic impact; modern sciences would uphold the truths of religion instead of refuting them. Because in

\textsuperscript{78} Alparslan Acikgenc, ”The Conception of Science in the Risale-I Nur,” in Fifth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi The Quranic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur (Istanbul: Sozler, 2000), 334-35; also see for further details Bekim Agai, ”The Religious Impact of Science and Natural Science in the Writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” in Fifth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi The Quranic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur (Istanbul: Sozler, 2000), 344.
\textsuperscript{79} Ozervarli, ”Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing,” 320.
\textsuperscript{81} Owen Chadwick, The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 233.
\textsuperscript{83} Ozervarli, ”Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing,” 320-21.
fact, he mentions, it is Islam which is the bedrock of all sciences and has given the birth to most of them\textsuperscript{84}. Therefore an important characteristic of the Risale is “its relating science to the truths of belief and showing that rather than their conflicting in any way, if considered in the light of the Qur’an science may broaden and strengthen belief.” \textsuperscript{85} Risale contains numerous treatises which prove this compatibility of science with religion. It was due to this reason that when, once a group of Kastamonu high school students sought Nursi’s guidance regarding the fact that their teachers did not speak of God, he replied thus: "All the sciences you study continuously speak of God and make known the Creator, each with its own particular tongue. Do not listen to your teachers; listen to them“\textsuperscript{86}

In order to understand the synthesis between science and religion propagated by Nursi through Risale, it is important to discuss commonalities that he thought existed between Quran and modern science. The focal point of modern science was, understanding the physical world through reasoning. The Quran too, invited humans to contemplate on the reality of the cosmos. He referred to one of the verse of the Quran:

\textbf{I created not jinn and mankind except that they might worship Me} \textsuperscript{87} \\

Deriving from it that recognition of the Creator was part of worship. Nursi asserts:

“Be certain of this, that the highest aim of creation and its most important result is belief in God. The most exalted rank in humanity and its highest degree is the knowledge of God contained within belief in God.”\textsuperscript{88}

This recognition was only possible through comprehending the universe using reasoning and intellectual faculty.\textsuperscript{89} He believed God had provided humans with three sources to enable them to recognize their Creator. These three sources were the Quran, the Seal of the Prophets and the Universe. He called the third source ‘book of universe’. The book of universe needed

\textsuperscript{84} Nurzi, \textit{Reasonings}, 4,12. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 310. \\
\textsuperscript{86} Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, \textit{The Rays}, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2010), 226. \\
\textsuperscript{87} Qur’an 51:65. \\
\textsuperscript{88} Nurzi, \textit{The Letters}, 262. \\
\textsuperscript{89} Nurzi, \textit{The Rays}, 125.
to be read through 'reflective thought'.\textsuperscript{90} In this way Nursi found a concord between “the Qur'an, which is the main source of religion, and the physical universe, which is the subject of science.”\textsuperscript{91} And thus science itself becomes an act of worship\textsuperscript{92} if it uses reason to gain knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{93}

In Nursi’s concept the harmony of science with religion is linked with the perfect design of the universe which is the initial point of his “experimental theology”\textsuperscript{94}. Nursi deems the Quran and the universe as interdependent for their proper understanding. There are verses in the Quran related to the natural phenomenon which help to enhance one’s understanding of the universe. This approach was an attempt to explain the intellectual dimension of the Quranic faith with reference to the modern age.\textsuperscript{95} Therefore, it is clear from Nursi’s understanding of the Quran and modern sciences that he saw sciences as a vehicle to unravel the multiple facets of the perfection and beauty of the universe. The revelations that modern sciences were making only strengthened the proof in favor of intelligent design and existence of God. He did not give a literal interpretation of the Quranic verses related to the creation and design of heavens and the earth. He maintained that these verses should be interpreted figuratively. For examples the verses explain the creation of the seven heavens and earth and their design,\textsuperscript{96} their creation in six days,\textsuperscript{97} and parting the earth from the heaven.\textsuperscript{98} To him,

\textsuperscript{90} Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 243. Details are given in next section.
\textsuperscript{91} Ozervarli, "Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 324.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 168. also see Sukran Vahide, "The Book of the Universe: Its Place and Development in Bediuzzaman’s Thought," in \textit{Forth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi A Contemporary Approach to understanding the Quran The Example of the Risale-i Nur} (Istanbul: Sozler, 1998), 476. However, there is one major difference between Nursi’s method of reasoning (‘reflective thought’) and the reasoning adopted by modern sciences. Unlike scientific reasoning, Nursi’s reflective thought proceeded on the principle of \textit{mana-i-harfi} rather than \textit{mana-i-ismi}. This subject will be discussed ahead in detail.
\textsuperscript{94} Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 325.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 327; Vahide, "The Book of Universe," 474.
\textsuperscript{96} Qur'an 2:29, 65:12.
\textsuperscript{97} Qur'an 7:5, 11:7.
\textsuperscript{98} Qur'an 21:30.
when the Quran mentioned seven heavens or the creation of the universe in six days, it was not to be taken in literal sense. In Arabic language, it was common to use ‘seven’ to refer to multiplicity. It was a reference to the multiple astronomical and geological levels in sky and earth. This was the reason why different commentators gave different interpretations to this verse, each according to the available knowledge and discoveries of their respective time period.  

Similarly, the word ‘day’ in the six day creation of the universe did not refer to the twenty four hours of an earthly day. It merely meant a long epoch which might be even thousands of years. He saw epochs in different kind of times in relation to differences in the speed of motion in sound, rays, currents, and even as the distance of imagination. Dreams, for example, he said, could be taken as an example to understand this concept. Dreams happened in a short real time, but could be perceived as years. This also led him to attempt to establish a link between some sciences and the divine attributes (asma-al hasana). For example he established a link between philosophy and the divine attribute “al-Hakim”; Similarly, “al-Shafi” was linked with medicine, and geometry with “al-Mukaddir”. If studied in the light of these divine attributes, sciences were a means to transcend from the mundane to the ethereal. Therefore Nursi advises to study the beautiful names of Almighty God with the help of sciences and to make science and progress as steps to the divine heavens.

Nursi also justified the Quranic wisdom in not explicitly detailing realities of the universal phenomenon. According to him if the Quran had succinctly explained these concepts, it would not be possible for the people of earlier ages to understand these concepts. Secondly, the Quran does not refer to natural phenomenon just to understand their reality per se, as do philosophy and science; rather observing the order and functions of physical world is a means to understand the wisdom of the Creator. So, the Qur'an, not a science book though, still alludes to scientific and technological discoveries of modern age such as the airplane, electricity, railways, and telegraph. To elucidate his point he gave the

100 Nursi, The Words, 177.
101 Ibid., 596-97.
102 Ibid., 655.
103 Ibid., 270-71. For further explanations see Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 326.
example of prophetic miracles mentioned in the Quran. Though the primary objective of those miracles was to confirm and verify the prophetic claims, they were also a way to refer to the scientific discoveries of subsequent ages.\textsuperscript{104}

Following is an example from Risale that how physical sciences may strengthen the truths of belief by reading it in the light of the Quran:

“The All-Wise Maker has created the human body as though it was a well-arranged city. A number of the blood-vessels perform the duties of telephones and telegraphs, while others of them are like pipes from a fountain through which blood, which is the water of life, flows. As for blood, created within it are two sorts of corpuscles. One of them, known as red corpuscles, distributes nutrients to the cells of the body; it conveys sustenance to the cells according to a Divine law. (Like merchants and food officials.) The other sort are white corpuscles, which are fewer in number than the former. Their duty, like soldiers, is defence against enemies, such as illness... As for blood as a whole, it has two general duties; the first is to repair damage done to the body. There are two sorts of blood-vessels, veins and arteries. One of these carry purified blood, they are the channels through which clean blood is conveyed. The others are the channels for the turbid blood which collects the waste-matter; these convey the blood to where breathing occurs; that is, the lungs.

The All-Wise Maker created in the air two elements, nitrogen and oxygen. As for oxygen, when it comes into contact with the blood in breathing, it drawn to itself, like amber, the impure element, carbon, which is polluting the blood. The two combine and are transformed into matter called carbonic acid gas. Oxygen also maintains the body temperature, and purifies the blood. This is because, in the science of chemistry, the All-Wise Maker bestowed on oxygen

\textsuperscript{104}See for details Nursi, The Words, 260-70. Ozerverli adds Nursi’s this approach of miracles of prophets was very similar to the approach adopted by another famous subcontinent scholar of his time Shibli Naumani, who did not interpret miracles mentioned in the Quran as supernatural events contradicting the physical laws, but as something whose proper understanding was not possible due to limited human knowledge and which might, as the result of scientific discoveries in future, strengthen Quranic claims. See Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 327.
and carbon an intense relationship, which might be described as 'chemical passion', whereby, according to this Divine law, when those two elements come close to each other, they combine. It has been established by science that heat is produced by combining, because it is a sort of combustion.

The wisdom in this is as follows: the motion of the particles of those two elements is different. On combining, the particles of one element unite with those of the other, each two particles thereafter moving like a single particle. The other motion is transformed into heat according to a law of the All-Wise Maker. As a matter of fact, 'motion produces heat' is an established principle.

Thus, as a consequence of this fact, by this chemical combination, as carbon is removed from the blood the body temperature of human beings is maintained and at the same time the blood is purified. On inhaling, oxygen both cleanses the body's water of life and kindles the fire of life. On exhaling, it yields, in the mouth, the fruit of words, which are miracles of Divine Power.”

Risale is full of such examples for instance “The Air A window on to Divine Unity” in Thirteenth-Word is another example in which by describing duties of the air Nursi proves Divine activity. Similarly in Twenty-Fifth Word Nursi explains in the light of the verse: And the mountains [its] pegs (Qu’ran 78:7), that “how people of different disciplines from literature to science all receive their share from this verse, Bediuzzaman displays his knowledge of geography and geology.” To conclude, Risale is filled with numerous examples of observing the universe and Divine activity in it, in the light of physical sciences to establish the truths of faith. Thus, Risale proves there is no contradiction between science and religion. Nursi also gives logical replies to the criticism of modern materialistic science and philosophers “to

105 Nursi, The Words, 622.
106 Ibid., 173.
107 Ibid., 402-05.
109 The best example is the Supreme Sign it will be explained in next section.
rebuff the imputed conflict”\textsuperscript{110} between science and religion which caused much confusion towards religious beliefs purposely to disgrace Islam.\textsuperscript{111}


3.2.2 Revitalization of *tafsir* and *kalam* through Risale-i Nur:

An important educational objective which Nursi achieved through Risale is revitalizing of significant Muslim sciences of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis or explanation) and *ilm al kalam* (Muslim theology). The basic aim of Nursi was to “revivify belief through developing new teaching methods” as the existing forms of Quranic exegesis and *kalam* works were inadequate to answer the recent criticism of materialism to religious truths. Basically Nursi “endeavored to bring together in complementary fashion different disciplines and types of knowledge.” Therefore, the primary function which Risale performs is of *tafsır* and *kalam* both, which Nursi himself emphasized by identifying it as *ma’navi tafsır* as well as a work of *kalam* “and has been credited with carrying out a genuine renewal (*tajdid*) in this field.” Nevertheless “Nursi can be regarded mostly as a scholar of *kalam* and *tafsir.*” However he cannot be considered “*mutakallim* and *mufassir* in a classical sense”. What he actually contributed was “to integrate *kalam* and *tafsir* disciplines, and reviving them as a theology based on the Qur’an and on the methods of contemporary education.”

As far as the revitalizing of *tafsir* and Risale’s contribution is concerned, keeping in mind the chief objective ‘savior of belief’ in writing Risale, it is a thematic commentary in which the subjects of the Quran regarding belief have been focused and elaborated. According to Nursi there are four main themes of the Quran which are Divine Existence and Unity, Prophethood, Bodily Resurrection, and worship and justice so Risale also concentrates and explains these four themes. He explained these main subjects in compatibility to the requirements of modern age. The method and way of Risale is primarily based upon ‘belief through investigation’ which Nursi has derived from the Quran, thus Risale is “based on criteria set by the Qur’an itself (*tafsiru’l-Qur’an bi’l-Qur’an*)”. And this is

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115 Ozervarli, “Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing,” 322.
the major distinction of Risale which differentiates it from other works of exegesis.\(^{118}\)

‘Belief through investigation’ or iman i tahqiqi is to reach the reality and truths of belief by observing the universe concentrating “on the beings and processes of the natural world” with logical reasoning and “in the manner of Quran”\(^{119}\). In Nursi’s opinion the whole Universe is like a book which has been purposely created in this way so that one could reach by reading it to the reality. In Nursi’s vision there are three means or sources in this world which reveal the existence of God in order to make God known to mankind. First source is the seal of the prophets Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, second source is the Quran and the third source is the Universe.\(^{120}\) For third source Nursi uses the term kitab i kainaat (Book of Universe or Book of Creation). As Quran is a revealed and written book, comprises verses and chapters, provides the knowledge of the Maker, similarly the whole Universe is also a book ‘created book’, which is purposely designed in this way. As a vast book\(^{121}\) it also is comprised of letters, words, lines and pages. For instance Earth is like a page of this mighty book where plants, animal species, gardens, flowers etc. are like lines, words and so on.\(^{122}\) Thus, the purpose of this ‘Embodied Quran’ is to inform man about Divine existence, His unity and manifestation of His attributes and there are numerous ways to read it. Nursi’s method of reflective thought (tafakkur) emerges from this notion. This concept is “central to the Risale-i Nur and lies at the heart of the way to reality that Bediuzzaman opened up.”\(^{123}\)

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\(^{119}\) Vahide, "Nursi’s Approach to Religious Renewal," 58.

\(^{120}\) Nursi, *The Words*, 243.


\(^{122}\) For details see Nursi, *The Flashes*, 400-01; Nursi, *The Rays*, 87.

The key concept of this method is *mana-i harfî* (other indicative, the significative meaning of things), “which means considering or reading things for the meanings they express and on account of their Maker” 124 In other words it is a way of “deductive argumentation in the form of proofs” in which “beings are seen as evidence for their Maker’s attributes and are pondered over in such a manner as to deduce proofs of them” 125. For instance Nursi elucidates in *Isharat ul-Ijaz* that beings mentioned in the Qur'an are not for themselves, “for it was not revealed to teach geography or cosmology (astronomy)” but for a more profound purpose. “The Quran speaks of beings [in the universe] for purposes of deduction *Istidlal*” that is to signify with evidence the Divine existence and unity. 126 Whereas he points out in *The Flashes*: “According to the Qur'anic view, all the beings in the universe are letters, expressing through their 'significative meaning' the meaning of another. That is, they make known the names and attributes of that Other. Soulless philosophy for the most part looks in accordance with the *[mana-i ismi* or self referential], 'nominal meaning' and deviates into the bog of nature.” 127

Through this argumentation “Nursi offers numerous proofs of the Creator’s existence and unity, for the resurrection of the dead and other pillars of belief, as well as for many other cosmic truths.” 128 Thus “the main tenets of belief are not abstract facts divorced from life and reality, that a believer has to assimilate from 'outside'; they are living truths that spring naturally out of existence itself, of which man himself is apart.” 129 Furthermore method of *mana-i harfî* “is in contradistinction to materialistic science and philosophy, which look on beings as signifying only themselves (*mana-i ismi* – the nominal meaning of things).” 130

The best treatise in *Risale* to understand the methodology of belief through investigation is Seventh Ray in collection of The Rays entitled “The Supreme Sign”.

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127 Nursi, *The Flashes*, 156.
treatise is on “the observations of a traveler questioning the universe concerning his Maker”. It relates an imaginary journey of a traveler who is desperate to learn about “the author of this great book and the monarch of this lofty realm.”  

Nursi begins the treatise with the verse:

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\begin{align*}
\text{تَسْبِحُ الْسَّمَاوَاتِ السَّبْعَةَ والأَرْضَ وَمِن فِيهِنَّ وَإِنَّ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسْبِحُ بِحَمَدَهُ وَلَسَّنَّ إِلَّا يُقَهَّرُونَ تَسْبِيحُهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيماً غَفُورًا}
\end{align*}
\]

“The seven heavens and the earth and all that is in them extol and glorify Him, and there is nothing but glorifies Him with praise, but you understand not their glorifying; indeed, He is Most Forebearing, Most Forgiving.”

In order to inquire about the Maker, the traveler first looks at the heavens and all they contain including sun, moon and other heavenly bodies. He continues his journey thus through the testimony of the atmosphere with its lightning and thunder, the testimony of the earth, wind, rain, seas, rivers, mountains and so on, each and every being bears the witness and testifies the necessary existence and unity of the Creator. Thus “in this treatise the universe is studied together with all its beings and its visible and invisible worlds, and its testimony to its Creator is described on thirty-three different levels or degrees.” To put it another way “as the traveler travels through the universe questioning all of its realms and learning of their testimony to the divine existence and unity, his belief gains universality and strength with each degree, and passes from being ‘imitative belief’ to the degree of ‘certain, verified belief’, and beyond.”

The example of belief through investigation with the help of mana-i harfî can be observed in the following section of treatise:

“Then [the traveler] looks at the rain and sees that within it are contained benefits as numerous as the raindrops, and dominical manifestations [of the Most Merciful One] as multiple as the particles of rain, and instances of wisdom as plentiful as its atoms. Those sweet, delicate, and blessed drops

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131 Nursi, The Rays, 130.
132 Quran 17:44
are, moreover, created in so beautiful and ordered a fashion, that particularly the rain sent in the summertime, is dispatched and caused to fall with such balance and regularity that not even stormy winds that cause large objects to collide can destroy its equilibrium and order; the drops do not collide with each other or merge in such fashion as to become harmful masses of water. Water, composed of two simple elements like hydrogen and oxygen, is employed in hundreds of thousands of other wise, purposeful tasks and arts, particularly in animate beings, although it is itself inanimate and unconscious. Rain, which is then the very embodiment of divine mercy, can only be manufactured in the unseen treasury of mercy of One Most Compassionate and Merciful, and on its descent expounds in physical form the verse: “And He it is Who sends down rain after men have despaired, and thus spreads out His mercy” (Qur’an 42:28).”

A worth noting point here is through observing the beings in the universe with this methodology, Nursi is trying simultaneously to refute the hypothesis of ‘naturalism’ i.e. causality, coincidence, chance, etc. as Vahide identifies: “Thus, examining the universe in the light of the Qur’anic revelation, the Risale proves on the one hand the existence and Unity of God and the other truths of religion, and on the other, the irrationality and logical absurdity of the concepts on which materialist philosophy is based, namely, chance and coincidence, Nature, and causality; it refutes the materialist interpretation of science. Using numerous different arguments and proofs, it demonstrates that the very nature of the universe, its universal order and arrangement, its precise balance and measure, the wisdom and purposes followed in all things, its unity and the interdependence of its parts, excludes the possibility of all the various explanations put forward by philosophy and materialism.”

There are numerous other proofs in Risale demonstrating ‘nature’ and ‘causation’ as baseless ideologies and particularly Twenty Third Flash in The Flashes collection titled “Nature: Cause or Effect?”, on the whole deals with this issue. In the beginning Nursi states:

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135 Nursi, The Rays, 133-34. This is the way to reach the reality by logical reasoning and observing outer world, there is another way of reaching the reality as well that is with the help of man’s inner self, this will be discussed ahead.

“[T]here are certain phrases that are commonly used and imply unbelief. The believers also use them, but without realizing their implications.” Then he mentions three commonly used phrases: “Causes create this.” “It forms itself” and “It is natural; nature necessitates and creates it”. Afterwards he demolishes these concepts through nine detailed ‘impossibilities’, proving them logically absurd.¹³⁷ For example Nursi mentions:

“If the art and creativity, which are discerning and wise, to be seen in beings and particularly in animate beings are not attributed to the pen of Divine Determining and Power of the Pre-Eternal Sun, and instead are attributed to Nature and force, which are blind, deaf and unthinking, it becomes necessary that Nature either should have present in everything machines and printing-presses for their creation, or should include in everything power and wisdom enough to create and administer the universe. The reason for this is as follows: The sun’s manifestations and reflections appear in all small fragments of glass and droplets on the face of the earth. If those miniature, reflected imaginary suns are not ascribed to the sun in the sky, it is necessary to accept the external existence of an actual sun in every tiny fragment of glass smaller than a match-head, which possesses the sun’s qualities and which, though small in size, bears profound meaning; and therefore to accept actual suns to the number of pieces of glass.

In exactly the same way, if beings and animate creatures are not attributed directly to the manifestation of the Pre-Eternal Sun’s Names, it becomes necessary to accept that in each being, and especially animate beings, there lies a nature, a force, or quite simply a god that will sustain an infinite power and will, and knowledge and wisdom. Such an idea is the most absurd and superstitious of all the impossibilities in the universe. It demonstrates that a

man who attributes the art of the Creator of the universe to imaginary, insignificant, unconscious Nature is without a doubt less conscious of the truth than an animal.” 138

Due to refutation of materialist concepts of nature, causality and others, Risale is also regarded as a work of *kalam* with the contribution of revitalizing it. Nursi himself recommended his students to consult various treatises from Risale at certain times on their questions related to the issues of *kalam*. 139 Since the basic aim of *ilm al kalam* is “to explain Islamic beliefs and to defend them against foreign ideas and beliefs considered heretical.” 140 Yet Risale played this role very effectively, as through “the Quranic theology, Nursi could make a serious attempt to protect the Islamic faith from materialistic challenges of the age using an experimental approximation rather than any philosophical and/or theoretical methods”. 141

Therefore “Risale-i Nur contains just about all the subjects dealt with in the science of *kalam*”. 142 For instance one can list these subjects as: Philosophy of Nature, just mentioned above; Divine existence, Unity, Names and attributes primarily with two proofs; (i) perfect design and order of universe and, (ii): man’s inborn nature. Nursi prefers these two proofs on “cosmological arguments of classical *kalam*” because these are easier to understand. 143 Likewise another subject is Divine determining and man’s free will (*jabr-o-qadar*) explicated in the Twenty-Sixth Word, which Nursi claims to have solved in “two pages… in a way that everyone can understand” which could not be completely clarified

139 See for example Nursi, *Barla Lahikasi*, 283, Nursi wrote in reply to one of his students who had written a letter asking for instruction in *kalam*, Nursi replied: “You anyway receive such instruction. All the Words [parts of the Risale] are lessons in that luminous, true science of *kalam*.” as quoted by Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 20.
141 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 322.
143 Ozervarli, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 323.
even by leading *kalam* scholars.\(^{144}\) Similarly Bodily Resurrection and the Hereafter explained in the Tenth Word, which Nursi also claims to have proved rationally, which is also comprehensible even for children on which *Ibn e Sina* confessed his impotence to rationally understand\(^ {145}\). Likewise Prophethood and Belief-sin-accusations of unbelief\(^ {146}\) etc. are also some examples of *kalam* subjects discussed in Risale.

Although all the subjects of *kalam* are included in Risale, but the methodology Nursi adopted to prove those truths is different from traditional *kalam* methodology because of certain reasons. Firstly Nursi believes philosophical arguments of *kalam* scholars are not understandable for a majority of believers and cannot “raise people to a level of belief in God’s existence, unity, and attributes which satisfies them.”\(^ {147}\) Thus according to him it was no more possible to learn the essentials of faith through *kalam* or in the *madrasah*, since it was a long process.\(^ {148}\) Besides, he also believes that “the knowledge of God gained by means of theology does not afford a complete knowledge and a complete sense of the Divine presence”... however to him all the parts of Risale “perform the duty of light on highway of the Quran” leading towards knowledge of God.\(^ {149}\)

Secondly, preferring reason over revelation was another element in the methodology of traditional *kalam* due to which Nursi turned his attention from that way. Nursi says that through preferring reason over revelation, *kalam* scholars “have not been able to express with clarity even ten of the Qur'an's verses, or prove them decisively.” By criticizing their methodology Nursi further asserts “it is as though they have dug tunnels under distant mountains, taken pipes with the chains of causes to the ends of the world, there cut the chains and then demonstrated the knowledge of God and the existence of the Necessarily Existent One, which are like the water of life. [Whereas] the Quran verses can all extract water from every place like Staff of Moses, open up a window from everything and make known the All Glorious One.”\(^ {150}\)

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\(^{146}\) Yavuz, "Nursi’s Views on Science of Kalam," 498.

\(^{147}\) Ibid. Also see al-Hamid, "Nursi: The Kalam Scholar," 430.

\(^{148}\) Nursi, *The Rays*, 531.

\(^{149}\) Nursi, *The Letters*, 381.

This convinced him that conventional approach to theology was inherently incapable of countering the doubts regarding faith, created by skeptical modern age. He devised a new science of *kalam* which was based on “the Qur’anic practical theology”\(^{151}\) with aim to free it from the narrow approach of the *madrasah*; reinterpret it as a response to skeptical schools of thought; and impart it to laymen in order to purify their minds, strengthen their beliefs and reform the society.\(^{152}\) In Risale therefore he provides “rational proofs for all the main tenets of belief and other question with which *kalam* was concerned” thus considers Risale “to be a new form of that discipline within its general function of the renewal of belief.”\(^{153}\) Ozerverli describes Nursi’s methodology in this way:

“[An] important reason that caused Nursi to turn from classical *kalam* methodology in favor of a Qur’anic-based theology is the presentation style of the Qur’an and its form of address to all humanity. Since the intellectual level of most of humanity is more simple, the Qur’an does not present the matter of faith in a philosophical and systematic way, but rather in allegorical forms (using *tashbîh* [metaphors], *tams'il* [allegories], *al-isti'arat* [simile] ) which Nursi describes as divinely-given principles (*al-tanazzulat-i ilahiyya*)”\(^{154}\).

Ozerverli continues

“but at the same time, [Risale] includes covert points of high thinking that are capable of satisfying intellectual minds. Therefore, [Nursi] himself used the same style in his writings, addressing people of a middling intellectual standard without an elaboration of a theoretical system of thought. But sometimes he gave details of a higher knowledge to satisfy his more intellectual readers as well. For example, he uses a dialectical method in controversial dialogues with Satan, in rejecting his preordained claims that the Qur’anic text is actually coming from a human origin.”\(^{155}\)

\(^{151}\) Ozervarli, “The Reconstruction,” 538.


\(^{153}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{154}\) For details see Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 188-94.

Al-hamid’s description is an excellent portrayal on Nursi’s method of *kalam* and role of Risale in revitalizing this science, he says:

“Bediuzzaman did not suffice with the subjects of the old science of *kalam*; he went beyond it and set out a comprehensive method for proving the (Divine) existence. In doing this he gave a place to man and nature. In setting out these questions from the point of view of materialist philosophy, he developed a system of *kālām* completely opposed to the Western ideological systems. ….We may therefore say that Bediuzzaman’s method of renewal in the field of *kālām*, which aimed to change it, was not directed at any specific problem or specific time. This comprehensive method rather constitutes a firm basis in conformity with the language and life-style of the age and with the struggles that take place in this age of ignorance, and with the behavioural norms of the Umma. The knowledge of the *kālām* scholars of the past consisted of what was written in books. Bediuzzaman, however, started from the books, then surpassing them, reached out to the universe, the Qur’an, and God’s Messenger (PBUH), and moving on from here to social action based on belief, he strove to reform those people who had been corrupted. And this is the great difference between abstract knowledge and applied knowledge, and restricted knowledge and absolute knowledge.”\(^{156}\)

A prime example of Nursi’s departure from the methodology of traditional *kalam* is his treatment with the arguments of Divine existence. Mindful of the needs of his time and challenges posed by agnosticism, he did not accord much importance in his works to the famous cosmological arguments of classical *kalam* i.e. contingency (*imkān*) and createdness (*hudūs*).\(^{157}\) Rather “he preferred arguments such as the perfect design [*nizām*] in the book of


\(^{157}\) Ozervarlı, "Nursi’s Project of Revitalizing," 322. Although Nursi employs the proofs of createdness and contingency but not in similar manner as the scholars of *kalam* developed moreover he also criticizes their methods see Nursi, *The Words*, 716-19; Nursi, *The Rays*, 163-64. For the explanation see Ali Mermer, "The Ways to Knowledge of God in the Risale-I Nur," in *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said*
the universe (kitab-i kainat) [as explained earlier] and the innate ability of conscience (vijdan) within human beings.” To Nursi, man himself is one of the undeniable proofs of the existence of God. Man was an embodiment of the physical and spiritual features of the universe. Being a smaller example (misal-i musaghar) of universe, man is microcosm of the cosmos. Unlike the more common deductive method employed by philosophy from effect to cause, Nursi relied on “experimental inductive method from the cause to the effect” for his theological pursuits. This approach of observing outer world (nizam) and human inner world (vijdan) was similar to the Quranic approach that categorized signs (ayat) of God under two separate heads, namely signs observable in the structure of outer physical existence of the cosmos (afaq) and the ones manifested in all human beings (anfus) both at physical and spiritual levels (Qu’ran 41:53).

To sum up, Nursi’s contribution in revitalizing the tafsir and kalam through Risale is to provide rational explanations of the main tenets of belief, which are equally understandable for simple minded people and for the intellectuals as well. He explained all the subjects of classical kalam theology with new methodology; therefore one can conclude that Nursi formed a new science of kalam which is similar to the classical kalam in terms of subject and purpose to an extent, but it is different in respect of methodology.

3.2.3 Integration of spirituality in Risale-i Nur:

One of the significant objectives of Nursi’s Medresetu’z-Zehra project was unification of three different structures of education in which the heart based teaching method of Sufi tekke (sufi meeting places or orders) was also imperative according to Nursi.
to take benefit from. He observes Sufism as a “branch of knowledge” but his understanding of Sufism is not precisely like the other sufi orders of his time. He developed his own methodology of spirituality through Risale which is according to him a safe, shorter and more beneficial way for the people of the present age. Actually Nursi strove for the integration of different branches of knowledge including religious, rational and spiritual in Risale “to establish an ‘epistemological wholeness’ and organic relations between the various categories of knowledge, revealed and scientific, and art, ethics, and belief, and within man himself with his many faculties. This is consistent with the Qur’an and its insistent teaching of divine unity.” In Nursi’s vision the training of all human faculties’ i.e. intellect, heart, and soul is essential because to him the purpose of education should not be to ensure only the material needs and prosperity of an individual. It should also purify a person’s heart and soul for success in the life hereafter. Because a society that would not cater to the spiritual and intellectual needs of man would be destined to be ruined. This is why Nursi integrates Spirituality as a branch of knowledge in Risale because it addresses the human faculty of heart in addition to the intellect. Zeyneb Seyilgan justly explains this educational aspect of Risale, she notes:

“Reconciliation, integration, unification, and forming alliances--these were the guiding principles in Nursi’s educational vision, bringing together various streams of knowledge and members of society. This is specifically seen in his approach towards Sufism as a branch of knowledge. With this in mind, Nursi depicted the Risale path as the summation of the twelve great ṭarīqas and underlined the importance of all of them. Nursi stated repeatedly that the Nur

162 Sayilgan, "The Medresetu’z-Zehra."
165 Sayilgan, "The Medresetu’z-Zehra."
circle provided the benefits of the *ṭariqas* and that one did not need to look for them somewhere else.”

Nonetheless, Nursi considers Sufism in-appropriate for the present age because of immense difficulties of this way which is not possible for everyone to bear. Due to the lengthy way and hardships of this path, some people might be de-tracked and their faith might be endangered. Conversely, he also asserts that due to negative aspects of some orders of this path, of which he himself is also a critic; it is not justified to condemn and prove the whole system invalid.

Though Nursi acknowledged the spiritual path of Sufism as a means of discovering the truths described in the Quran, he accepted only that Sufism which conformed to the injunctions of the Quran and the *sunnah* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Nursi believed that Sufism was a journey of the heart which aimed at “direct witnessing (*mushahada*) or ‘presential knowledge’ (*ilm-i huzuri*)” of the ultimate Truth. It is a spiritual journey, which reflects the one undertaken by the Prophet ﷺ in his ‘ascension’ that aims at unraveling the depths of faith and attain gnosis of God (*ma’rifah*). Thus, in Nursi’s view Sufism was concerned with purging soul of impurities and attainment of experiential knowledge. That is “nothing less than the nurturing of the ‘perfect man’ that every individual has the potential to

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167 Sayilgan, "The Medresetu’z-Zehra."
168 Nursi, *The Letters*, 510.14. Actually Nursi’s readings and observation of the time and its necessities convinced him that his contemporaries were exposed to many doubts and were challenged to provide rational responses to skeptics who thought faith incoherent and implausible… otherwise their faith would be weakened by such doubts and they would have the risk of losing faith. Loss or lack of faith is the extreme detriment in Nursi’s view, for its consequence would be the loss of one’s eternal happiness. This is the risk involved in journeying on tarīqah which require lengthy training, including some challenges that result in not all seekers successfully completing the journey. And, as the way of heart *tasawuf*, Sufism, could fall short in resisting to doubts of the time harming belief, that is why Nursi concluded that compelling circumstances of the present time required belief to be the necessity and it was not the age of Sufism. See Ian S Markham and Suendam Birinci Pirim, *An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings* (Uk: Ashgate 2011), 40-41.
170 Ibid., 510.
be. It is a journey of the heart because it is precisely that faculty of man which makes him a comprehensive summary of the universe or, to use the Sufi term, a microcosm of the whole creation.”  

According to Nursi there are two key elements of this spiritual journey, namely, remembrance (zikr) of God and reflective thought (tafakkur) which are essential not only in the world hereafter but also for internal peace in this world.  

Nursi also criticizes the method of Sufism time and again while comparing it with the method of Risale. The basic difference between the two is in their treatment of the universe. According to Nursi, Sufism completely ignored Universe in their pursuit of the ultimate truth. They “either denied the universe’s true existence or entirely disregarded it; that is, they cast it into oblivion.” Whereas Risale stressed the importance of minutely observing the entities present in the universe, in other words by reading the book of the universe, in order to ascend to the understanding of The Creator. Nursi puts this difference in approach to Sufism’s tendency to rely purely on inner human faculties, primarily ‘the heart’, to reach The Almighty. This reliance on the journey of heart appeals more to intuition than intellect. It is not that Risale ignores the importance of illuminating inner self through this spiritual journey, but it equally stresses on the use of intellectual reasoning and proofs to understand this universe and wisdom of The Creator. It was important for Risale to appeal to logic and facts present in the universe to convince the modern skeptic brains to accept the Quranic

172 Turner, The Quran Revealed, 343. Nursi explains this point in following words: “since man is a comprehensive index of the universe, his heart resembles a map of thousands of worlds. For innumerable human sciences and fields of knowledge show that man’s brain in his head is a sort of centre of the universe, like a telephone and telegraph exchange for innumerable lines. Similarly, the millions of light-scattering books written by incalculable saints show man’s heart in his essential being to be the place of manifestation of innumerable cosmic truths, and to be their pivot and seed. Since the human heart and brain are thus central, and comprise the members of a mighty tree in the form of a seed, and within them are encapsulated the parts and components of an eternal, majestic machine pertaining to the hereafter, certainly the heart’s Creator willed that it should be worked and brought out from the potential to the actual, and developed, and put into action, for that is what He did. Since He willed it, the heart will certainly work like the mind. And the most effective means of working it is to be turned towards the truths of faith on the Sufi path through the remembrance of God in the degrees of sainthood.” Nursi, The Letters, 507.

truths. Nursi gave an apt description of the methodology of Risale explaining that unlike the traditional religious scholars Risale did not merely rely on and proceed ‘with the feet of the reason’. Instead it was a synthesis of heart and reason “proceeding with the feet of the blending and combining of the reason and the heart, and the mutual assistance of the spirit and other subtle faculties, it flies to the highest peaks; it ascends to where the feet and even the eyes of the philosophy that attacks [religion] cannot reach; and it shows the truths of belief even to eyes that are blind.”¹⁷⁴ This is basically one of the primary features of Nursi’s new method of revitalizing the belief of individuals adopted in Risale, which is to proceed with the alliance of heart and mind. That is to say man’s “reasoning faculty and intuitive inner senses” both “are utilized in ascertaining the truth, and in the process are illuminated with the knowledge obtained.”¹⁷⁵ This is the way of Risale which Nursi named as haqiqat (reality) a direct way derived from the Quran. This he places within “the legacy of prophethood (the greater sainthood)”¹⁷⁶ instead of sufi way. He states: “it is reality (haqiqat) rather than tariqat. It is Shari’ah.”¹⁷⁷ Nursi mentions three ranks of sainthood with reference to Sirhindi and among them “The greater sainthood (velayet-i kubra) is to open up by way of the legacy of prophethood a direct way to reality without entering the intermediate realm of Sufism.” This short but elevated path “looks to the unfolding of divine immediacy. For there are two ways of passing from the apparent to reality: one is to traverse the degrees through spiritual journeying, as in Sufism. The second is to pass directly to reality without entering the intermediate realm of Sufism. According to Nursi, this way is particular to the Companions of the Prophet and those who succeeded them.”¹⁷⁸ This was Nursi’s desire to furnish Risale with these characteristics in order to guide his people for direct way.

¹⁷⁴ Nursi, Kastamonu Lahikasi, 10 as quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 235-36.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 233.
¹⁷⁶ Nursi, The Letters, 68.
Chapter 3: Nuris on Educational Reconstruction of Society … (125)

Following example from Risale would be helpful to understand a facet of Nuris concept of spirituality, a direct way to reality (haqiqat), in getting the idea what type of spirituality he prescribes for Muslims. This path, according to Nuris, is not only suitable for this age rather it is recommended because it is based upon the teachings of the Quran. Moreover, it is shorter and safer than other sufi orders. It consists of four components; impotence (‘ijz), poverty (faqr), compassion (shafaqa), and reflection (tafakkur) which lead towards the purification of the soul (tazkiyya al nafs) and can be obtained through following four steps:

**First step** is to acknowledge one’s deficiencies by comprehending the verse

\[
\text{فَلَا تُذْكَرُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ}
\]

“Therefore, do not justify yourselves.”

Nuris explains in the light of this verse that it is man’s innate nature that he loves and praises himself more than any other thing and always considers himself faultless. Until his self-appraisal and self-defending leads him to an extreme level as worshiping of himself as indicated in the following verse:

\[
\text{أَرَأَيْتُ مِنْ أَنَّهَا إِلَهَهُ هَوْاً}
\]

“Did you such a one who takes as his god his own desires.”

So first of all man should struggle for the complete judgment of his weaknesses.

**Second step**, Nuris explains in the light of the verse:

\[
\text{وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسَوا اللَّهَ فَانْسَاهُمْ أنفُسَهُمْ}
\]

“And be not like those who forget God, and He therefore makes them forget their own selves.”

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179 Nuris, _The Letters_, 524.
180 Qur’an 53:32.
183 Qu’ran 59:19.
He elucidates that under the influence of evil commanding soul man plays a dual behavior. This dual behavior is reflected in his ignoring the facts that death, transient nature of life, downfall and serving humanity are as much relevant for him as are for others; however he becomes selfish when the question is of material prosperity and tends not to think of others.  

What Nursi suggests for man’s purification at this stage is the reverse of above mentioned state which is man should “forget himself when it comes to pleasure, and ambition and greed, and to think of himself when it comes to death and service of others.”

**Third step**, for purification of soul according to Nursi is to comprehend the verse:

\[
\text{ماَ أَصَابَكَ مِن حَسَبُهُ فَمِن الله وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِن سَيْبُكَ فَمِن نَفْسِكَ} \\
\text{“Whenever good happens to you is from God, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.”}^{186}
\]

Nursi explains “the verse teaches, the nature of the evil-commanding soul demands that it always considers goodness to be from itself and it becomes vain and conceited. Thus, in this Step, a person sees only faults, defects, impotence, and poverty in himself, and understands that all his good qualities and perfections are bounties bestowed on him by the All-Glorious Creator. He gives thanks instead of being conceited, and offers praise instead of boasting. According to the meaning of the verse:

\[
\text{فَلِفَٰتِ أَفْلَحَ مِن رَّكَاهَا} \\
\text{‘Truly he succeeds who purifies it’}^{187}
\]

One’s purification at this stage is to know his perfection to lie in imperfection, his power in impotence, and his wealth in poverty.”

**Fourth and final step**, lies in the complete and thorough understanding of the wisdom of following verse:

\[
\text{كُلُّ شَيٌّ هَٰلِكُونَ إِلَّا وَجِهَتُهُ} \\
\text{“Everything (that exists) will perish except His (own) Face (or Countenance).”}^{189}
\]

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186 Qur’an 4:79.
187 Qur’an 91:9.
However to understand Nursi’s fourth step, “it is necessary to bear in mind his teachings on the ‘Other-indicative’ and the ‘self-referential’ perspectives of reality” \(^{190}\) “In other words, a thing has two aspects, one in respect to itself (mana-i ismi), the other in regard to its Creator (mana-i harfi). In its first aspect, the thing is transient (fani), absent (mefkud), temporal (hadis), and nonexistent (ma’dum), whereas, in its second aspect, it is like a mirror, reflecting God’s names… A person at this stage will have completely given up his egotism, and thereby will be able to attribute all due existence to God, and then finally see that so long as he is a mirror of the manifestation of the true Donor of Existence.”\(^{191}\) Which means “all that he is and has is from God: in himself he is virtually nothing at all, dependent as he is at each instant on the effulgence of Divine grace to bestow on him the gift of existence.”\(^{192}\) Thus this way is to reach the divine reality through reflection on man’s inner world. In Nursi’s vision there are two ways to reach the reality and truths of belief. One is through observing the outer world (afaq) and second is by reflection on the man’s inner world (anfus).\(^{193}\) Nursi employs the methodology of mana-i harfi and ismi in reflection through man’s inner world as well. Turner and Horkuc conclude:

“[Thus] Qur’anic – and, by extension, Nursian – spirituality is therefore not about becoming more God-like. In fact it would appear to be quite the reverse. It is about realizing that those attributes in man which appear to make him like a God belong in reality to another. The 'spiritual journey' of man towards God, then, is not about becoming more like Him; rather, it is about 'purifying' oneself of all possible claims to 'god-likeness' and making room for Him to reveal Himself through the medium of the spiritualized soul.

\(^{189}\) Qur’an 28:88.
\(^{190}\) Turner, The Quran Revealed, 353.
\(^{191}\) Kuspinar, "Nursi’s Evaluation of Sufism,” 80.
\(^{192}\) Turner, The Quran Revealed, 353.
\(^{193}\) Nursi, The Letters, 510. The details of reaching reality through reflection on man’s inner world, how man attains this and the role of human I in this regard, all will be discussed in chapter five.
It means not acting like Him, but acting in His name; it involves not being like Him, but manifesting or revealing Him.‖

In a nutshell Nursi develops his system of spirituality, only a little glimpse has been taken above, yet there are many other points which cannot be fully comprehended as this subject needs a separate detailed study due to its vastness. One can conclude that Nursi did not join any Sufi order in his whole life neither he called Risale having any connection with Sufism. Considering spirituality as a branch of knowledge, Nursi has introduced a system which works with the alliance of heart and mind and whose objective is to reach the reality of God, which is basically, according to him, the Quranic method.

Conclusion

The chapter examined Nursi’s views on educational reconstruction of society. First section aimed to give a comprehensive account of Nursi’s ideas and efforts for educational reforms which were chiefly concerned with the establishment of the university Medresetu’z-Zehra. Besides, other aspects of his educational project were also evaluated including reformation of educational structure of madrasah, proposals of better direction for Muslim scholars and certain practical instructions for students. Nursi considered this educational plan helpful to counter the decadence of education system of that time which also proved to be one of the major factors of rapid decline of Ottoman Empire. Afterwards, Nursi’s endeavors to found the university till the end of his life were also analyzed. A radical circumstantial change after the emergence of new Turkish Republic helped Nursi to realize that it was no more possible to establish such an institute in concrete form. Since, it had already been determined by him that now the time was to serve for the defense of belief, he was led to the decision of writing Risale. Hence Nursi’s Medresetu’z-Zehra dream came true only through Risale with the

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194 Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 92.
achievement of all the major objectives of his educational plans and thus Risale study circles became ma’navi (informal) Medresetu’z-Zehra. Subsequently, second section of this chapter analyzed the role Risale played in the fulfillment of these objectives. First contribution of Risale in this regard was to create a harmony between modern and religious sciences, so that the combination of both could be utilized to understand the basic purpose of man’s creation which is knowledge (ma’rifah) of the Creator. Second contribution of Risale was to revitalize tafsir and kalam sciences, and to set an example for further course of action in these areas so that these sciences could play their roles according to the requirements of modern age along with the ones they were already playing, in order to befittingly answer the recent attacks of skepticism. Integration of spirituality as a form of knowledge, a distinction of Nursi among his contemporary scholars, was the third major service Risale rendered to accomplish one of the goals of Medresetu’z-Zehra project. While giving the interpretation of truths of belief, Nursi prefers to take the root of rational and spiritual both ways. His methodology of belief through investigation which proceeds through logical observation, not only focuses the outer world (universe) by utilizing human’s faculty of intellect but also gives particular attention to man’s inner world through utilizing human faculties of heart, soul and conscience. Moreover, in Risale he takes special care of intellectual abilities of all social classes enabling both intellectuals and laymen to receive guidance from Risale. Furthermore, he pays particular attention to the educational training of all members of society including children, young, old, and women. Due to this wider scope of his educational enterprise which involves training of all segments of society and the epistemological wholeness of all types of knowledge i.e. religious, rational and spiritual, his methodology in Risale is connected with the post-modernism’s concept of ‘holism’.

“Postmodern holism entails an integration of all the dimensions of personal life – affective and intuitive as well as cognitive,” In addition “the postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension” and accepts that there are also “other valid paths to knowledge besides reason… including emotions and the intuition.” In this way the basic ambition and the heart of Nursi’s Medresetu’z-Zehra project to combine madrasah, maktab and tekke was accomplished through Risale.

196 Sayilgan, "The Medresetu’z-Zehra."
198 Ibid., 7.
CHAPTER : 4
NURSI AND SOCIO-POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETY

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Conclusion
Introduction

To understand Nursi’s approach and strategy on socio-political reconstruction of society one needs to study different phases of his life. The Old Said phase spanned Nursi’s youth. It lasted till the end of the World War-I. It coincided with the last few years of the Ottoman Empire where Islam was still important as “the cause of life of the state, and its religion.”

The nature of his struggle in first phase was active involvement in social and political matters of that time. He was trying to bring change by utilizing political and educational channels to save Ottoman Empire. Turkey’s defeat in the war resulted in disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. This marked the beginning of the New Said. One of the main differences of this phase was that he chose to disengage himself from all spheres of public life that were part of Old Said’s endeavors. This withdrawal continued and was reinforced when the new regime started Westernization of the Turkish society. Islam was banished from all walks of life. Nursi was sent in exile during this period. The real problem for the Muslims in following period was not the disintegration of the caliphate. It was a pervasive transformation of Turkish society that saw the rise of skeptical, godless ideologies. Nursi’s major contribution was in the form of Risale-i Nur, to encounter this problem he adopted the way of ma’navi jihad in the form of Risale. Third Said, the last ten years of his life, was marked by the beginning of another political era of Turkey in which situation was eased due to lenient policies of Democrats. The Third Said bore minor differences. However, the differences between his strategies in the first two phases were more striking as compared to the third one. These changes in different phases were in response to the changing circumstances, discussed in detail in the first chapter. In order to get a clear understanding of his efforts of reconstruction on socio-political fronts, it is important to gain insight into his endeavors during all three phases separately. So this chapter is divided into three sections in which his socio-political reforms will be examined in each of the three distinct phases of his life namely, Old Said, New Said and Third Said.

4.1 Nursi’s endeavor for Socio-political reconstruction of society in Old Said period

This section aims to study Nursi’s efforts for socio-political reconstruction of society in his Old Said phase. His socio-political endeavors in early years were chiefly based upon educational reforms through establishing Medresetu-z Zehra and political reforms through the support of constitutional movement. The former have been studied in chapter three with higher details, his second main effort will be elaborated in the following section. Prior to that, Nursi’s response towards Western civilization’s influence on Muslim societies in general and on Ottoman society in particular will be elaborated in the beginning because this affected social and political structure of Ottomans to a larger extent, and the solution Nursi prescribed will also be discussed. Secondly, his favor and support for constitutional system of Government and his efforts to guide and convince people from different levels of society to contribute their roles will be discussed. Thirdly, Nursi’s Damascus Sermon will be studied in order to get understanding of his socio-moral reforms as this sermon is considered the crux of his social and political thoughts.

4.1.1 Nursi’s stance on Western civilization’s influence:

The biggest question and challenge, threatening the identity of Muslim societies and affecting their socio-political structure at larger extent (in the time of Nursi) was how to deal with Western civilization’s influence in the wake of Westernization. It was such a challenge that confronted the entire Muslim world and societies at that time therefore all Muslim thinkers and scholars i.e. Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Qutb, Allama Muhammad Iqbal etc. provided solutions to meet this challenge.²

The first point which Nursi clarifies in this regard is that, positive aspects of Modern civilization are not the property of Christianity or Europe rather these are universal virtues and have been common possessions of all humanity since the beginning:

“I cannot deny that there are numerous virtues in [modern] civilization, but they are neither the property of Christianity, nor the creation of Europe, nor

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the work of this century. Rather, they are common property. They are the product of the combined thought of mankind, the laws of the revealed religions, innate need, and in particular of the Islamic revolution brought about by the [Shari‘ah] of Muhammad (PBUH)”.

Likewise to link decline with Islam is also a mistreatment despite the fact that Islam, what Nursi believes “is the master of all achievements... and has been furnished with a real civilization and positive, true sciences.” “Islam enjoins progress and comprises all the necessities of civilization.” This is historically testified that Muslim had always progressed according to the extent they adhered to the teachings of Islam. In terms of its influence, Nursi divides European civilization into two types on the bases of positivity of true Christianity and negativity of materialist philosophy he comments:

“One follows the sciences that serve justice and right and activities beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity. This first Europe I am not addressing. Rather, I am addressing the second, corrupt Europe which, through the darkness of the philosophy of naturalism that considers the evils of civilization to be its virtues, has driven humankind to vice and misguidance.”

Keeping in view the positive sides of European civilization as well as its negative impacts on Ottoman society, Nursi once gave a very eloquent analysis:

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7 It is accustomed to call ‘modern civilization’ or ‘Western civilization’ Said Nursi reffered to as “European civilization,” or simply as Europe. This is logical, since modernity, not only in the sense of scientific and technological advances, but also in its philosophical underpinnings, first took root in Europe and from there was brought to every corner of the world. See Thomas Michel, *Insights from the Risale-I Nur* (USA: Tughra Books, 2013), 52.

“The Ottoman state is pregnant with Europe and it will give birth to a European state one day. And Europe is pregnant with Islam; one day it will give birth to an Islamic state.”

However, “in the West, the evils of civilization had come to preponderate over its beneficial aspects.” because “at the heart of Europe’s sickness are the twin ‘gifts’ of ‘diseased and misguided philosophy’ and ‘harmful and corrupt civilization’, by-products of the naturalist and materialist currents which emerged in the wake of the Enlightenment.”

Nursi notes: “O second Europe! You hold a diseased and misguided philosophy in your right hand and a harmful and corrupt civilization in your left, and claim, “Mankind’s happiness is with these two!” May your two hands be broken and may these two filthy gifts of yours be the death of you”

It was this negative aspect of materialist philosophy that first affected the Western civilization. Then, Muslim societies, through an unchecked process of Westernization, fell victims to the harms of the same materialist philosophy. According to Nursi:

“[Modern civilization] focuses on the immediate, the temporal, the ephemeral, and finds it difficult to see beyond to questions of eternal importance…Instead of seeking the truly good life intended by God for people, men and women are caught up in a rat race of seeking wealth, prestige, pleasure, and political power in the mistaken fantasy that these things will bring them happiness ….”

Nursi blames Muslim societies for this blind imitation of negativities of modern civilization. Due to this, socio-economic inequalities also emerged in Muslim societies. He states, “When comparing modern civilization with the principles of the Qur’an, all immorality and instability in the social life of man proceeds from two sources: i: ‘Once my stomach is full, what do I care if others die of hunger?’ and ii: you work, and I’ll eat.”

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9 Quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 42.
10 Ibid., 158.
13 Quoted in Michel, Insights, 56. For original text see Nursi, The Words, 496.
up on the instruments of racism and negative nationalism, where conflict is the leading principle, which is destroying human peace and happiness.\textsuperscript{15}

Furthermore, “for Nursi war is an inevitable by-product of Western civilization, which, he says, is a threat to moral and social life because it justifies the twin evils of force and self interest.”\textsuperscript{16} Yet when a civilization is built “on the principles of conflict, competition, and enmity, the result will inevitably be war and mutual destruction.”\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, European literature also formed numerous negative impacts on Muslim mindset.\textsuperscript{18}

In order to demonstrate all above points, Nursi made comparisons at numerous places in Risale “between the societal values proposed by modern civilization and the vision of society presented by the Quran”\textsuperscript{19}. Vahide adds: “The basic difference between the two arises from the fact that Islamic civilization is based on Divine Revelation, while Western civilization is based on the principles of Greek and Roman philosophy. Because Western civilization has drawn distant from true Christianity, the evils of civilization have come to preponderate over its beneficial aspects. Dissipation and sensuality, and social and economic injustice, have come to prevail, which having led to its decline, will eventually cause its break up and make way for the establishment of Islamic civilization.”\textsuperscript{20}

For example Nursi states:

“It [European civilization] takes as its point of support force, which manifests itself in aggression. Its aim and purpose is benefit and self-interest, after which everyone jostles and pushes without restraint. Its principle in life is conflict, which manifests itself in contention and discord. The ties between different groups are racialism and negative nationalism, which thrive on devouring others and which are manifested in ghastly clashes. Its alluring

\textsuperscript{15} Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 420.
\textsuperscript{16} Turner, \textit{Qur’an Revealed}, 523.
\textsuperscript{17} Michel, \textit{Insights}, 59.
\textsuperscript{18} For details of these points and other demerits of European civilization i.e. impact of European literature and its comparison with Islamic civilization and solutions according to Nursi consult Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 158-61; Turner, \textit{Qur’an Revealed}, 523-35; Michel, \textit{Insights}, 51-72.
\textsuperscript{19} Michel, \textit{Insights}, 54.
\textsuperscript{20} Vahide, "Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad," 126-27.
service is encouraging lust and passion, satisfying desires, and facilitating the attainment of whims. And as for lust and passion, they make man descend from the level of the angels to that of a beast.”

Whereas Islamic civilization is based upon the following principles-almost reverse of the above:

―Its point of support is truth instead of force, which is manifested as justice and equity. Its aims are virtue and God’s pleasure in place of benefit and self interest, which are manifested as love and friendly competition. Its means of unity are the bonds of religion, country, and class instead of racialism and nationalism; they are manifested as sincere brotherhood and reconciliation, and cooperation in only defending against outside aggression. The principles in life are those of mutual assistance and cooperation instead of conflict, and are manifested as unity and mutual support. In place of lust is guidance, which is manifested as progress for humanity and being perfected spiritually. It restricts the passions, and instead of stimulating the base desires of the carnal soul, it gratifies the high sentiments of the spirit.”

In this comparison Nursi differentiated Islamic socio-political tenets from those of the Western civilization. Islamic social values aimed at social stability brought about by virtues like justice and mutual cooperation. This was in contrast to the Western ideals of social change rooted in competition and interclass conflict. This idea of social stability based on justice could be traced back to the works of Ibn Khaldun and had been a defining feature of Muslim societies in general. Nursi’s was trying to incorporate the concepts of homeland and class which belonged to nationalist and socialist ideologies without tampering with the basic social fabric of Islam. This, he believed, would counteract the evils of Western social values.

Thus Nursi stressfully criticized “the blind and unselective imitation of Western culture. He believed that Asian nations would lose their character if they tried to resemble Europeans just for the sake of being regarded progressive. Although he supported new developments in

21 Nursi, Sunuhat, 44 quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 159.
the West regarding social and political rights, such as constitutionalism, republicanism, and so on, he rejected the overall project of Westernisation by adopting the European way of life in various spheres. He pointed out that an imitation of Europeans would also mean approving their aggression through colonialism.” 23 He notes: “Do not try to imitate Europeans! How can you reasonably trust in and allow the vice and invalid, worthless thought of Europe after boundless tyranny and enmity it has shown you?” 24

4.1.2 Old Said’s suggestions to cope with this situation:

One solution Nursi prescribed for Muslims was to consider the example of Japanese while benefiting from Western civilization. They only had taken advantage from the virtues of Western civilization through benefiting from the technology and industry for their progress while preserving their own national customs. This was the best example for Muslims to follow. Nursi states:

“We shall take with pleasure the points of Europe—like technology and industry—that will assist us in progress and civilization. However... we shall forbid the sins and evils of civilization from entering the bounds of freedom and our civilization with the sword of the Shariah, so that the young people in our civilization will be protected by its pure, cold spring of life. We must imitate the Japanese in acquiring civilization, for in taking only the virtues of civilization from Europe they preserved their national customs, which are the leaven of every nation’s continuance. Since our national customs grew up within Islam, they should be clung to in two respects.” 25

Along with this suggestion Nursi also prescribed a method to counter the impact of Western civilization while he was still in the Old Said phase. The method was to wage jihad against, ignorance, poverty and conflict which he regarded as three biggest enemies confronting the Muslims. Because in Nursi’s view “the essential enemy of Muslims [in] this age was

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24 Nursi, The Flashes, 166.

25 Quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 54-55.
not the ‘outside’ enemy, it was the threesome of ‘ignorance, poverty, and conflict’-the antithesis of Islam. It was these ‘pitiless’ enemies and their consequences that had been the cause of the Islamic world’s decline, and prevented Muslims from performing the duty of upholding the Word of God.”

The solution he prescribed was to fight ignorance with the sword of knowledge (of modern and religious both sciences), to combat poverty with industry (san‘at) and to battle conflict with unity and brotherhood.

Nursi pointed out towards this point in a newspaper article:

“All believers are charged with upholding the Word of God. At this time, the most effective means of this is material progress, for the Europeans are crushing us under their ‘immortal’ tyranny with the weapons of science and industry. We therefore shall wage jihad with the same weapons against „ignorance, poverty, and conflicting ideas, the most fearsome enemies of upholding the Word of God. As for external jihad, that we shall refer to the decisive proofs of the Illustrious Shari’a, for the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not by force, as though they were savages who understand nothing.”

Thus Nursi had this opinion in his Old Said phase too that in this age ‘upholding or exalting the word of God’ (one of the basic aims of jihad, obligatory upon all believers) was also “dependent on material progress” which was only “possible by attaining true civilization”.

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26 Quoted in Vahide, "Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad," 127; for original text Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 85.

27 In one of his later works, he proposes three primary reasons for the decay of the Islamic world: poverty (fakirlik), ignorance (jahalat) and (civil) unrest-conflicts (ikhtilaf). In addition, he proposed three solutions to these problems: science (marifet), art (san‘at) and unity (ittifak). Cited in Mustafa G Sahin, “Turkey and Neo-Ottomanism: Domestic Sources, Dynamics and Foreign Policy” (PhD Diss., Florida International University, 2010), 123. http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/160; also see Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 109; Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction,” 546; M Hakan Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey (New York: Oxford university press, 2003), 160.


The discussion should not lead one to think, however, that Nursi was against the physical jihad. In fact he deemed physical jihad equally important when the situation demanded it.\textsuperscript{30} He spent a good part of his early life himself participating in jihad as he “was one of the most heroic fighters in the defense of his country.” He in all probability participated in the Balkan war in 1913, assisted in fatwa of jihad at the outbreak of the WW-I, travelled to North Africa for jihad proclamation in 1915 and formed militia on the orders of Enver Pasha. He was also a recipient of War Medal for his valiant services against the Russians. The important point is that he did not forsake his jihad with pen even on the battlefield. He was engaged in expounding the verses of the Quran even in the trenches. It all goes to show how important scholarly jihad was to him which he himself mentioned in the preface of \textit{Isharat ul-I’jaz} (Signs of Miraculousness).\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{4.1.3 Political reforms: support for constitutionalism:}

Nursi’s life as political activist (in Old Said time) was marked by his efforts to rekindle the glory of Islamic civilization it enjoyed in the by-gone days, which was best represented by the Ottoman Empire. He wanted to materialize this through constitutionalism and education. The details of his work in the field of education have been discussed in chapter three. Here his efforts for constitutionalism and the rationale behind his support for it will be penned briefly.

Nursi’s support for constitutionalism and democracy was not in any way the result of him being impressed by the Western ideals. Instead, he considered this form of government the best representative of Islamic values. Moreover, he deemed a constitutional government necessary for sustainability and progress of the Empire. Thus, Nursi believed it was obligatory to support constitutionalism because, if in lines with the injunctions of the Quran, it would strengthen religion and exalt the word of God. Material progress was a must for

\textsuperscript{30} Dr. Ismail Latif Hacinebioglu, interview by Shumaila Majeed, Suleyman Demirel University Isparta Turkey, January 16, 2014.

religion to maintain its stronghold and constitutionalism was the vehicle that could actualize this progress.\textsuperscript{32} Turner comments:

‘Old Said’ saw in constitutionalism an opportunity for the Ottoman nation to progress more rapidly and to considerably greater heights than it had in the past. However, constitutionalism would, he averred, work only if it were imbued with the spirit of Islam and adherence to the precepts of religion. Like many of the reformist thinkers of his era, Nursi believed that Islam was by its very nature a receptacle for the seeds of progress and civilization: the past glories of the Muslim world had proven as much, and all that was needed now for that ‘true civilization’ to be realised once more was for Muslims to reaffirm their faith and not fight shy of the new political ideas that were being formulated. A few days into the ‘Second Constitutional Era’ following the Young Turk ‘revolution’, Nursi gave a speech entitled Address to Freedom in which he outlined the objectives of constitutionalism, one of which was the restoration and rejuvenation of Islamic civilization.”\textsuperscript{33}

Nursi’s support firstly for CUP and later on for \textit{Ittehad-i Muhammedi Jamiyati} (as discussed in first and second chapters) was solely due to their struggle for the reinforcement of constitutionalism. However, the reasons that proved an impetus to Nursi’s involvement in politics deserve a mention here. He took to politics primarily for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted to guide those in the corridors of power regarding the principles of Islam so that politics could be used to serve religion.\textsuperscript{34} The second reason for his involvement in politics had much to do with his pragmatic approach. It was palpably clear that in the aftermath of the French Revolution the overall scenario had changed a great deal universally. Despotism and arbitrary rule did not sit well with the public mood and political wave of the time. The


\textsuperscript{33} Turner, \textit{Qur’an Revealed}, 519.

concepts of individual freedom, equality and justice and rule of law were in vogue not only in Western Europe but also in the Ottoman Empire. Nursi ventured to use the changing trends to establish the veracity of Islamic values and principles. He explained that such modern ideas as were being advocated by the West were not alien or in any way contradictory to Islam. In Vahide’s argument:

“Bediuzzaman accepted the trend, and through pointing out that these luminous concepts are not the exclusive property of the West as the Europeans would have it, but are fundamental to Islam, showed the way towards developing a truly Islamic form of government. This demonstrating that consultation, equality before the law, justice, freedom, and brotherhood are enjoined by Islam and were practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and his immediate successors, and that despotism is contrary to Islam, is not apologetics nor some belated and dubious claim to them as is often portrayed, but is a genuine statement of fact, and is, furthermore, a recognition of the dynamic nature of the [Shari’ah].”

That is why in his freedom speech entitled ‘Address to Freedom’ which Nursi delivered in 1908 three days later the constitutional revolution, he “explained to the people the meaning of constitutionalism, and how they should regard it, and that if the [Shari’ah] was made the source of it, this oppressed nation will progress a thousand times further than in former times.”

One can summarize the points Nursi delivered in his speech as follows: firstly, the only way to revive the Ottoman caliphate is freedom and constitutionalism; secondly, Shari’ah can only be practiced within the framework of freedom; thirdly, the principles a Muslim state must follow include union of hearts, love of nation, education, human endeavor, and the giving up of dissipation; fourthly, Muslims should benefit from Western science, technology and industry keeping the fact in mind that there are some evils connected with the numerous virtues of European civilization. “Nursi [also] exhorts Muslims to follow the Japanese in acquiring the virtues of European civilization while preserving their own distinct national customs and

36 Ibid., 69.
37 Ibid., 71.
Fifthly, Muslims should follow the Islamic principle of mutual consultation. Because Nursi feels “in this complex modern age, it is only through a constituent assembly, consultation, and freedom of thought that the state can be upheld, administered, and guided.” He “predicts that unity, adherence to Islamic morality together with the successful functioning of the constitutional government and genuine practice of the Islamic principle of consultation will result in the Ottoman nation soon competing neck and neck with the civilized nations.” In sixth point, Nursi listed the reasons of Muslim world’s decline and wretchedness as (i) the failure of Muslims to observe the ordinances of the Shari’ah; (ii) the bigotry of ignorant literalist scholars, and (iii) the abandonment of the virtues inherent in European civilization and the adoption of only its sins. 

It is another significant aspect of Nursi’s socio-political endeavor that he wanted all the populace to get involved and play their roles in support of constitutionalism. This is why he travelled to remote tribal areas of Empire and had discussions with tribesmen, to explain to them that constitutional form of government was much more relevant to Islam as compared to despotism. This he did because it was a general understanding among people that the new constitutional form of government was irreligious. Nursi made it clear by comparing constitutionalism with despotism:

“Despotism is oppression. It is dealing with others in an arbitrary fashion. It is compulsion relying on force. It is the opinion of one person. It provides extremely favorable ground for exploitation. It is the basis of tyranny. It annihilates humanity. It is despotism which reduces man to the most abject valleys of abasement, has caused the Islamic world to sink into abjection and degradation, which arouses animosity and malice, has poisoned Islam and in fact sows its poison everywhere by contagion, and has caused endless conflict within Islam by giving rise to its deviant sects like the Mu'tazilah, Jabriyyah, and Mürji'ah…” Whereas Constitutionalism, Nursi asserted is

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39 Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 72-73.

40 Abu-Rabi, "How to Read Risale," 74; also see for details of 'Address to Freedom' Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 52-56.

41 Consult Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 53-54.

42 For details see Vahide, Author of Risale-I Nur, 72.
“the manifestation of the Qur'anic verses 'And consult them in affairs of public concern' (3:158) and 'Whose rule in consultation among themselves' (42:38). It is the consultation enjoined by the Seriat. This luminous body's life is truth, in place of force. Its heart is knowledge, its tongue, love. Its mind is the law, not an individual
Indeed, constitutionalism is the sovereignty of the nation...” And again, "...the real meaning of constitutionalism is that power lies in the law...”

4.1.4 Nursi’s Views on Muslim identity and Nationalism:
During the Old Said phase there were three strands of identity which emerged and existed side by side at the end of Ottoman period. These were Islamism, Turkism and Ottomanism. Ottomanism had almost lost its force with the uprising of the non-Muslim minorities in Balkan states. The other two ideologies, however, held the sway. Islamism was based on the concept of religious ideologies whereas Turkism was based on nationalism. Nursi tried to bring about the confluence of the two currents of identity and establish a hierarchy in which Islamic identity was held in the higher position than nationalism. Also, Ottomanism again recovered when the Second Constitution was enforced and the place of non Muslims in the state came under discussion.44
The Old Said differentiated between the positive nationalism and negative nationalism.45 If nationalism fostered brotherhood and unity it was desirable; but it was undesirable if it promoted racial bias and animosity towards others. He made earnest efforts to keep the Muslims away from disintegrating on the basis of ethnic differences. His aim was to counter the divisive effects of nationalism and strengthen the idea of Muslim nationhood.46 In his view, the emerging nationalist movements promoting negative nationalism were a throwback to the pre-Islamic tribalism which Islam had uprooted some thirteen hundred years before. He urged the Turks, Arabs, Kurds and other ethnic groups to consider Islam their first and foremost identity which bound them together.47

44 See Davutoglu, "Bediuzzaman and Politics," 295.
45 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Sunuhat, 13 quoted in ibid., 296.
46 See ibid., 296-97.
47 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 83; for explanation see Davutoglu, "Bediuzzaman and Politics," 296; also see Haddad, "Ghurba as Paradigm," 306; for more on nationhood, nationalism and Nursi see Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 93-97.
Mindful of the hostile forces, both internal and external, which were engaged in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Nursi believed the preservation of unity was of paramount importance. He emphasized unity on several levels in his writings and addresses and also advised his fellow Kurds to guard against the divisive elements. He believed “unity had to be established within the various groups of the multiethnic, multi-religious empire; within the empire itself; and on the level of Islam.” According to him, Islamic unity lied at the core of Ottomanism. Moreover, he also emphasized the virtues of nationhood. It was nationhood that could function as a springboard for such positives as love, progress and unity. He disliked despotism and believed despotism resulted in the loss of nationhood and increased hatred and division which could unravel the entire social fabric of a people and eliminate any possibilities of progress.

These were the ideas Nursi disseminated through his writings and speeches. When he was confronted with court martial in May 1909, he referred to his efforts to enlighten people about the importance of constitutionalism as his defense. He explained how he had been visiting coffee houses and other places which were frequented by some twenty thousand Kurdish porters living in Istanbul. He would explain to them in layman language as to why constitutionalism mattered for them and how they were its beneficiaries. He identified three social problems they had to fight against. These were poverty, illiteracy and rift within different sections of society. There were hardly forty Kurds out of around forty thousand who were literate enough to read a newspaper. For these three problems Nursi suggested as many solutions. He termed them as the ‘golden swords’. These were national unity, striving and love for the Ottoman nation. In order to encourage them, he also explained to them the importance of collective effort. The way forward for Turkey was a combination of brawn and brain. They had mettle and physical strength to contribute towards the betterment of their society whereas Turks had intellectual abilities and education to complement their struggle. Constitutionalism was not against shari‘ah. It was compatible with the Islamic principles and therefore beneficial for its people. He emphasized the importance of unity, brotherhood and
obedience to the government for a happy and well-balanced life. Without unity and love for each other there were few prospects for them.  

**4.1.5 Nursi’s socio-political efforts at all levels and through all channels:**

A point mentioned above needs to be elaborated further. Nursi expanded his efforts for the guidance of ordinary tribal people to make them understand about their role and contribution. For example he toured remote places of eastern provinces of Empire, had long discussions with rural people to explain to them the importance of constitutional system and unity, and to warn them about the problems of negative nationalism and harms of despotism. He did this because he actually wanted that all the levels and sections of society should have clarity on these points so that all populace could play their supportive role in social and political reformation. He focused on ordinary people in particular because he considered them as “builders of future”.

That is why he also compiled these discussions in the form of book with the title *Rachatat al Awwam* (prescription for the ordinary people) in Arabic, whose Turkish version entitled Munazarat. While staying in urban areas, it was also his routine to visit tea houses and public places to have discussions with common people and laymen on socio-political issues. Likewise, Nursi also made efforts to guide Muslim scholars about their actual responsibilities and identified their mistakes, “he had a whole set of proposals for ulama”. For instance he inscribed *Rachatat al Ulama* (prescription for the scholars) Turkish version *Muhakemat*. Moreover, for people to be aware of the social and political issues of the time, and the reasons and solutions of Muslims and Ottoman Empire’s decline, he wrote numerous articles, penned books, addressed gatherings, and delivered lectures and sermons for this purpose. He provided guidelines by unitizing all the means of communication of that time. He was working to improve political conditions and was addressing and writing to

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48 Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 60-61. Nursi’s thoughts on unity and nationhood will be further elaborated in following pages.
49 Ibid., 85.
50 For details ibid., 84-85, 92.
guide politicians, his speech ‘Address to freedom’ is the best example. He was supporting political parties which he considered right at that time for instance first CUP, but when realized their anti Islamic tendency he separated from it and joined Ittehad-i Muhammadi Jamiyati. He also addressed public gatherings. The major examples are his Address to freedom and Damascus Sermon. Nursi’s services in different organizations of that time are also illuminating proofs of his efforts for the reformation of his society at all levels, utilizing all measures. For instance, his working for Daru'l-Hikmeti'l-Islamiye (Academy of Higher Islamic studies), which was established after WW-I to “find solutions for problems confronting the Islamic world”; his founding an organization in 1920 named “Green Crescent society” with objective “to combat the spread of alcoholic liquor and other harmful addictions”; his involvement in Madrasah Teachers Association in 1919 which aimed to maintain better educational standards in madrasah. Thus, he was working on all the level and sections of society by utilizing all the channels of time for socio-political reconstruction of his society. Now Nursi’s Damascus Sermon which is the essence of his social, political and moral thoughts will be studied ahead.

4.1.6 Nursi’s ideal on socio-political and ethical reforms based on Damascus Sermon:
The sermon which Said Nursi delivered at Umayyad Mosque of Damascus in 1911 is the essence of his thoughts regarding socio-political and moral reconstruction of Muslim society. The significance of the sermon became clear at that time when it was published twice in the following week due to its high demand. Its significance is still in place and accepted today even after one hundred years as it “has been often reprinted and is still being read and studied”. The analysis Nursi made about Muslim societies and the solution he prescribed for their material and spiritual backwardness “have continued to speak to the needs of Muslims of this century”.

One can grasp Nursi’s thoughts of an ideal Muslim society from the sermon. To have a true understanding of Nursi’s approach it is important to


52 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 136, 41-42.

have a detailed study of Damascus Sermon here.

After praises of Almighty God, Nursi initiates why the non-believers who had distanced themselves from God and faith in religion were the ones progressing fast in terms of material development. Whereas the regions where religion still had a stronghold not only came to a standstill but also epitomized retrogressive societies. He identified six dire sicknesses as factors of this backwardness and considered the undoing of these factors necessary for believers to make any positive contribution to human progress in years to come. Among these six sicknesses first is: The rising to life of despair and hopelessness in social life. Second: The death of truthfulness in social and political life. Third: Love of enmity. Fourth: Not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another. Fifth: Despotism, which spreads, becoming widespread as though it was a contagious disease. And Sixth: Restricting endeavour to what is personally beneficial. The rest of the address concentrated on the fundamental question which Nursi raised at the beginning, and to cure the illnesses which he thought were affecting the religion negatively. He devised six words each corresponding to one of the six sicknesses. Thomas’ gives following remarks about Nursi’s methodology in Damascus Sermon:

“One can say that Said Nursi’s methodology is that of a physician who must: 1) examine the symptoms to discover what is wrong, 2) name the sickness in diagnosis, 3) encourage the patient with a positive prognosis that affirms that there is a cure, and 4) prescribe what must be done to promote the healing.”

Here the remedies of the spiritual sicknesses Nursi prescribed will be examined in detail:

4.1.6.1 The illness despair, the remedy hope:

Muslims were completely overwhelmed by the dazzling progress made by the Western irreligious societies. They compared this situation with their retrogressive societies and fell victim to hopelessness. They felt forsaken by God. The future looked bleak for them and promising for the upholders of “godless materialism” who had resources to dominate the world. Nursi suggested ‘hope’ as a remedy to this ill as “there are real grounds for hope”

Nursi mentions: “The future shall be Islam’s and Islam’s alone. And its ruler shall be the

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54 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 26-27.
55 Michel, "Nursi’s Damascus Sermon,” 47.
56 Ibid.
truths of the Qur’ān and belief. Therefore, we must submit to Divine Determining and our fate of the present, for ours is a brilliant future, while the Europeans’ is a dubious past.”

This Nursi believes due to the fact that Islam takes special care of its followers not only for their progress in moral and nonmaterial/spiritual matters, but also Islam is highly concerned for their material (maddī) progress in this world. Nursi explains Islamic concept of hope under the above two aspects in detail. While explaining moral and nonmaterial aspect he elucidates: the solid bases for hope might be observed in human history which shows that Muslims increased and progressed in civilization to the level they practiced and lived in accordance with Islamic truths. On the contrary, they fell into savagery, decline, disaster and defeat to the degree they neglected these truths.

Human psychology also provides an impetus for hope. A happy and contented life, both individually and collectively could not be materialized without religion. Faced with critical situations, even the most irreligious person turns to religion for solace. Material development without religion was possible but only at the cost of such evils as negative competition, greed and warfare which ultimately led them to destruction. All this meant that the need for God for a fulfilling life, despite the apparent decline of religion in twentieth century, would eventually come to dominate opposing ideologies. “Another sign of hope can be found in increased education, in that as people move beyond blind following of their leaders and begin to think for themselves, the intrinsic worth of the basic truths of religious faith can be better understood and valued.”

While explaining second aspect of hope in terms of man’s material progress Nursi explicates such unbreakable strengths of Islam that enable believers to progress materially. For instance Islamic teaching of stimulating people to compete for exalted things shatters despotism and

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57 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 27-28. Nursi remained very optimistic even in the most turbulent circumstances and also guided Muslims for not losing hope ever, he asserts: “just as every winter is followed by spring and every night by morning mankind also shall have a morning and spring, God willing. You may expect from Divine mercy to see true civilization within universal peace brought about through the sun of the truth of Islam.” See ibid., 39.

58 Ibid., 28.

59 Ibid., 29.

60 See ibid., 29-31; also see Michel, "Nursi's Damascus Sermon," 48.

61 Michel, "Nursi's Damascus Sermon," 48; see in Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 32.
destroys jealousy, hatred and rivalry among believers. These are the major hurdles for man’s social, political and material growth which consequently restrict the optimum exertion of human capabilities to grow in every aspect of life including material welfare. Likewise the fearlessness arising from the belief is another force which enables believers “neither to demean [themselves] or to be servile to oppressors and despots, nor to oppress and be arrogant towards the unfortunate”. Similarly, the duty of upholding the word of God is another power which helps believers to attain material success. Nursi believes since the enemies of Muslims are equipped with the weapons of science and technology, the Muslims should also strengthen and equip themselves with education, science, industry and technology, they should strengthen themselves in all material (maddi) fields to combat them. This is the sort of jihad in Nursi’s eyes which is actually required as the service of ‘upholding God’s word’ in this age and can only be offered through attaining the expertise of science, technology and material progress.62

4.1.6.2 The illness untruthfulness, the remedy honesty:
Nursi identifies lack of truthfulness in social and political lives as second evil responsible for Muslims’ backwardness. He does not take lack of truthfulness as telling lies rather he explains hypocrisy (double standard) as actualized form of lying, flattering (self-serving insincerity) as cowardly lying, duplicity (pretending to be friend of both sides while playing them against each other) as harmful lying; all these facets Nursi includes as forms of lying. Even “unbelief in all its varieties is falsehood and lying” and destructive for individual and social lives.63 Nursi notes that not only religious scholars who used to give self-interested fatawa but politicians also who even justify their dishonesty with misleading political propaganda and misuse their positions, power and state resources as well; all these are the forms of untruthfulness which are harmful and ultimately destroy public order.
Nursi prescribes honesty as the remedy of all these forms of untruth. He argues that a Muslim society can never be able to offer the modern world a feasible alternative to corruption and lying without becoming an embodiment of truthfulness showing strong sense of responsibility. He strongly believes that the principle of honesty is still as valid even in 1950s

62 See Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 36-37.
63 Ibid., 45.
(forty years after the original sermon) as it was in 1911 when he delivered the sermon. He states: “O my brothers in the Umayyad mosque! And O my brothers, 40 to 50 years later who form the 400 million believers in the vast mosque of the world of Islam! Salvation is only to be found through truthfulness and honesty...the strongest chain with which to be bound to salvation is honesty.”

4.1.6.3 The illness enmity, the remedy love:

Third ailment of the age which Said Nursi identified in his Sermon was enmity and hostility which had overturned man’s social life. Nursi asserted that two world wars of the 20th century “have shown how evil, destructive, and what an awesome wrong is enmity” Self worship and arrogance were the root causes for enmity and hatred, which in turn resulted in subliminal hostility towards others. They could do harm to the ties among the believers in the most impalpable ways. Afflicted with enmity, one did not realize his wrongdoings and insincere behavior. “People usually consider that the evils others do are proper grounds for hostility, but Said Nursi teaches that, unless others are aggressive, one should not let the evils of our enemies attract your enmity. Hell and Divine punishment are enough for them.”

As remedy of this destructive ailment, Said Nursi suggests love: “The thing most worthy of love is love, and that most deserving of enmity is enmity. That is, love and loving, which render man’s social life secure and lead to happiness are most worthy of love and being loved.” He locates “love, brotherhood, and affection as basic to Islam and its bond. Fairness and favorable thinking is a mark of the Islamic character”.

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64 Ibid., 48; also see Michel, "Nursi's Damascus Sermon," 51.
65 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 50.
66 Michel, "Nursi's Damascus Sermon," 52; for original text Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 50.
67 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 49.
68 Ibid., 51.
4.1.6.4 The illness disunity, the remedy unity:
Fourth malady of the age, according to Nursi, undermining the bases of Muslim societies, is disunity. Nursi’s take on linguistic and ethnic differences within the umma was that these two factors were contributing in creating and widening the rift between Muslims. Thomas comments:

“In raising this issue, Said Nursi was confronting real situations. He delivered his original Sermon in Damascus, which in 1911 was a restive part of the Ottoman state. Within a decade, Syria would become a French protectorate. Said Nursi prepared his Turkish translation of the Sermon 40 years later when Syria and its Arab neighbors were emerging as independent nations. Said Nursi's plea is that Muslims not allow ethnic and linguistic differences to divide and weaken the unity of their nations, nor that relations between Muslim nations be determined on national, ethnic and linguistic lines.”

He advised his hearers to work for unity among Muslims. It was time to rise above personal differences and work collectively to forge unity and brotherhood among Muslims. He urged the newly autonomous Arab states to draw inspiration from the United States of America in this regard, which achieved success and lost grandeur in a short time by bringing its people together.

4.1.6.5 The illness individualism, remedy nationhood:
Another sickness Said Nursi finds in Muslim societies is restricting endeavors to what is personally beneficial, in other words to be concerned for personal benefits on the expense of others/societal benefits. Nursi mentions this sickness is infiltrated among Muslims from other nations which have taken from us our most valuable possessions, making our elevated morals the means of their progress. He comments about the statement “should I die, let my nation live, for I have an everlasting life in my nation… that these words proceed from the religion of truth and the truths of belief. These are the property of the believers. However, because of the obscene and bad character that infiltrated into us from foreigners, a selfish man from among us says: ‘If I die of thirst, let it not rain again anywhere in the world. If I do not

70 See Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 52-53.
experience happiness, let the world go to rack and ruin as it wishes.’ These ridiculous words arise from lack of religion and from not recognizing the hereafter. They have entered among us from outside and are poisoning us. Also, because of the idea of nationhood which those foreigners obtained from us, an individual becomes as valuable as a nation. For a person’s value is relative to his endeavor. If a person’s endeavor is his nation, that person forms a miniature nation on his own.” Nursi continues “despite our strong and sacred Islamic nationhood, through everyone saying: ‘Me! Me!’ and considering personal benefits and not the nation’s benefits, a thousand men have become like one man. If a man’s endeavor is limited to himself, he is not a human being, for human beings are by nature civilized. Man is compelled to consider his fellow humans. His personal life continues through social life.”

4.1.6.6 The illness despotism, remedy mutual consultation:
A further reason for the decline of the Muslim world is despotism. Nursi asserts: “Belief necessitates not humiliating others through oppression and despotism and not degrading them, and secondly, not abasing oneself before tyrants. Someone who is a true servant of God cannot be a slave to others. Do not make anyone other than God lord over yourselves.” What he prescribes as remedy is consultation. “He sees consultation as the Islamic alternative to individualistic despotism, just as it is the sound basis for true freedom and progress.”

Nursi affirms:

“The key to Muslims’ happiness in the life of Islamic society is the mutual consultation enjoined by the Shari‘a. The verse, “Whose rule is consultation among themselves” (42:38) orders consultation as a fundamental principle. Just as the consultation of the ages and centuries that mankind has practiced by means of history, a conjunction of ideas, formed the basis of man’s progress and sciences, so too one reason for the backwardness of Asia, the largest continent, was the failure to practice that true consultation.”

He further elaborates:

“The key and discloser of the continent of Asia and its future is mutual consultation. That is to say, just as individuals should consult one another, so

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71 Ibid., 54-55.
72 Michel, "Nursi’s Damascus Sermon," 55.
73 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 56.
must nations and continents practice consultation. For it is the freedom that is in accordance with the Shari‘a, which is born of the consultation enjoined by the Shari‘a, and the noble-mindedness and compassion of belief that will loosen and remove the fetters and chains of the various forms of tyranny.”

If a believer willingly works beyond his self interest and join others in solidarity and sincerity, “ten persons can perform the work of a thousand” He concludes his Sermon with these words:

“In the face of endless enemies and innumerable needs, man can continue his personal life only through the support and assistance proceeding from belief, and can maintain his social life only through the mutual consultation enjoined by the Shari‘a that proceeds from the truths of belief. Only thus can he halt his enemies and open up a way to secure his needs”

A point needs to be mentioned here is despotism and dictatorship, what can be understood from Nursi’s views, is not only harmful as a form of government, but this is damaging at all levels in society. It can be experienced even at work places, in family life, and at scholars level as well which Nursi named as scholastic despotism (discussed in third chapter). Nursi mentions at different places:

“I am opposed to all forms of despotism. Wherever I see it, I strike back at it.”

“In my judgment, the very worst form of despotism lies in the despotism of the mind and the intellect.” I can live without bread, but I cannot live without freedom. With every degree in which faith and belief increase, so too does the light of freedom increase in its radiance. Such indeed, is the Asr-ı Saadet, age of happiness! (Golden Age)”

Ibid.
Ibid., 57.
Ibid., 58.
Nursi, Ilk Donem Eserleri, Divan-ı Harbi Orfi 465. (Translated by Hakan Gulerce into English)
In sum, the analysis of Nursi’s efforts on socio-political front in Old Said phase shows how he remained steadfast in his optimism despite bleak contemporary conditions. His aim was to instill self-confidence in Muslims through psychological uplifting.
4.2 Nursi and struggle for socio-political reconstruction in New Said phase

In 1923 when Republic came into power the forces hostile to Islam gained a foothold in Turkish society. They used the state power to impose their alien, non-Islamic agenda on Muslims. In consequence the challenge of this phase in front of Nursi was implemented influence of aggressive materialism in the form of secular Turkish Republic where all the reforms were institutionalized to turn the country into a Western-style modern state. At social level, western norms were adopted and at state level all the institutes were changed in accordance with the western values of secularism. Thus, one of the Old Said’s analyses: “The Ottoman state is pregnant with Europe and it will give birth to a European state one day” came true with the establishment of Turkish Republic. In sum, materialist philosophy replaced religion in the Republic. Turkey became “the forefront of the battle against unbelief and materialism.”

Kuru comments:

“[T]his threat against the faith of the Turkish people was much more dangerous than the political threat from the West. It was relatively easy to detect and fight against a foreign threat, but now the threat against the faith was coming from within. The worm was in the body and it was hard to defeat it. Nursi understood that he needed to do something to save the faith of Muslims and decided to work only for the promotion of the Islamic creed. That was the birth of the ‘new Said’.”

Now the whole context was changed, in previous period of Nursi, there was dying Muslim Empire, to save which he exerted himself working on two fronts (through supporting constitutionalism and educational reforms). After the change in the whole scenario it was essential to change the strategy. The strategy Nursi adopted for the reconstruction of his society in this phase was jihad i ma’navi which he also called positive action. This form of jihad, according to Nursi, was more suitable and appropriate for that period. In order to get full understanding of Nursi’s socio-political strategy in New Said phase, following questions

81 Quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 42.
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will be addressed in this section: What is jihad i ma’navi (metaphorical jihad) and which sword Nursi suggested to use against destruction of materialism? Why Nursi avoided politics and recommended the same for his students? What is ‘positive action’? Besides, New Said’s vision of Nationalism and inter-faith relation will also be discussed briefly.

4.2.1 Nursi’s views about metaphorical (ma’navi) Jihad:

Arabic word jihad, derived from جهد, literally means to ‘strive’, to ‘struggle’, and to ‘exert strenuously’ 84. In Islamic context jihad is the name of the struggle and persuasive efforts undertaken to uphold the word of God. 85 The word has been explained with various forms and categories by Muslim Scholars, i.e. jihad against one’s own soul (jihad bil-nafs), jihad with tongue (bil-lisan) or with pen (bil-qalam), jihad with wealth (bil-maal), jihad with knowledge (bil-ilm) and jihad with sword or force (bil-saif). Ibn al Qayyim describes four main stages or forms of jihad which are: jihad against one’s own self, against satan, against disbelievers and against hypocrites. He further elaborates the properties of each stage. In either category of jihad the primary objective is ‘exalting Allah’s Word and assisting in His religion and to vanquish disbelief’. 86

As far as Nursi’s vision of jihad is concerned, he divides it into two categories; internal and external jihad. Internal jihad is marked by, among other things, the willingness to sacrifice ‘I’ for the collective ‘we’. He considers internal jihad the ideal weapon to battle with misguidance and unbelief. He was convinced that the changing trends of the world required Muslims to engage in constant struggle with their souls, which was the greatest form of jihad. “For it is only a collective personality of this kind that can successfully combat the collective personalities of the forces of misguidance and unbelief.” 87

Regarding second mode of jihad which is external or physical in nature, Nursi’s vision is different from that of his contemporary Muslim thinkers and “quite peculiar to him alone”\(^88\). The struggle he initiated against irreligion and unbelief was ‘jihad of the word’ which he also named as ‘positive action’. He considered it the most required and appropriate form in his age among all other types of jihad. He viewed physical or armed jihad non-suitable for the modern age. As the destruction and harms caused by the enemies of Islam in this age (European materialism) were of spiritual sort therefore the remedy should also be of the same kind.\(^89\) Vahide writes: “the unique function of the Risale-I Nur in the renewal of belief and revitalization of Islam demanded this method,”\(^90\) because “jihad has to be in conformity with conditions, and in a form that meets the requirements of the situation.”\(^91\) Moreover, Nursi admitted that external or armed jihad was partially responsible for the propagation and spread of Islam in the past, but it was not an answer to the contemporary challenges.\(^92\) Muslims carried out physical jihad in the Middle Ages because the threats then necessitated it. They “had been compelled to wield the sword in the face of the barbarism, bigotry, and aggression of that time”\(^93\). The new age demanded of Muslims to wage an intellectual war against the hostile forces with “metaphorical swords of true civilization, material progress, truth and justice which will defeat and scatter the enemies of Islam”.\(^94\) He argued furthermore “the Europeans were not the barbarians they had once been; besides, they were attacking the ‘sphere of Islam’ not with weapons of steel but with the ‘weapons’ of industry, technology, science and learning.”\(^95\) Since “in [this] time of civilization, Europeans are civilized and powerful... [and] from the point of view of religion, the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not by force, and by showing through complying to its

\(^{88}\) Turner and Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, 106.


\(^{90}\) Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 232.

\(^{91}\) Vahide, “Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad,” 123.

\(^{92}\) Turner and Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, 106.

\(^{93}\) Vahide, “Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad,” 127.

\(^{94}\) Turner and Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, 106.

\(^{95}\) Turner, *Qur'an Revealed*, 567.
commands by act and good morals, that Islam is elevated and worthy of being loved." In addition, Nursi also believed that the abolition of Empire and the establishment of Turkish republic provided further proof that the time for physical/external jihad was over. In justification of this claim he comments in The Rays:

“The verse, There is no compulsion in religion (2:256) points … to the date 1350 [if Rumi, 1934, or if Hijri, 1931-2], and through its allusive meaning, says: By the matters of religion being separated from those of this world on that date, freedom of conscience, which is opposed to force and compulsion in religion, and to religious struggle and armed jihad for religion, was accepted as a fundamental rule and political principle by governments, and this state became a secular republic. In view of this, jihad will be a non-physical religious jihad with the sword of certain, verified belief (iman-i tahqiqi ). Because it shows a flash of miraculousness indicating that a light will emerge from the Qur’an which will make known and set forth clearly proofs so powerful they will demonstrate almost visibly the guidance and truths of religion.

Furthermore, as far as the word khalidun (2:257), by repeating the contrast between light and darkness, and belief and darkness -the source and origin of

96 Quoted in Vahide, "Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad," 127.
97 Turner, Qur’an Revealed, 566-67.
98 “Here, the Quranic verse which prohibits Muslims from compelling others to accept Islam is, having been recast as ‘freedom of conscience’, placed on the lips of the architects and champions of the Republic and acknowledged as one of the underlying ideological principles of the new, secular state.” See ibid., 566-67.
Nursi makes it clear at various occasions that secularism principally, gives the right to every individual to have religious or irreligious beliefs according to his will and wish and since he is free in this right, no one can impose his opinion on any individual, according to this principal “secularism means being unbiased, that is in accordance with the principle of freedom of conscious ... it refers to a government that does not interfere with the religiously- minded and pious, the same as it does not interfere with the irreligious and dissolute.” See Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The Rays, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2010), 305,86; Sukran Vahide, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Approach to Religious Renewal and Its Impact on Aspects of Contemporary Turkish Society,” in The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 67.
all the comparisons in the Risale-i Nur and just like them is a concealed sign that a great hero in the contest of the mânevi jihad at that date is the Risale-i Nur, which bears the name of light. For its immaterial sword has solved hundreds of the mysteries of religion, leaving no need for physical swords.

... It is due to this mighty mystery that Risale-i Nur students do not interfere in the politics and political currents of the world and their material struggles, nor attach importance to them, nor condescend to any involvement with them.... They feel not anger at their enemies, but pity and compassion. They try to reform them, in the hope they shall be saved.”

What Nursi meant by the year 1350 is unclear whether it is according to hijri (lunar) calendar or the solar Ottoman calendar. Nevertheless Nursi’s this assertion is quite obvious “that with the disestablishment of the Caliphate and what amounted to a separation ‘church and state’ with the advent of the Republic, militant jihad had now become defunct.” For after “the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire”, Islam and state were no longer co-extensive, Turkish Republic could not be considered as ‘sphere of Islam’, consequently there was no such central Muslim power left to authorize militant jihad. Turner comments:

“It is with this in mind that Nursi has no qualms about declaring militant jihad impermissible: so long as the state is an avowedly secular entity with no claims to religious legitimacy, jihad – which nevertheless remains incumbent on individual Muslims – must by definition be a non-physical one, to be waged in a manner that does not contravene the laws laid down by the secular regime.”

Another reason of Nursi’s view to consider militant jihad non applicable in his age was he visualized the situation of Muslims similar to as it was in Meccan period of Prophet Muhammad. Nursi, in his approach to rejuvenate individual’s belief, drew inspiration from Meccan period methodology of the holy Prophet. Yet “the first thirteen years of Muhammad’s mission in Mecca were dedicated for the most part to matters of faith, spirituality and the fostering of self-knowledge and Divine gnosis” In Meccan period,

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100 Turner, *Qur’an Revealed*, 567.

101 Ibid., 566-67.

102 Ibid., 570.
jihad with force was not commanded due to in-favorable conditions. Militant jihad was only ordered and practiced after migration to Medina when a Muslim state was established, and this was permitted for defense, Turner explains Nursi’s point of view in this way:

“Militant jihad may have been appropriate as a means of defending the nascent community of Muslim believers at Medina during the time of the Prophet, for in a sense they embodied Islam: any attack on them was an attack on the religion itself, for it was through them that the religion was given expression. Today, however, as in Nursi’s time, the Muslims are not living in the Medina of the seventh century; nor do they have the mindset of Medina or the substructure of solid belief upon which the very existence of Medina as a paradigm was predicated… “[Nursi] was never one to ‘dream of Medina’ when it was Mecca that the Muslim world needed. Nursi’s emphasis on the need to safeguard and perfect belief, his withdrawal from politics, his rejection of militant jihad and his gradualist approach to social reform all suggest that, unlike the vast majority of Muslim thinkers whose ‘dreams of Medina’ underpin their socio-political discourse, Nursi’s focus is wholly Meccan in orientation, based on his enduring desire for the betterment of the individual human soul as the prerequisite for the emergence of a lasting moral order in society at large.”\(^{103}\)

After having a look at Nursi’s views, one can derive the point that Nursi considered ‘physical jihad’ or ‘jihad with force’ unsuitable in the current conditions and situation of his time. Albeit in case of attack on Muslims, force in the form of defensive exertion is allowed. Thus, force could only be used for defense; however, offensive (iqdami) jihad seems to be not permissible in Nursi’s opinion.\(^{104}\) This is Nursi’s distinctive approach which is different from

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\(^{103}\) Ibid.

\(^{104}\) For detailed understanding of Nursi’s thoughts on jihad see ibid., 557-70; Vahide, ”Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad.”; Muhammad Harb, ”Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Middle East Question in the Light of His Cause Universality and Understanding of Jihad,” in Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi The Reconstruction of Islamic thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (Istanbul: Sozler, 1995); M Hakan Yavuz, ”The Sufi Conception of Jihad: The Case of Said Nursi,” in Sixth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman: Globalization, Ethics and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur (Istanbul:
that of the majority of Muslim orthodoxy. For the majority of Muslims scholars, the offensive (*iqdamî*) jihad is as integral to the injunctions of Islam as was the defensive jihad.\(^\text{105}\) However, in view of the situation of that time, one can safely conclude that Nursi’s approach was right. In the wake of the Ottoman collapse and establishment of the Turkish Republic, the situation could have worsened if Nursi had allowed or urged his students to take part in militant jihad. For example, at the beginning stages of Turkish Republic, Shaikh Said (from Palu tribe)\(^\text{106}\) prepared to wage the militant jihad against the government due to their skeptical policies and requested Nursi to support him in his cause. Not only did Nursi refuse to join him, but also advised him to abandon that idea. Nursi believed that fighting against government meant fighting those fellow believers who were part of the Turkish Army. He could not allow the shedding of the Muslim blood. Moreover, going for any armed attempt against the government of that time could create a huge social disorder. Therefore, it is clear from the discussion above that Nursi accorded no place to militant jihad in contemporary times due to the circumstances. His statement supports this point: “Whatever physical jihad demands, we are not charged with that duty at the moment.” It was the belief of the Muslims which was at stake. The deterioration was spiritual in nature and called for a verbal jihad - the only suitable answer to the threats facing the Muslims. As Turner notes: “Jihad was still incumbent on Muslims, but it was a different kind of jihad, designed to counter a different kind of danger.”\(^\text{107}\)

What further can be understood from the passage of The Rays quoted above is; firstly the struggle Nursi pursued against disbelief was with the immaterial sword of Risale; secondly he avoided himself and advised the same for his students to get involved in any activity of politics. These two points will be elaborated ahead.

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\(^{106}\) See Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 180-82.

\(^{107}\) Turner, *Qur'an Revealed*, 569.
4.2.2 Immaterial sword of Risale-i Nur:

Nursi offers the service of non-physical jihad against materialist philosophy through immaterial sword of Risale with its chief element of iman i tahqiqi. This immaterial sword according to Nursi “has solved hundreds of the mysteries of religion, leaving no need for physical swords”\textsuperscript{108}. Vahide elucidates:

“Risale-i Nur... possesses characteristics ... to pursue such a “verbal” jihad [prescribed by prophet (pbuh): wage a jihad against polythesis... verbally\textsuperscript{109}] against the irreligion, innovation, and materialist philosophy that were being forcibly imposed in Turkey. And that these characteristics led its readers to obtain “certain, verified belief” has been testified to by many of them.”\textsuperscript{110}

Risale helped its readers to acquire verified belief. It did so through a verbal jihad against such misleading elements as innovations in religion and materialistic philosophy. One of the most striking features of Risale was to approach the question of belief from rational point of view. It broached the subject of truth of belief through logical reason supported by the use of comparison and allegory. In this way it managed to unravel the most difficult of issues. It dealt with a detailed comparative analysis between the Quranic wisdom and modern skeptical philosophies, proving that true happiness and progress of humanity could only be attained by following the Quranic principles. One of Risale’s features ‘to show the face of the Quran that looks to the modern age’ elaborates how the Quran instructs its readers to contemplate the divine signs reflected in the phenomena of nature. On this front, Risale not only proved the truth of religion in the light of modern scientific discoveries, but also castigated ‘nature’ and ‘causality’ hypothesis on which the structure of materialistic philosophy rested. Few examples of which have been studied in previous chapter.\textsuperscript{111} In Nursi’s opinion, this method of reflective thought on the one hand manifested the lights of Divine Unity; and on the other

\textsuperscript{108} Nursi, The Rays, 290.


\textsuperscript{110} Vahide, "Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad," 133.

\textsuperscript{111} See chapter three section 3.2.2 of this dissertation.
hand exposed the shallowness of naturalism and materialism. At another place Nursi writes:

“The greatest danger facing the people of Islam at this time is their hearts being corrupted and belief harmed through the misguidance that arises from science and philosophy. The sole solution for this is light; it is to show light so that their hearts can be reformed and their belief, saved. If one acts with the club of politics and prevails over them, the unbelievers descend to the degree of dissemblers. And dissemblers are worse than unbelievers. That is to say, the club cannot heal the heart at this time, for then unbelief enters the heart and is concealed, and is transformed into dissembling. And at this time, a powerless person like myself cannot employ both of them—the club and the light. For this reason I am compelled to embrace the light with all my strength, and cannot consider the club of politics whatever form it is in. Whatever physical jihad demands, we are not charged with that duty at the moment. Yes, in accordance with a person’s way, a club is necessary to form a barrier against the assaults of the unbelievers or apostates. But we only have two hands. Even if we had a hundred hands, they would be sufficient only for the light. We do not have any other hands with which to hold the club.”

Nursi believed that the evils of modern civilization were an inevitable offshoot of the ‘line of philosophy’. These very evils were responsible for the corruption of belief. It was the struggle against these evils that Nursi supported as the jihad of his time. He referred to them as the darkness which engulfed a person’s heart and soul. It was the light of jihad through pen, which he himself had undertaken, that could rid a person of this darkness and illuminate his inner self with the light of faith. Due to this Nursi elaborates at various places in Risale that what harms ‘line of philosophy’ (negative one) has formed on man’s personal and social lives. For example about impact on man’s social life Nursi writes:

“Among the principles of the line of philosophy concerning social life is that of conflict, which springs from the misuse of their inborn dispositions by a

113 Nursi, The Flashes, 144-45.
114 This will be discussed with higher details in next chapter.
number of tyrants, brutish men, and savage beasts. Indeed, they have accepted this principle at so fundamental a level and at such a general one that they have idiotically declared: “Life is a conflict.” At another place he comments: “By reason of its philosophy, present-day civilization accepts ‘force’ as the point of support in the life of society. It takes as its aim ‘benefits,’ and considers the principle of its life to be ‘conflict.’ It considers the bond between communities to be ‘racialism and negative nationalism.’ While its aim is to provide ‘amusements’ for gratifying the appetites of the soul and increasing man’s needs. However, the mark of force is aggression. And since the benefits are insufficient to meet all needs, their mark is that everyone tussles and jostles over them. The mark of conflict is contention, and the mark of racialism, aggression, since it thrives on devouring others. Thus, it is because of these principles of civilization that despite all its virtues, it has provided a sort of superficial happiness for only twenty per cent of mankind and cast eighty per cent into distress and poverty.

4.2.3 Metaphorical (ma’navi) Jihad and Nursi’s avoidance of politics:
Since primary duty of Risale was savior of belief, according to Nursi, “the most important bounty and duty at this time is firstly the saving of one's own belief, then trying to save the belief of others.” He writes: “I have sacrificed even my life in the hereafter to save the community's religious belief. I neither long for Paradise, nor fear Hell. Let not one Said but a thousand be sacrificed for the sake of the Turkish community of twenty-five million.” He continues he does not wish for paradise even if he fails in this service of belief: “I would not want Paradise even, if the Quran has no listeners on the earth; it would be a prison for me. I am happy to burn in the fires of Hell if I see this nation's belief to be safe, for while my body

115 Nursi, The Words, 564.
116 Ibid., 420, 146.
was burning, my heart would be in bliss.”\textsuperscript{118} So this was the cause due to which Nursi dedicated his life in New Said phase for writing and dissemination of Risale and training of individuals. Thus Nursi’s ‘ma’navi jihad’ was aimed at revitalizing belief. He maintained that it was more vital than any other matter concerning Islam and Muslims, so much so that even if Imam Mahdi (r.a) came during that time he would also consider revitalizing Muslim faith the focal point of his mission. Compared with this mission, the implementation of shari’ah was peripheral. This was so because all the virtues stemmed from the purification of belief. Since Risale was performing the role of non-physical sword required for ma’navi jihad, no physical struggle was needed.\textsuperscript{119} Nursi comments:

> Yes, at this time belief and religion, and social life and the Shari‘ah, and public law and Islamic politics are all in need of a renewer of great stature. But the duty of renewal with respect to saving the truths of belief is the most important, the most sacred, and the greatest. The spheres of the Shari‘ah, social life, and politics take second, third, and fourth places in relation to it. Also, most emphasis in the narrations of Hadith about the renewal of religion is on renewal in [the question of; lit., “truths of”] belief. … Furthermore, it does not appear to be possible for these three duties to be performed all together perfectly by one person or community at this time and for them not to impede one another. They can only be brought together at the end of time by the Mahdi and the collective personality of his community, which represents the luminous community of the Prophet’s Family. Endless thanks be to Almighty God that in this century He has given the duty of renewal and preservation of the truths of belief to the Risale-i Nur and to the collective personality of its students.\textsuperscript{120}

This definition was the guiding principle for Nursi in all his writings. What made Nursi almost unique among his contemporary religious scholars was the emphasis he put on reigniting the spirit of faith among Muslims rather than restoring their political power or

\textsuperscript{118} Quoted in ibid. Even Nursi said if he had been in Maccah, he would have travelled to Turkey solely to save the belief of his people. See Vahide, ”Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad,” 131.
\textsuperscript{119} See for more explanation Vahide, ”Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad,” 136.
\textsuperscript{120} Nursi, Kastamonu Lahikas as quoted by Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 239-40.
construing Shri’ah rules. In his view, it was more important to inspire in the hearts of Muslims ‘certain belief, instead of ‘imitative’ belief. Yavuz notes:

“Said Nursi, unlike Mawdudi, Qutb, or Banna, did not seek a political collective movement to control the state. He stressed the formation of an individual consciousness as a precondition for a just society. He wanted to offer a new conceptual ground to Muslims to defend their inner world against the expanding ideologies of the West.”

However, Nursi’s apolitical approach should not be taken as indicating that he believed in Muslim’s practicing their religion individually without participating in the collective life of society. Instead, he avoided politics because there was an irreconcilable gap between his moral beliefs and the principles underpinning politics at that time. He says: “Yes, politics at this time corrupts hearts and causes torment to nervous spirits. Those who want sound hearts and peaceful spirits should give up politics.” Nursi explains different reasons of his avoidance of politics at different places, which can be summarized under these main points:

**First** reason as described above was to focus all the attention on the savior of belief. Due to skeptical trends Muslims were facing the risks of losing their faith so it was more important to exert all efforts for strengthening their faith to resist these challenges. 

**Second** reason for the shift in his stance was the political bias prevalent in society. It was this bias that made a pious person praise the evil ones of his party and criticize pious individuals of other political parties just because of their political affiliation. Due to this he coined his eminent statement: ‘A’udhu billahi min ash shaytan wa-al-siyasa’ (‘I seek refuge with God from Satan and from politics’) “This statement marked the turning point in Nursi’s approach to politics and Islam.” Moreover, this biased aptitude in politics, believes Nursi,
is a major hurdle in the path of sincerity, a key element and “the greatest strength of the way of Risale” on which Nursi focused for the training of Muslim individuals:

“Sincerity, the basis of our way, prevents us [from any involvement in politics]. Because at this time of heedlessness, a person with partisan ideals exploits everything for his own way; -even his religion and his actions which look to the hereafter he makes a tool of for that worldly way. Whereas the truths of belief and sacred service of the Risale-i Nur can be the tool of nothing in the universe. They can have no aim other than God’s pleasure. But to preserve this mystery of sincerity and not exploit religion for worldly ends has become increasingly difficult at this time of partisan clashes between the various [political] currents. The best solution is to rely on Divine grace and assistance in place of the power of those currents.”

Nursi stressed “that spiritual development and political activism can very rarely be compatible. Politics generally lead to corruption, conflict, and arrogance, which contradict his moral teaching based on dignity, brotherhood, and humility”.  

**Third:** Nursi stayed away from politics for he did not want people to doubt his intentions. He insisted that his society was bewildered and in dire need of the true path which was Islam. According to him, it was not advisable for the proponents of the Quran to be involved with politics as it might undermine the trust people put in the servants of the Quran. He notes: “They may ask, ‘Does he want to attract [us] with the light and then to beat [us] with the club?’ and not follow the light.” Thus, “a true servant of the Qur’an should avoid politics in order to be trustworthy” At another place, again in letters, Nursi expresses a similar point:

talking about the kind of politics which is basically abusing, misusing and exploiting religion and religious sentiments. Colin Turner, interview by Shumaila Majeed, Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture Istanbul, April 21, 2014.


127 Nursi, *Emirdag Lahikasi*, i, 38 as quoted in ibid.

128 Quoted in Kuru and Kuru, "Apolitical Interpretation," 102-03.


130 Kuru and Kuru, "Apolitical Interpretation," 102-03.
“But if you ask why service to the Qur’an and belief prohibit me [from political life], I would say this: the truths of belief and the Qur’an are each like diamonds, if I were polluted by politics, the ordinary people who are easily deceived, would wonder about those diamonds I was holding, ‘Aren’t they for political propaganda to attract more supporters?’ They might regard the diamonds as bits of common glass. Then by being involved with politics, I would be wronging the diamonds and as though reducing their value.”

Fourth: Another major reason “why he himself and the Risale-i Nur students had to strenuously avoid involvement” in politics, Nursi asserted, is due to the fact that the current political systems were based upon such “human principles that allow individuals to be sacrificed for the good of society” and “permits minor wrongs when it comes to the good of the state, and has led to whole villages being wiped out on account of one criminal.” Nursi explained that the rights of one innocent cannot be sacrificed due to the crimes of others; it has become a common political practice that hundreds of innocent suffer and harmed due to the handful of criminals:

“One of the most basic principles of “human politics,” that is, politics and diplomacy based on principles taken from “philosophy” of some sort rather than divinely revealed religion, was “Individuals may be sacrificed for the good of the nation and society. Everything may be sacrificed for the sake of the country.” This “fundamental human law” had resulted in appalling crimes throughout history, including the two world wars this century, which had “overturned a thousand years of human progress,” and had given the license for the annihilation of ninety innocents on account of ten criminals. He explained in the light of the Quranic verse: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another (6:164, 17:15) “the verse taught the principle that no one was responsible for another’s crimes, and no innocent person could be

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131 Nursi, *The Letters*, 82.
132 Vahide, "Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad," 137.
133 Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 328.
sacrificed without his consent, even for the whole of humanity. It establishes true justice.”

Nursi makes the same argument about jihad explaining that due to the reason mentioned it was not allowed in Islam to use violence or force even if it was done in the name of religion.

These were the reasons which induced Nursi to avoid politics. According to Dr. Colin Turner it is not possible to compare Nursi with other scholars. Because the circumstances he faced were different and so was his approach. To support his opinion he referred to Nursi’s words that if Nursi had been in Maulana Rumi’s time he would be writing Masnevi and if Rumi was in Nursi’s age he would be writing Risale.

4.2.4 Jihad of word and positive action:

Nursi reiterated the significance of ma’navi jihad to his students before his death. He reminded them that the use of force within the confines of Islam was prohibited since it was not justified to afflict sufferings on the innocents for a handful of miscreants. Force was permissible only in case of external threat. He reinforced his point by citing the verse:

وَلاَ تَثْرُبُواْ وَإِرَّةَ وَزَرَّ أَخْرَىٰ

“No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another”

The nature of deterioration among Muslims was not material but moral and spiritual which necessitated a positive action: a struggle that was the same in nature. Following are the directives Nursi delivered when he last met his students:

“Our duty is positive action, not negative action. It is purely to carry out the service to belief in accordance with Divine pleasure, and not to interfere in God’s duty. We are charged to respond with thanks and patience to every difficulty within the positive service to belief, which preserves public order.

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134 Nursi, Emirdag Lahikasi, quoted in ibid., 327.
135 Vahide, “Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad,” 137.
136 There was a general discussion of Dr. Colin Turner with Turkish people gathering on 22nd April 2014, during his weeklong lectures on Muslim theologians, it was his reply to the question Do you find the approach of Nursi is similar to other scholars?
137 Qur’an 17:15
"All my life I have striven to preserve public order. This force may not be used internally, but only against outside aggression. Our duty is to assist [in the maintenance of] public order inside the country with all our strength. And the most important condition of peaceful *jihad* is not to interfere in God's business, which means, 'Our duty is to serve and the result concerns Almighty God. We are charged and obliged to do our duty. Like Jalaluddin Khwarazmshah, my duty is the service of belief; I have taken this lesson from the Qur'an for acting with sincerity: to be successful or not to be successful is Almighty God's duty.'"\(^{139}\)

Positive action in Nursi’s vision is basically to maintain ‘public order’ in every sphere of human life. Basar explains it as “to work solely for God’s pleasure is positive; to struggle hypocritically for self-interest and self-advertisement is negative…Just as belief is positive and disbelief is negative, so all instances of good and beauty are positive, while their opposites are negative. Forgiveness is positive, revenge is negative. Kindness is positive, insults are negative. To think well of things is positive, while to think unfavorably is negative.”\(^{140}\)

Nursi was a great proponent of positive action and public order. He said no true service to society could be imparted if it was marked by turbulence and anarchy. For people to imbibe the message of the Quran there had to be social stability and a sense of calm. Rampant disorder, corruption, terror and despotism (not just in government but all levels, in family life, at workplaces, among scholars, as explained in previous section) were such torments that corrode the very fabric of a society. “If social life becomes turbid, to calm and clear it need much time, and to re-found it and make it tranquil requires great endeavor and effort.” In order to prevent these problems from worsening and to restore social order, the situation had to be considered in the sequence ‘reason-logic-reasoned thinking’ and not through the


irrational lens of ‘excitement-physical force-partisanship’”.

Nursi was an adamant believer in the positive action to reinstate social order. He always shunned involvement in the matters that could lead to public disorder. He viewed public order and security as a pre-requisite to a positive social change. For this purpose he advised his students not to indulge in any activities that had the potential for social disruptions. As “conveying the message is [only] possible when public order and security is maintained” he saw the role of Risale instrumental in this regard. He insisted that “the Risale-i Nur cannot be broken; when attacked it grows stronger”. He also affirmed that Risale was never used against the nation and country and would never, under any circumstances, be used against them.

Nursi employed the term ‘positive action’ to refer to the measures necessary for social order and achievement of the ultimate aim: emergence of a healthy and balanced society through purification of personal faith. His apolitical role amply shows his stance on this issue. Contrary to many of his contemporaries, he never aspired to political power nor did he support, overtly or covertly, any movement that schemed to overthrow the government.

Nursi stated that the public peace could be ensured through the truths of belief. Once these truths dawnd on a person, he cherished peace and order. This is the reason that he called his students ‘the preservers of public peace’ because, “by instructing in the truths of belief, they place in everyone’s head a prohibiter [from wrong action], so preserving public order and

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142 A very interesting example of Nursi’s meticulousness in avoiding violence was quoted by one of his living students Mehmet Firinci. He told in an interview that it was their teacher’s advice to avoid even minor violent acts of any level in everyday life routine, i.e. not to smash boiled eggs brutally, not to change and replace fused light bulbs in a way that they would rupture, not to ignore the comfort of animals even. He narrated a story that once, one of their companions had to spread his wet clothes on a clothes line which was covered with bees. Nursi asked the person who was about to fly the bees not to disturb them and search any other place for his wet clothes. It was so because when people got habitual of taking care of public order and positive actions at minor levels, there will definitely develop the habit of adopting non violent aptitude at broader social and political matters. Mehmet Firinci, interview by Shumaila Majeed, Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture Istanbul, April 26, 2014.

143 Ayduz, "Guidance and Teblig," 201.

144 Quoted in Dilek, "Risale-I Nur's Method and Aim," 129.

145 See Turner and Horkuc, Said Nursi, 100-01.
security.” He explained in one of his letters in the mid 1940s the reasons why he ascribed so much importance to peace and order in society. He mentioned two ‘calamities’ as posing the ultimate threat to the Turkish Muslims. These were communism and the organizations connected with the foreign elements, whose aim was to spread aggressive atheism and dissension and corrupt the Muslim peoples. Both these had one thing in common - their atheistic agenda. Nursi considered them disastrous for his country. Their aim was to corrupt the Islam belief of the nation and undermine its relations with the Muslim world. He insisted a society bereft of religion could not survive. He used Risale as the Quranic barrier against the communist attack from the North and its supporters from within the country.146

Nursi drew an analogy between the moral degeneration in the society at that time and the corruption caused by Gog Magog (Yajooj Majooj) by destroying the Barrier of Dhul Qarnayn. He considered the prevailing situation worse than caused by Gog Magog. In a letter marked ‘extremely important’ he advised his students to stay firm in taqwa in their fight against moral deterioration. He encouraged his students to continue with their struggle and stay optimist. He advised them to work with the hope that few actions of theirs in such unfavorable conditions would be rewarded like the ones of the companions of holy Prophet ﷺ.147 Though the irreligious and destructive forces were active in countries like Iran, Egypt and the Maghrib (west), they were most active in Turkey. Nonetheless, according to Nursi, they were less successful in his country thanks to the six hundred thousand copies of Risale and its five thousand students “who had supported the authorities in holding out against those attempts” 148 Nursi once said that “at this time taking one page of Risale from one place to the other (so that people could read and benefit from it) is equivalent to the effort of ten believers fighting physically in the way of Allah”.149

147 Nursi, Kastamonu Lahikasi quoted in ibid., 139.
149 Mehmet Firinci shared this advice of Nursi to his students on the occasion when he last met them in Istanbul. Mehmet Firinci, interview by Shumaila Majeed, Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture Istanbul, April 26, 2014.
4.2.5 New Said on Nationalism and Muslim unity:

On Nationalism New Said’s ideas are continuations of Old Said’s.\(^{150}\) He differentiates between the two strands of nationalism. One of them is negative while the other one is positive. Negative nationalism is exclusive in its nature. It fuels negative competition among nations and breeds feelings of hate. It believes in harming others for self-promotion and supremacy. On the contrary, positive nationalism fosters a sense of cooperation among people. It does not look down upon other nations nor does it thrive on the feelings of false pride. This aspect of nationalism is acceptable as long as it does not encroach on the rights of other nations and avoids racism - the curse of the future of humanity. In Nursi’s view positive nationalism, that provides solidarity, is connected to “mutual acquaintance and assistance not to antipathy or hostility”\(^ {151} \) to ethnicities. He explains in the light of the verse:

\[
\text{بَلْ إِنَّكُمْ مِنَ الْخَلَاقِينَ}
\]

*O mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other.*\(^ {152} \)

All humans have been described here as the descendants of a single male and female, and the cause of their dividing into nations and tribes is only to help them to understand and recognize each other. This is not for any discrimination on the bases of race or color. Nursi was against the idea that nationalism was a superior identity. He always considered the Islamic identity superior to nationalism. If promoted under the umbrella of Islamic identity, nationalism could play a positive role in society:

“...In the idea of nationalism is a thrill of the soul, a heedless pleasure, an inauspicious power. For this reason those occupied with social life at this time cannot be told to give up it up. However, nationalism is of two kinds. One is negative, inauspicious, and harmful; it is nourished by devouring others, persists through hostility to others, and is aware of what it is doing. ... Positive nationalism arises from an inner need of social life and is the cause

\(^{150}\) Nursi, *The Letters*, 372.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 373.

\(^{152}\) Quran 49:13.
of mutual assistance and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength; it is a means for further strengthening Islamic brotherhood. This idea of positive nationalism must serve Islam, it must be its citadel and armour; it should not take its place.\textsuperscript{153}

A worth mentioning point, however, is that the term Muslim unity which Nursi frequently used and focused on in Old Said period, was replaced with the terms and concepts of \textit{ukhuwwat} (brotherhood/sisterhood) and \textit{ikhlas} (sincerity) in New Said phase. In other words New Said concentrated more on the concepts of \textit{ukhuwwat} and \textit{ikhlas} among Muslims as compared to the ideology of \textit{ittehad i Islami} or Muslim unity. He focused his attention on inculcating \textit{ukhuwwat} and \textit{ikhlas} in the heart of Muslim individuals. These concepts hold too much significance in Nursi’s system of training. \textit{Ukhuwwat} in Nursi’s vision is something which Dr. Farhad describes as “rule of self forgetfulness for the sake of brothers” which means:

“[A Muslim individual] should experience self forgetfulness for the sake of his community. An individual should let go of his personal emotions and intellectually indulge [cooperate] himself in the virtues and good manners of his brothers. The essence of such behavior is loyalty. When individuals reach this kind of behaviour by applying this rule, the Muslim Ummah will become solid and will occupy a high rank and good status. The Muslim ummah then will regain her lost glory after being deprived from it because of not applying the book of God and the tradition of the prophet and because of many negative characteristics that has spread such as selfishness, miserliness and stinginess. The way to change the recent state of ignominy is to apply this rule on an individual level.”  

This aspect of Nursi’s training is clearly visible in the behavior and practices of Nur students. It will be further elaborated in the next section.

4.2.6 Nursi’s notion of inter-religious collaboration against skepticism:

Nursi is considered one of the first few scholars of the 20th century who propagated the cause of Muslim-Christian unity. He advocated alliance with non-Muslims especially with ahl ul kitab (Christians) to actualize a just society. This concept is also related to social aspect of teaching how to deal with other religious people while living in a pluralist society. He considered interfaith dialogue crucial for the progress of Muslims as well as facing the current challenges of his era. He persuaded the followers of both religions that it was imperative to end the hostility among the religious people. He supported a joint struggle by monotheists to combat the ruinous effects of materialism which posed a threat not just to the Muslims but all upholders of the monotheistic tradition. He insisted that even if there were differences among different religions, they should be discussed amiably “with rational


arguments” through moral jihad (jihad-i-ma’navi) without resorting to physical aggression.\textsuperscript{156} Nursi believed that his era was characterized by civilization and knowledge. Violence had no place in it. Islam was to be spread through persuasion not force. Non-Muslims, if they believed in God, were to be seen as natural allies of the Muslims for a peaceful and just world and to counter unbelief.\textsuperscript{157} Therefore, in his view it was more important to undertake a combined effort against the gradual growth of materialistic atheism than focusing on the differences between the religions. To encourage a similar spirit in the two communities to counter the anti-religion forces, he invoked the example of Muslim-Christian cooperation during the time of holy prophet ﷺ:

“It is even recorded in authentic traditions of the Prophet that at the end of time the truly pious among Christians will unite with the People of the Qur’an and fight their common enemy, irreligion. And at this time, too, the people of religion and truth need to unite sincerely not only with their own brothers and fellow believers, but also with truly pious spiritual ones among the Christians, temporarily refraining from the discussion and debate of points of difference in order to combat their joint enemy — aggressive atheism.”\textsuperscript{158}

Nursi was mindful of the fact that modern European civilization had forsaken the divine guidance and solely relied on the rational standards of the Enlightenment. It was a system that stressed the needs of individuals at the expense of the collective well being. Religion was relegated to the private life of a person and denied any role in the socio-political affairs of the state.\textsuperscript{159} Nursi supported collaboration with the followers of other religions to combat their common enemy materialism which he saw as an enemy to the whole of humanity. He propounds “The joint cause, inclusive of all mankind, were the misguided ideas arising from Materialism.”\textsuperscript{160} He materialized his views regarding interfaith harmony by contacting Catholic Church in Rome in 1950 and sent a collection of Risale, to which Pope Pius XII

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{156}{Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 548.}
\footnote{157}{Sayilgan, "Constructing an Islamic Ethics of Non-Violence: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi", 94.}
\footnote{158}{Nursi, \textit{Flashes}, 204.}
\footnote{159}{Ozervarli, "The Reconstruction," 549; Michel, "Muslim Christian Dialogue," 327–28.}
\footnote{160}{Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 748.}
\end{footnotes}
replied with a letter of thanks. He also visited the Ecumenical Patriarch of Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul in 1953 to urge mutual cooperation against atheism.  

Concluding remarks: The direct result of the intellectual struggle against unbelief which Nursi initiated in New Said phase emerged in the form of Risale-i Nur. Through Risale, Nursi actually offered the service of metaphorical jihad (jihad with word/pen) which was the most required form of jihad in those circumstances. To offer this service truly, Nursi kept himself and his students at distance from politics. Also, he strictly abided by the rule of positive action to maintain public order in any way and stressed the same to his students not to get involved in any such activity which could cause unrest in society and which could result as hurdle in the service of belief. “This positive struggle though would be slow but it would show its influence in the long run.”

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4.3 Nursi on socio-political reconstruction in Third Said phase

From 1950 onward till his death in 1960, the life span of Nursi is called Third Said phase\textsuperscript{163} which is marked by once again his involvement to some extent in social and political spheres. It was a period of political change in Turkey. Republican People’s Party had been voted out in May 1950 general elections and Democrats were voted into power. Nursi was relatively less critical of the Democrats as he considered them ‘lesser of two evils’\textsuperscript{164}. His role in politics was mainly limited to guiding and supporting the Democrats as he saw them as a better option for his country than the outgoing government. The Democrats, under Adnan Menderes, were not hostile to Islam. They aimed at undoing the anti-Islamic policies of their predecessors. This was a positive sign for Nursi and his disciples who could now carry on with their work more freely. The change in Nursi’s strategy in this period was again “closely related to the tendencies of society in general”\textsuperscript{165}. Third Said retained many ideas of the ‘Old Said’ as well. His aim was to lay such foundations on which his successors might carry forward his work. The salient features of the efforts Nursi rendered for socio-political reconstruction during the Third Said phase will be discussed here.

4.3.1 Nursi’s advice and support for new Government:

Democrats were anti-communism. They also took a few pro-Islam measures in a bid to make up for the damage done to the religion during the twenty-five year rule of RPP. Thus, Nursi supported Democrats though he was not practically involved in politics. His role was only that of a guide and supporter. The reason for his support of the Democrat was twofold. Firstly, he wanted to make sure that RPP would not come into power again because the party provided a camouflage for the communists to continue their anti-Islam efforts; secondly, Democrats were supportive of Risale students in their endeavors to halt the moral degeneration.\textsuperscript{166} Bediuzzaman wrote thus to the president Celal Bayar in 1950:

“In the face of those who have oppressed us making politics the tool of

\textsuperscript{163} See Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 305; Turner, \textit{Qur’an Revealed}, 551.

\textsuperscript{164} Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 306.


\textsuperscript{166} See Vahide, “Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihad,” 141; also see Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 323-24.
irreligion in fanatical manner, we work for the happiness of this country and nation by making politics the tool and friend of religion.”

The guidance Nursi offered to the new government was through the channels of “letters, his students, and some personal relations with Democrat deputies.” He pointed out to them where the dangers were and how the policies compatible with the moral principles of Islam could enable them to overcome them. He urged them to take steps in the right direction, extended his moral support to them, advised his students to support the Democrats and publically voted for them in the 1957 elections. Nursi’s guidance to Menderes and Democrats was essentially about making them aware of the harmful effects of materialist ideas on their society. He also explained how Quranic teachings could encounter such ideologies that were responsible for the unraveling of their moral ethos. He emphasized the point that the clash was between belief and unbelief and there was no third option. The Western ideals imposed in Turkish society during the RPP regime were fundamentally destructive in nature. They created an environment of division and exploitation. Since they were based on racism and divisive nationalism, they were inherently incapable of creating a just society. It was only Islamic principles which could prove antithetical to such evils. Islam guaranteed brotherhood, a sense of Islamic ‘nationhood’, public order and peace, equality and true justice.

Nursi also highlighted the misleading notion that “physical forces or international treaties” could not stop such negative forces of irreligion and their destruction from spreading. It was his conviction that “the truths of belief and the Qur’an, and the religious feeling of the heart” were the only solution. For this reason, he praised the government’s initiative to resume the compulsory religious education in schools. In order to motivate the Democrats to keep pursuing their policies which were soft on religion he likened them to ‘Ahrarlar’, translated as liberals, who worked in former period for the freedom movement compatible with the injunctions of Shari’ah.

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Chapter-4: Nursi and Socio-Political Reconstruction of Society

4.3.2 Expansion of Risale-i Nur publications and movement:
Nursi was aware of the effectiveness of Risale in furthering his cause. He tried to seek the official support for its publication. To this end, he wrote to the government many times but all such attempts failed. It could only materialize in 1956, “when Risale was finally cleared by Afyon Court that Bediuzzaman permitted his students to have it printed in the Latin alphabet on modern presses”. During the 1950s many of Nursi’s students were living in Ankara. They would meet Deputies in the National Assembly to help spread the message of Risale. Nursi described his students in Ankara as working ‘on the front’ because it became the centre of publication after 1956. Moreover, first printed copy of Risale was bound in green colour. Nursi’s students chose this colour for binding because green was the colour of Islam. However, Nursi had it re-bound in red color - for it was the colour that represented jihad. To this day, Risale is bound in red color.

In the 1950s Nursi also republished some of the major works he wrote during the Old Said phase. Two of them were Munazarat and Iki Mekteb-i Musibetin Sehadetnamesi veya Divan-i Harb-i Orfi which was an anthology of discussions on different topics. He also translated his famous Damascus Sermon named Hutbe-i Samiye. It was delivered originally in Arabic. Nursi translated it into Turkish and made some additions to it. The publication of Risale at such unprecedentedly large scale (due to its printing in new script) helped further Nursi’s cause a great deal. It reached a large number of readers, which was up till now impossible. This resulted in its message being more widespread than ever before. Consequently, Risale study centers were opened up across the country.¹⁷³

4.3.3 Nursi’s support for Muslim unity:
Another front of his socio-political endeavors that Nursi struggled on during the Third Said phase was Muslim unity, which he also had worked for in his youth days in Old Said phase. After the establishment of the Republic, the ties of Turkey had been broken with the Islamic world. Nursi urged Menderes to mend these ties and forge links with the Islamic world again. The other important step in this direction was his decision to translate Risale in Arabic and ensure its distribution throughout the Islamic world.

Nursi wrote letters to the Democrat regime to convince them to strengthen their relations

¹⁷³ See ibid., 142-43; Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 322-23.
with the Muslim countries, which had been severed due to the policies of the preceding
government. He warned them of the elements that were scheming against Turkey by
spreading irreligion to segregate it from the other Muslim countries. He advised them to take
the Quran as the guiding force. This would endear them to Muslims and they would have 400
millions brothers in the form Ummah all over the world.\footnote{\textit{Emirdag Lahikasi}, ii, 56, 178, in Vahide, "Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad," 143.}
Risale students worked relentlessly for the unity of the Muslims. Nursi termed them as the
members and successors of the Ittihad-i Muhammedi (the Society for Muslim Unity), an
organization which had been active in 1909.\footnote{\textit{Emirdag Lahikasi}, ii, 24-5, 34 in ibid.}
The 1940s-50s was a time when Asian and African Muslim countries were getting independence from the colonial rule. They were establishing their independent states. Nursi saw in this development a ray of hope for the
Muslim unity which he had hoped for at the dawn of the 20th century also.\footnote{\textit{Emirdag Lahikasi}, ii, 100) ibid., 144.} Another positive sign for him was the growing acceptance of Islam even within the secular West. He wanted the Muslim world to function as a confederation based on the common belief. He wrote thus in the early 1950s:

“\textit{We cordially congratulate you on the occasion of this holy festival (\textit{id}). God willing, you will live to see a great festival of the Islamic world. There are numerous signs that the Qur’an, the source of the laws of the “United Islamic States,” will completely prevail over the future, bringing a true festival for mankind.}”\footnote{\textit{Emirdag Lahikasi}, ii,76 ibid; for more details on Nursi’s views on Muslim unity consult Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 325; Davutoglu, "Bediuzzaman and Politics," 306.}

In the New Said phase Nursi had stressed more on brotherhood and sincerity than Muslim
unity which he continued to do in the Third Said phase also. It was will be explained in detail a later section.

\textbf{4.3.4 Third Said stance towards Europe:}

Bediuzzaman was of the view that modern west should be shown the sublime nature of Islam. Modern age was the age of scholarly persuasion. If the West was to be brought to
Islam, it was only possible through wise persuasion. This was a means of converting the non-believers to Islam in large numbers. Nursi expressed this point in his Old Said phase as well:

“If we were to display through our actions the perfections of the morality of Islam and the truths of belief, without doubt the followers of other religions would enter Islam in whole communities; some entire regions and states, even, would take refuge in Islam.”

In view of the changing socio-political dynamics, in particular in the wake of the Second World War, Nursi supported political alliance with the Western Europe. This shift in Nursi’s stance was primarily for two reasons. Firstly, Nursi saw communism as a major threat to humanity and considered joint efforts between the West and the Muslim world necessary to combat this threat. Secondly, there had been a paradigm shift in the attitude of the west towards the Muslim World. “European powers which had formerly opposed Islamic Unity, no longer opposed it, indeed they were now in need of it.” However, changed world scenario with the spread of communism meant that a united Muslim world suited them. This was the reason that Nursi supported Baghdad Pact. His letters to the Prime Minister and the President on the formation of CENTO showed he wanted an alliance to be established not only between different Muslim states but also between the Muslim world and the West.

4.3.5 Training of young students:

In his last ten years Nursi paid particular attention to the training of young students to prepare them, carrying on the service of belief against irreligion, and “to lead the Nur movement in later years.” Nursi was already writing advising letters to his students since his New Said time to guide them for the “Risale-i Nur’s primary function of renewing and strengthening

178 Nursi, Damascus Sermon, 29.
179 The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), originally known as the Baghdad Pact or the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) was formed in 1955 by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. It was dissolved in 1979.
180 Emirdag Lahikasi, i, 237, 244-5, 262-3 Emirdag Lahikasi, ii, 24, 195-6 quoted in Vahide, "Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad," 144.
181 Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 309.
belief\textsuperscript{182} and to direct them about their responsibilities. However, in Third Said phase Nursi further intensified these efforts.

In the letters Nursi wrote for the counseling to his students, three points are very prominent. Firstly he advised them strongly to keep themselves away from any type of participation in political matters; the reasons have been discussed in previous section. Secondly, he warned them “above all to be cautious and circumspect in the face of the plots and intrigues hatched against them by their many enemies.” And thirdly, to “guiding them toward developing complete sincerity (ikhlas) in their service and selflessness before their fellow Risale students, so that the ‘collective personality’ necessary to fulfill the Risale-i Nur’s unique functions could emerge.”\textsuperscript{183} One of the marked features of Risale and its students lay in the stress on sincerity and selflessness. Nursi guided his students to observe these two qualities so the collective personality could materialize which was necessary to accomplish the functions of Risale. Nursi himself epitomized selflessness and sincerity and always sacrificed ‘I’ for collective personality. It was Nursi’s firm belief that even if an individual was strong in faith he could not alone counter the collective personality of irreligion nor could he successfully uproot the doubts sowed by unbelief and misguidance. A collective personality was essential to battle with the collective personality of irreligion.\textsuperscript{184} In his words:

“The present time is the time of the group, or social collectivity, not of the individual. However great a genius an individual is, even a hundredfold genius, if he is not the representative of a group and if he does not represent the collective personality of a group, he will be defeated in the face of the collective personality of an opposing group.”\textsuperscript{185}

Nursi’s suggestion for his students to develop ‘collective personality’ is to give up their ego first and to “transform the ‘I’ into ‘We’ to “work on account of the collective personality of the Risale-i Nur.”\textsuperscript{186} He further elaborates:

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 420.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Dilek, “Risale-I Nur's Method and Aim,” 127.
\textsuperscript{185} Nursi, \textit{The Letters}, 513.
\textsuperscript{186} Nursi, \textit{Kastamonu Lahikasi}, 135 quoted in Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 244.
“The present is not the time for egotism and the personality for those who follow the path of reality [ahl-i haqiqat]; it is the time of the community [jama’at]. A collective personality emerging from the community rules, and may survive. To have a large pool, the ice blocks of the ego and personality have to be cast into the pool and dissolved.”¹⁸⁷ “The people of truth have to give up the ego if they are to serve the truth. Even if a person is justified in making use of the ego, since he will resemble the others and they too will suppose he is self-seeking like them, it is an injustice to the service of the truth. In any event, the service of the Qur’an around which we are gathered does not accept the ‘I’, it requires the ‘we.’”¹⁸⁸ “While in the past, the age of individuality, persons of great stature like ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani, Imam Ghazali, and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi had been sent to guide the Muslim community in accordance with divine wisdom, the unprecedented difficulties and conditions of modern times demanded that a collective personality undertake such duties.”¹⁸⁹

Nursi viewed sincerity as a quality that would prove useful in the attainment of any purpose whether it was positive or negative. In Nursi’s words, “even those who do wrong gain strength from their sincerity in wrong doing.”¹⁹⁰ This sincerity and brotherhood of Nursi is called “tefani” which he explains in following words:

“[T]efani is, “annihilation in one another.” That is to say, to forget the feelings of one’s own carnal soul, and live in one’s mind with one’s brothers’ virtues and feelings. That is why, in any event, the basis of Nur community’s way is brotherhood based upon the closest friendship… This friendship necessitates being the closest friend, the most sacrificing companion, the most appreciative comrade, the noblest brother. The essence of such friendship is true sincerity.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Kastamonu Lahikasi, 102 in ibid.
¹⁸⁸ Nursi, The Letters, 497.
¹⁸⁹ Kastamonu Lahikasi, 6-7 quoted in Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 244.
¹⁹⁰Nursi, The Flashes, 216.
¹⁹¹ Ibid., 217.
Thanks to the teaching of this *ikhlas* and *ukhuwwat* (the rule of self forgetfulness for the sake of one’s brother) which formed the collective personality of Risale-i Nur students. It is basically this strength of Nur community which categorizes it as renewer and regenerator. As Vahide maintains:

“[In Nursi’s vision it was] a sort of Re-newer or Regenerator of Religion [mujaddid]… For just as a Re-newer was sent each century who would serve religion and belief in the required way, so in the present age of the assaults of secret organizations and the collective personality of misguidance, the Re-newer of Religion has to be in the form of a collective personality. Just such a collective personality was that of the Risale-i Nur, formed through the self-sacrificing sincerity of Nursi and its students. Indeed, Nursi described himself as a seed out of which, in His mercy, Almighty God had created the valuable, fruit-bearing tree of the Risale-i Nur.”

Nursi’s address to generations of future seems suitable to quote here, to express how much Nursi was optimistic about the progress and prevalence of Islam in future, and how high expectations he had from future generations of Muslims:

“I am turning this way; I shall speak to the people of the future: O you Saids, Hamzas, Omers, Osmans, Tahirs, Yusufs, Ahmeds and the rest of you who are hidden behind the high age of three centuries hence, and listening silently to my words,…I was hasty, I came in winter, but you will come in a paradise-like spring. The seeds of light sown now will open as flowers in your ground.

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192 Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 335.
And we await this from you as the recompense for our service... O you miserable two-footed mobile mausoleums who have left Islam, which is like the spirit of the two lives! Do not stop at the door of the generation that is coming. The grave awaits you. Retreat into it and let the new generation come forth, which will wave the reality of Islam over the universe in earnest”\textsuperscript{194}

Conclusion:
The analysis of Nursi’s efforts for social and political reconstruction in all three phases of his life leads one to the conclusion that Nursi was a reformer who took into account the requirements of his time and age. He did not ignore the dynamics of his society in order to reform it. His efforts were all-pervasive that did not exclude any segment of society. He made use of every possible source and channel to accomplish his mission. It is imperative for a reformer to possess these qualities. In the Old Said period Nursi adopted top-to-bottom approach. He used political channels and supported constitutionalism. He explained to all levels of society the merits of constitutionalism and warned against the demerits of despotism. Furthermore, he guided people on such important matters as the negatives of nationalism and importance of unity. He not only enhanced public awareness concerning the socio-political reasons behind their decline; but also suggested a way forward for the solution of such problems. After 1925, anti-Islamic policies were implemented at the state level. It changed the political and social landscape of the country. Nursi also reversed his approach. Now he pursued a bottom to top policy which aimed at the training of an individual and salvaging his faith (this will be discuss with details in the next chapter). Risale played an instrumental role in reinvigorating an individual’s faith. Nursi termed it as jihad i ma’navi. A praiseworthy aspect of Nursi’s jihad i ma’navi was his concern for ‘positive action’ and ‘public order’. As hostile as the regime was towards Islam, Nursi never incited people to violence or revolt. He remained steadfast in his commitment to peace and order even when the severe hardships were inflicted on him. He avoided from negative action so that conditions could not go to any unrest and make any hindrance to the service of belief. In the third phase, when the new government came into power which had a soft corner for Islam, Nursi adjusted his policies regarding certain matters. He guided the government and extended his complete support to it.

\textsuperscript{194} Nursi, Munazarat in Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 91-92.
so that the previous government might not come into power again. He accelerated his efforts for unity and worked for an expanded circulation of Risale at national and international level. He shaped a collective personality in the form of his sincere students on the basis of true sincerity to combat the collective personality of irreligion.

A point significant to mention here is that Nursi’s different phases of life do not indicate any change in his thoughts; he rather changed his strategy for the reconstruction of society. His stance was similar to a physician. If a physician was to treat a particular disease with a certain medicine, he would prescribe the same medicine only as long as it was effective. Once the medicine is not effective any more, for one reason or the other, the physician will change the medicine. Changing the medicine doesn’t not suggest that the physician’s diagnosis was wrong or he has changed his mind. This analogy explains the reasons that underpinned the differences in Nursi’s approach in different phases of his life. Old Said adopted the strategy which was suitable to the conditions in which he lived. Once the situation changed with the coming into being of Turkish Republic, it rendered the first strategy impracticable. Since the disease had worsened, a new strategy was required. Hence, he adopted the strategy which was suitable in that situation and concentrated on writing and disseminating Risale. Then the third phase of his life, which is termed as Third Said, saw further changes in the social and political spheres. Nursi again changed his strategy a little to correspond to the new circumstances. However, the common feature of all the three phases of Nursi’s life is his focus on all levels and sections of society. In the words of Vahide:

“The Risale I Nur is “populist”. That is to say, just as the Old Said had striven to make his message heard by ordinary people [also] and to involve them in the great movements of the time, so the New Said in his new struggle sought to address the ordinary people so to renew their belief and raise their religious

\[195\] Dr. Faris Kaya explains it in these words: The change in Nursi’s methodology and strategy in different phases of his life is like metamorphosis. One cannot consider it the change in his views or thoughts. As in metamorphosis it brings change though in biological forms but the essence remained same. The same is the case with Nursi’s strategy. The essence of his ambition remained the same in all his phases of life which was ‘ila e kalimatullah’. Dr. Faris Kaya, interview by Shumaila Majeed, Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture Istanbul, January 20, 2014.
consciousness while combating efforts to deprive them of their own religion and culture and turn them into pale imitations of Westerners.”

196 Ibid., 193-94.
CHAPTER : 5

REVITALIZATION OF BELIEF AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUALS THROUGH RISALE-I-NUR

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Chapter-5: Revitalization of Belief and Spiritual

Introduction

Revitalization and savior of belief of individuals is the central theme and primary function of Risale-i Nur which Nursi explicitly states at various places in the whole collection. For instance: “The Risale-i Nur’s function is to strengthen and save belief. We are charged with serving [the cause of] belief…”¹ and, “[the aim of the Risale is to] repair vast damage [by] striving to cure with the medicines of the Qur’an and belief ... the collective heart and generally-held ideas ... and general conscience...”² At another place “with the assaults of science and philosophy, and the contagion[s] of materialism and naturalism spreading through humanity, [its function] is first and foremost to save belief in such a way as to silence philosophy and materialistic ideas.”³ Due to this reason the greater part of the Risale addresses the subjects of belief, and is planned to offer one a direct way of attaining verified and conscious belief in God by means of reflective thought.⁴ That is to say the objective of Risale “is to revitalize the faith of the mass of believers by offering certain proofs of the fundamentals of belief by means of a method derived from the Qur’an, relevantly to the present situation, in a way that addresses [all] the intellect, the heart, and the conscience.”⁵

To achieve this objective Nursi turned his attention to moral and spiritual training (tarbiyah) and “shifted his emphasis to the inner dimension of individual spirituality and the development of a new, reflective Islamic consciousness.”⁶ Nursi trains and educates one for his spiritual growth to remind him of the chief purpose of being sent to this world mentioned in the verse of the Quran:

\[ \text{وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجَنََّاتَ وَالْأُرْضَ إِلَّا لِيَتَبَارَىُونَ} \]

“*I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me*”.⁷

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² Ibid., 200.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., 3-4.
⁷ Quran 51:56
In Nursi’s vision basic purpose behind man’s creation is worship of God but worship does not only mean few ritual duties as formal and spiritless ceremony. Rather the meaning of verse includes recognition of the One Who is worshipped along with belief in Him, this is described as the highest aim of creation. In Risale, Nursi aims to achieve this outcome through the method of reflective thought, which is the chief principle of Risale.

Nursi’s method of reflective thought is comprised of two principles. One is to reach the reality of the Creator by analytical and logical observation of outer world. He named this universe metaphorically as ‘created Quran’ seeing that as the Quran is written book, likewise the universe is the created book. In which everywhere there are signs (ayaat) of existence and unity of the Creator. Considering them with logical reasoning, one can easily apprehend the reality of God. ‘The Supreme Sign’ studied in chapter three is the best example of description of reflective thought on the outer world.

Second principle in Nursian scheme to attain the awareness of God is through reflective thought on man’s inner world or self. According to Nursi man is like a “comprehensive index of this universe, his heart resembles a map of thousands of worlds”.

One can gain conscious awareness of the Creator with the detailed insight into this inner human world. This aspect is related to the spiritual side of Nursi’s thoughts. Turner mentions: “In the Qur’anic – and, by extension, the Nursian – schema, spirituality involves man’s quest to uncover the reflection of the divine within himself.”

This is the reason that Nursi’s thoughts have resemblance with the path of Sufism. Because in Sufism too, it is believed that man’s purpose is to attain gnosis (marifah) of God through

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human inner self and spirit. Nursi also believes in this function of human spirit, what he calls human inner world, that it has the potential to lead towards God and to attain knowledge of the Creator, this provides confirmed belief to a believer in Nursian theology. So this is one similarity, secondly there are also a few terms used in Risale which are similar to the expressions employed in Sufism. For instance, “the unseen and visible worlds (‘alam al-ghayb and ‘alam al-shahada), the principle of continuous creation (khalq jadid), the greatest Name of God (al-ism al-a’zam), the creation of the world as mirror to Divine Beauty and Perfection, Man as mirror to the Divine Names and so on.”

But there is a clear difference in the spirituality of Nursi and that of Sufism. For instance Nursi’s spirituality (as described in second chapter) has a crucial role of human intellect and it works with the collaboration of heart/spirit and mind. Whereas Sufism solely depends upon heart or spirit having least role of intellect in it. Secondly, a follower of Sufism neglects the universe in his ultimate stage, whereas Nursi’s spirituality in Risale stressed the importance of minutely observing the entities present in the universe in order to ascend to the understanding of The Creator.

Thirdly, in Sufism the role of sheikh (sufi leader or teacher) is very important in leading disciples to this path and there is no concept of following the sufi path without teacher. On the contrary the system Nursi developed for the spiritual training of individuals does not have any mandatory role of teacher. He believed that treatises of Risale are enough to read and there is no need for teacher or master in order to get guidance and inspirations from Risale. Nursi asserts that reading Risale will benefit a reader ten times more than meeting him in real.

15 See chapter three of this dissertation, 3.2.3.
The second principle Nursi prescribed for the revitalization of faith to reach the reality through reflection on man’s inner self will be studied in the beginning of this chapter. Then the influence of this method on the belief of Muslim individual will also be discussed. As “the result of this reflection is not merely theoretical knowledge which admits God’s existence and unity; rather [it develops a] ‘sense of presence’ which permeates every aspect of man’s life.”\(^{18}\) This was the basic objective of Nursi to raise such type of ‘affirmative belief (tahqiqi iman)’ in the heart of every individual.\(^{19}\)


Therefore, in the title of this chapter ‘spiritual development’ refers to such human training which encompasses improvement and enhancement of one’s faith and knowledge of God as well as inculcating the awareness of God’s presence in one’s heart. Spiritual training, “then, for Nursi involves a fundamental recognition of a link between the Creator and the heart of a person, which then transforms the way in which the person sees [his self and] the world. Nursi believes that this account of spirituality is authentically Islamic”\(^\text{20}\) which in turn forms a deep impact on believer’s conduct in his days and nights, in personal and collective lives. By raising this reflective Islamic consciousness, Nursi aims to reconnect an individual with his Creator in his everyday life. This training also enables one to save his faith in the face of materialist assaults and helps one to keep his faith safe. This method of training, furthermore, enables a believer to experience benefits of belief in different life stages, whatever circumstances and conditions of life he faces. Whether in trials or misfortunes, every problem he is afflicted with becomes the cause to increase his faith.\(^\text{21}\)

Keeping this aspect of Nursi’s thoughts in view this chapter aims to examine his efforts for the revitalization of belief in the light of these contents:

- Nursi’s notion of reaching the reality of the Creator through reflection on man’s inner world
- Raising the faith of individuals by training them for different life stages, conditions and behaviors.


5.1 Nursi’s notion of reaching reality of the Creator through reflection on man’s inner world

This section aims to address the following questions: What is the concept of Human I, How it leads towards knowledge of God and what role it plays in revitalizing an individual’s belief? How this method enables one to protect his belief from the assaults of materialist philosophy? What are the benefits of such method?

5.1.1 Nursi’s concept of Human I:

According to Nursi man is decked with number of hidden senses and faculties other than intellect, which he named at different places as conscience, soul (nafs), spirit (ruh), heart (qalb) etc. all of which operate in human body under the aegis of heart. Among these there is a faculty of Human I, ana (ego) which can be translated as human self. If man explores the properties of this human faculty analytically, he can find numerous indications for the existence of his Creator and can reflect number of Divine attributes in it. Nursi writes:

“The All-Wise Maker gave to man as a Trust an ‘I’ which comprises indications and samples that show and cause to recognize the truths of the attributes and functions of His dominicality, so that the ‘I’ might be a unit of measurement and the attributes of dominicality and functions of Divinity might be known. However, it is not necessary for a unit of measurement to have actual existence; like hypothetical lines in geometry, a unit of measurement may be formed by hypothesis and supposition. It is not necessary for its actual existence to be established by concrete knowledge and proofs.

“I’ is the key to the Divine Names, which are hidden treasures, so is it the key to the locked talisman of creation; it is a problem-solving riddle, a wondrous talisman. When its nature is known, both the ‘I’ itself, that strange

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riddle, that amazing talisman, is disclosed, and it discloses the talisman of the universe and the treasures of the Necessary World. . . .

The key to the world is in the hand of man and is attached to his self. For while being apparently open, the doors of the universe are in fact closed. God Almighty has given to man by way of a Trust, such a key, called the ‘I’, that it opens all the doors of the world; He has given him an enigmatic ‘I’ with which he may discover the hidden treasures of the Creator of the universe. But the ‘I’ is also an extremely complicated riddle and a talisman that is difficult to solve. When its true nature and the purpose of its creation are known, as it is itself solved, so will be the universe.”

Human ‘I’ is such a treasure according to Nursi which has been bestowed to man by Almighty God as a part of ‘trust’ mentioned in the verse:

이에ًا عَرَضْنا الْأُمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالجِبَالِ فَأَبَانُ أَن يَحْمِلْنَاهَا وَأَشْفَعْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلْنَاهَا

الْإِنسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ طَلُومًا حَجَوُّا

“We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it - he was indeed unjust and foolish.”

Trust is something that a person should use not out of his own whims but according to the wishes of the real owner, however he possesses the freedom to go against the will of the owner. Nursi sees “the Creator- creation relationship” as the one in which, by accepting the trust given to him by his Creator, man has assumed the role of vicegerent and representative of God on earth. As delivered in the Quran:

يَوْمَ أُخْرِجْتُ الْأَرْضَ حَيْثَ وَعَلَمَ أَمْمَ الْأَسْمَاءِ كُلُّهَا

“I will create a vicegerent on earth.” ... “And He taught Adam the names of all things”

Nursi interprets the names taught to Adam were the ‘beautiful names’ (asma-al-hasana) of God Himself. The wisdom behind teaching these names was to enable Adam to

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23 Nursi, The Words, 558.
24 Quran 33:72.
26 Quran 2:30-31.
recognize the attributes of Divine perfection and to give him the ability to use these attributes wittingly. Moreover “it [was] on account of man’s potential to act as God’s representative that the angels were asked to acknowledge man’s creational status by ‘bowing down’ to him.”

This also means “if man uses his knowledge of the names wisely and bows down to God of his own volition, he rises above the angels and fulfils his destiny as the jewel in the crown of creation.” On the contrary, if he fails to act according to the status God bestowed upon him, man would sink to a position that according to the Quran is ‘lowest of the low’ (asfala safilin)

Thus, whoever accepts this ‘trust’ may acquire the ability to know and experience God through his attributes of perfection. But in order to make it happen one has to use this trust according to the wishes of the Creator. It also means that success would stem from the just use of the ‘trust’ and unjust use would lead to failure. Being representative of God implies that one practically assumes the attributes of God in order to carry out His will in this world.

Nursi further explains human ‘I’ as mirror like, a measuring scale and a tool of discovery, whose sole purpose and function is to discover God and His attributes, through the understanding of one’s own attributes. How this understanding leads towards the understanding of God’s attributes, he contends:

“For example, with its imagined dominicality over what it owns, the ‘I’ may understand the dominicality of its Creator over contingent creation. And with its apparent ownership, it may understand the true ownership of its Creator, saying: “Like I am the owner of this house, so too is the Creator the owner of the universe.” And with its partial knowledge, it may understand His knowledge, and with its small amount of acquired art, it may understand the originative art of the Glorious Maker. For example, the ‘I’ says: “As I made this house and arranged it, so someone must have made the universe and arranged it,” and so on. Thousands of mysterious states, attributes, and perceptions which make known and show to a degree all the Divine attributes

28 Ibid., 33.
and functions are contained with the ‘I’. That is to say, the ‘I’ is mirror-like, and, like a unit of measurement and tool for discovery, it has an indicative meaning; having no meaning in itself, it shows the meaning of others.”

In addition man should also realize that the ownership of its ‘I’ is imaginary and apparent, it does not have actual existence; “it has no meaning in itself, and exists only to reveal the existence and meaning of the absolute.” In this way the human ‘I’ works as another indicative (mana-i harfi) and indicates the reality of the other (the Creator), Nursi notes:

“That is to say, the ‘I’ …realises that it serves one other than itself. Its essence has only an indicative meaning. That is, it understands that it carries the meaning of another. Its existence is dependent; that is, it believes that its existence is due only to the existence of another, and that the continuance of its existence is due solely to the creativity of that other. Its ownership is illusory; that is, it knows that with the permission of its owner it has an apparent and temporary ownership.”

It is pertinent to elaborate at this point Nursi’s concept of Human I’s mirror like function which he explains at different places in Risale. As noted above, man is the combination of different human faculties other than intellect which is regarded as human inner world. A careful study of this inner world can lead one towards knowledge of God and His attributes according to Nursi. He quotes following verses in support of his vision:

“We have created man in the best of forms”

“And in the earth there are signs for those who are certain And in your own selves; will you not then see.”

Reference to man’s mirror like essence with its different aspects can be found throughout Risale, for instance Nursi says:

33 Nursi, The Words, 562.
34 Quran 95:4.
35 Quran 51:20-21.
“There are more than seventy Names [of God], the impresses of which are apparent in man’s comprehensive nature. For example, through his creation, man shows the Names of Maker and Creator; through his being ‘Most Excellent of Patterns,’ the Names of Most Merciful and All-Compassionate, and through the fine way he is nurtured and raised, the Names of All-Generous and Granter of Favours, and so on; he shows the differing impresses of different Names through all his members and faculties, all his organs and limbs, all his subtle senses and faculties, all his feelings and emotions.”

Likewise, man’s poverty, weakness and impotence are also such constituents of human nature whose true perception can play a crucial role in leading one towards recognizing Divine existence and His numerous Names and attributes. Just as the darkness of night makes electric lights more luminous, the weakness and incapacity of man accentuate the absolute power supremacy and infinite mercifulness of his Lord. It is man’s duty to rise to the highest level of worship and servitude to his Creator by acknowledging and proclaiming his incapability and weakness. Man’s weakness and impotence shows that he innately needs to be dependent on Someone. If man has needs, it indicates that there must be Someone Who has the power to answer and fulfil his needs, for “if He [God] hadn’t wanted to give, He would not have given wanting.”

Nursi writes:

“Through its impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, my life acts as a mirror to the power, strength, wealth, and mercy of the Creator of life. Yes, just as the pleasure of food is known in proportion to the degree of hunger, and the degrees of light through the degrees of darkness, and the degrees of heat through the degrees of cold; in the same way, through the boundless impotence and poverty in my life, I understood the infinite power and mercy of my Creator, who answers my needs and wards off my innumerable

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In this manner man’s conscience (inner world) is like a window to the intellect/mind.40 “Even if the eyes of reason [mind] are blind [closed], the eyes of conscience are always open”41 For “the conscience does not forget the Creator; even if it denies its self, it sees Him (the Creator), reflects on Him and turns toward Him.”42 Mermer adds: “The conscience is used as a unit of measurement, and after making it confirm a truth, the heart, the centre of the emotions, finds satisfaction.” 43 Thus in Nursi’s system of thought what Kuspinar explains is:

“[the heart] needs to be kindled with the light of [verified] faith, cultivated with the devotional acts and services to God and polished with the recollection of Him, if it is to be, truly speaking, a locus-mirror of God’s Beautiful Names. A heart which does not go through such a process of spiritual training remains what Nursi calls ‘a dry and raw seed’ and becomes even a burden for its bearer, while leaving at the same time all of its auxiliary members and faculties dull and idle and letting them eventually die off. If, on the other hand, it is well trained and well cultivated, then all of its faculties will be able to perform their respective functions…. Besides, the man possessed of such a heart attains to the stage of intimacy with God where he, being fully at peace and tranquil in himself, witnesses the signs and realities of God within himself (anfus) and outside (afak).44

40 Nursi, Al-Mathnawi, 368.
41 Ibid., 377.
42 Ibid., 376.
In this way man could gain the knowledge of his Creator through the journey of reflective thought in his inner world, which, with the collaboration of his reflection on outer world in turn would confirm and revitalize his Belief in God.

“The Inner Way starts from the self, and drawing the eyes away from the outer world, it looks at the heart. It pierces egotism, opens up a way from the heart, and finds reality. Then it enters the outer world. The outer world now looks luminous. It completes the journey quickly. The reality it sees in the inner world, it sees on a large scale in the outer world. Most of the paths which practise silent recollection take this way. The most important basis of this is to break the ego, give up desires of the flesh, and kill the evil-commanding soul.”

According to Nursi man being “comprehensive index of this universe” when understands the true meaning of ‘I’ “the locked doors of creation [are] open[ed] and the riddle of cosmic existence [is] solved.” When a person acquires the knowledge of God’s existence by means of his inner world, then through reflection on outer world in turn, he gets confirmation. This process provides him with a conscious and verified belief. And this belief which he achieves through investigation with the alliance of mind (by intellectual reasoning on outer world) and heart (by contemplating on human inner world) both, can never be harmed by attacks of materialist philosophy. This also enables one to easily live his life in servitude to God even in a secular society. Nursi reflects thus the “best way to interpret Islam in secular setting”

Besides in Nursi’s vision, human ‘I’ has been getting training from two different lines (philosophy and prophet-hood) since the beginning. The impacts of these two lines on ‘I’, and the benefits and harms they cause to man’s personal and social lives will be examined ahead. This will help to understand further Nursi’s way of training, that how it enables one to protect his faith from the assaults of materialist philosophy, the biggest threat of that time to the belief of individuals. This will also elaborate Nursi’s basic struggle of reconstruction after 1925.

46 Ibid., 507; Nursi, The Flashes, 452.
47 Turner, The Quran Revealed, 181.
5.1.2 Savior of individual’s belief from the assaults of materialist philosophy:

One of the major subjects Nursi deals extensively in different parts of Risale\textsuperscript{49} is savior of individuals’ belief from assaults of materialist philosophy. Nursi states:

“Since science and philosophy are now dominant and the plague of materialism and naturalism has spread among mankind, before everything belief should be saved in such a way that it silences philosophy and materialism.”\textsuperscript{50}

As previously mentioned, Nursi turned all his attention to the savior and reinforcement of individual’s belief when he realized the harms and damages materialism formed on the thoughts of Turks. He focused his attention on Risale to make his readers realize how materialist philosophy misleads individual’s thoughts in order to damage their personal and social conduct. According to Nursi there have been basically ‘two currents’ or ‘two lines of thought’ (opposite to each other) right from the beginning of this world who direct human beings in their lives. One is ‘Line of prophet-hood’ and the other is ‘Line of philosophy’ these lines have spread their branches and have been playing a significant role in affecting ‘every class of humanity’. History proves that whenever the line of philosophy joined the line of prophet-hood and Religion, humanity experienced a brilliant happiness and social life. And whenever they separated, “goodness and light have been drawn to the side of the line of prophet-hood and religion, and evil and misguidance to the side of the line of philosophy”.\textsuperscript{51}

Nursi also provides a detailed account of how these two lines affect ‘human I’ which has direct concern in shaping human personalities and in turn societies. While describing the harms of line of philosophy which separated itself from religion Nursi elaborates:

“The line of philosophy that does not obey the line of religion... scatters the darkness of ascribing partners to God and misguidance on all sides. In the branch of the power of intellect, even, it produces the fruit of atheism,

\textsuperscript{49} For example see Thirtieth Word, Twelfth Word, Twenty-fifth Word in Nursi, \textit{The Words}.


\textsuperscript{51} Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 561.
Materialism, and Naturalism for the consumption of the human intellect. And in the realm of the power of passion, it pours the tyrannies of Nimrod, Pharaoh, and Shaddad on mankind. And in the realm of the power of animal appetites, it nurtures and bears the fruit of goddesses, idols, and those who claim divinity.”

Whereas about the benefits which line of prophet-hood has shown to mankind, Nursi writes:

“In the branch of the power of intellect, it has nurtured the fruits of the prophets, the messengers, and the saints. In the branch of the power of repulsion, it has resulted in angelic kings and just rulers. And in the branch of the power of attraction, it has resulted in people of good character and modest and beautiful manner, both generous and gracious.”

Nursi indicates in above passages towards three powers or tendencies of human nature by explaining what harms are formed when these powers are not well nurtured and come under the influence of ‘Line of philosophy’. At another place he gives a detailed explanation of these human tendencies and their proper training. In order to get full understanding of the influence formed by the ‘two Lines’ it would be helpful to first look at Nursi’s explanation of three different human powers or tendencies. He elucidates:

“The human soul possesses three powers (quwwa): the power of animal appetites (al-quwwa al-shahwiyya al-bahimiyya), the function of which is to attract benefits; the power of animal passion or repulsion (al-quwwa al-ghadabiyya), the function of which is to ward off harm; and the power of intellect (al-quwwa al-aqliyya), the function of which is to distinguish between that which is beneficial and that which is harmful. It is how these powers are used by the human ‘I’ that determines the soul’s behavioural states. Each power may be either overused, which leads to excess (ifrāt) or it may have a deficiency (nuqṣan), in which case it leads to negligence (tafrit). Nursi warns against both extremes – excess and negligence – and cautions man to aim for the ‘middle way’, which is justice.”

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52 Ibid.

Chapter-5: Revitalization of Belief and Spiritual  

Turning back to the effects of line of prophet-hood and philosophy on human powers/tendencies Nursi proves by giving comparisons how these ‘two Lines’ affect man’s personal as well as social life. When his three powers will be trained under the line of prophet-hood, man will observe numerous benefits in personal and social life. On the contrary gaining the training under line of philosophy these tendencies will be mislead both in man’s personal and collective matters. Nursi makes it clear by comparing ‘Line of prophet-hood’ and ‘Line of philosophy’ regarding their effects on man’s individual and social life.  

**What influence both lines form on one’s personal life:**

Line of prophet-hood enables an individual to understand his self (I-ness) having an indicative meaning whose “existence is dependant” and whose “reality is shadow-like…displays the manifestation of true and necessary reality”.

It also helps one to realize “in the manner of a worshipper, that the aim of humanity and duty of human beings is to be moulded by God-given ethics and good character, and, by knowing their impotence to seek refuge with Divine power, seeing their weakness to rely on Divine strength.”

While

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Markham and Suendam Birinci Pirim, *An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings* (Uk: Ashgate 2011), 172. On the question what happens if excess or deficiency in different human tendencies occurs? Turner explains: “For example, deficiency in the power of intellect results in foolishness (*ghabāwa*) and idiocy (*balāda*), while excess leads to deception and trickery (*jarbaza*), preoccupation with trivia and inordinate attention to minutiae (*tadqiq fi safāsi al-‘umūr*). When the power of intellect is used properly and attains the ‘middle way’, the result, Nursi says, is wisdom (*h. ikma*). A deficiency in the power of animal appetites results in lassitude (*khumūd*) and lack of enthusiasm (*‘adam al-ishtiyāq*) while at the other end of the spectrum, excess results in depravity and dissolution (*fajr*). When the ‘middle way’ is attained, however, man is led to a state of mind in which he is encouraged to do what God has commanded and eschew what he has forbidden. As far as the power of passion/repulsion is concerned, underuse leads to fear and cowardice (*jabāna*) while an excess results in rashness (*tahawwur*), a precursor of tyranny (*zulm*) and despotism (*istibdād*). The ‘middle way’ as far as this power is concerned is courage (*shaja’a*), which enables man to uphold the message of Divine Unity and protect the sanctity of Islam.” Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, 188-89.

54 Here only effects on personal life will be discussed, for effects on social life consult Nursi, *The Words*, 146, 564.

55 Ibid., 562.

56 Ibid., 563.
following Line of prophet-hood an individual realises his impotence and defectiveness and turns towards God Almighty with humility.\textsuperscript{57} He becomes humble, righteous and mild:

“Yet outside the limits of his Maker’s leave, he would not voluntarily lower and abase himself before anything other than his Maker. And he is weak and in want, and he knows his weakness and poverty, but he is self-sufficient due to the wealth which his All-Generous Lord has stored up for him in the hereafter, and he is strong since he relies on his Master’s infinite power. And he acts and strives only for God’s sake, for God’s pleasure, and for virtue.”\textsuperscript{58}

On the contrary Line of Philosophy, he says:

“regards the ‘I’ as carrying no meaning other than its own. That is to say, it declares that the ‘I’ points only to itself, that its meaning is in itself. It considers that the ‘I’ works purely on its own account. It regards its existence as necessary and essential, that is, it says that it exists in itself and of itself... And it considers the ‘I’s’ duty to be perfection of self, which originates from love of self.”\textsuperscript{59}

Furthermore, philosophy closes “the doors of impotence and weakness, poverty and need, deficiency and imperfection, which are intrinsic to human beings, thus obstructing the road to worship.” Nursi gives the example of Plato, Aristotle, Ibn e Sina and Farabi being the “most illustrious representatives and authorities of the line of philosophy” who claimed:

“the ultimate aim of humanity is to liken themselves to the Necessary Being, that is to say, to actually resemble Him. They thus delivered judgement in the manner of Pharaoh, and, by whipping up ‘I-ness’ and allowing polytheism to run free in the valleys, opened the way to numerous different ways of associating partners with God, like worship of causes, idols, nature, and the stars.... Being immersed in Naturalism and being completely incapable of emerging from associating partners with God\textsuperscript{60}, they were unable to find the broad gate of thanks.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 564.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 145-46.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 562-63.
\textsuperscript{60} What is meant here by associating partners will be explained ahead.
In addition, student of philosophy Nursi acclaims:

“worships the basest thing for the sake of benefit; he recognizes everything from which he can profit as his ‘Lord’. And that irreligious student is obstinate and refractory, but he is wretched together with his obstinacy and accepts endless abasement for the sake of one pleasure. And he is abject together with his recalcitrance and shows his abasement by kissing the feet of satanic individuals for the sake of some base benefit. And that irreligious student is conceited and domineering, but since he can find no point of support in his heart, he is an utterly impotent blustering tyrant. And that student is a self-centered seeker of benefit whose aim andendeavour is to gratify his animal appetites; a crafty egotist who seeks his personal interests within certain nationalist interests.”

The ‘I’ nurtured under the shadow of prophet-hood realizes thus its actual function. The parameters of one to envision his self and the universe will be consequently changed. When ‘I’ functions in the light of prophetic guidance, only then it does justice to the Creation plan of God. One realizes that the powers, knowledge and attributes one possesses are a reflection of the real. True ownership of these belongs to the one who gave these to man, the Creator. This realization makes a human being understand the cosmic reality and the way it obeys its Maker in its functioning. He transcends his personal desires and returns the ‘trust’ to its real owner. The way to ‘return the trust’ is to utilize it in accordance with the will of God. This involves complete and unconditional submission. For example “To submit one’s (imaginary) knowledge means to nurture it for God’s sake and to use it in accordance with His will alone. It also means to attribute it to Him at all times and under all circumstances, and not to appropriate it for oneself or to imagine that one has any real power of disposal over it.” Thus this “surrendered ana ‘I’ forms the basis of what Nursi calls the line of prophet-hood”

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61 Nursi, The Words, 563.
62 Ibid., 145-46.
64 Turner, "Spiritual Architecture of Risale," 36; also see Turner, The Quran Revealed, 190.
Conversely if ‘I’ could not realize its actual function and would be nurtured under the shadow of philosophy, it will envision itself and the world with different perspective. That is to see “itself solely in the light of its nominal and apparent meaning. …that it owns itself; it cannot act consciously and sincerely as the ‘vicegerent’ of God, and thus fails the trust.”  

Nursi writes:

“But if, forgetting the wisdom of its creation and abandoning the duty of its nature, the ‘I’ views itself solely in the light of its nominal and apparent meaning, if it believes that it owns itself, then it betrays the Trust, and it comes under the category of, And he fails who corrupts its (Quran, 91:10). It was of this aspect of the Trust, therefore, which gives rise to all ascribing of partners to God, evil and misguidance, that the heavens, earth and mountains were terrified; they were frightened of associating hypothetical partners with God.”  

As opposed to the line of prophet-hood, line of philosophy does not allow any reference to God in its quest for an understanding of the universe. The line of philosophy succumbs to the temptation of self-centered rather than God-centered approach. All the attributes at man’s disposal are considered to be inherent possession rather than Divine trust. Thus, when these attributes are used without a reference to God, a person cares little about the intended purpose of powers given to him. He starts considering them his own and employs them for his own motives; not for public-spirited purposes. 

Turner elaborates:

“Power, for example, when expressed by an ‘I’ that is in the ‘line of prophet-hood’, will be tempered by compassion and used for the good of all other beings; when brandished by an ‘I’ that is in the ‘line of philosophy’, on the other hand, power will be seen as a personal asset that is to be used in any way the apparent owner of power dictates.”

What will happen consequently Nursi notes: “For as it ascribes power to itself, so it will ascribe power to causes in the outside world and fail to see the universe for what it is; it will

\[66\] Nursi, The Words, 559-60.
\[68\] Turner, The Quran Revealed, 190.
associate partners with God on a grand scale.‖ What is meant here by associating partners; Nursi insists that it is in the nature of a human to worship a master. He either worships his Creator or his own evil desires. The seeds of submission are intrinsic to human nature. He has to decide if he wants to submit to His creator’s will or his own whims because both cannot be submitted to simultaneously. Turner further elucidates:

“because servitude is part of [man’s] creational make-up, he will of necessity become a slave to the whims of his own evil-commanding soul. Nursi concurs with the Quran wholeheartedly on its insistence that man, who is by virtue of his innate disposition created to worship, cannot serve two masters at the same time – particularly when the demands of those masters are in diametric opposition… The result is that he will inevitably have to accept as many gods as there are causes and creatures in creation”

This actually is the concept materialist philosophy is based upon, considering all human powers and attributes independent, entrapping one into the trap of cause and effect and thus setting one free from the concept of God’s existence. On the contrary an ‘I’ trained under the line of prophet-hood can achieve the strength to save its belief from the assaults of materialism. For about the matter of causality and chance Nursi believes that if cause and effect phenomena will be studied horizontally, and in light of mana-i harfi (other indicative) methodology that too will prove the existence of God and will lead towards Him. In this way Nursi instills verified belief in an individual’s heart and saves him from falling into the whirlpool of materialist philosophy whose effects were wide spread in Nursi’s time around him. In Risale belief in God, Unity, Divine attributes all are defined in the same manner.

70 Turner, The Quran Revealed, 311-12.
72 For instance see Sixteenth Word, Twenty-second Word, Twenty-fourth Word, in Nursi, The Words. Also see first chapter of this dissertation where subjects of Risale-i Nur are discussed.
Besides, merits and demerits of belief and disbelief for man’s personal and collective life are also elaborated.\textsuperscript{73} Other tenets of belief are also elucidated in the same way. For instance, belief in the hereafter has been defined with rational proofs along with benefits for human life in accepting it and disadvantages of denial.\textsuperscript{74} Likewise, belief in prophet-hood, Messenger-ship of Muhammad \textsuperscript{72}alerts, angels and books\textsuperscript{75} is also explicated in same way.

\textsuperscript{73} For example see Twenty-third Word where Nursi explains the importance of faith in man's life in this world and in the hereafter under the title of ‘Belief or Unbelief: the Results of a Choice’ in ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} See Tenth Word and for a detailed interpretation of Nursi’s teachings on life after death consult chapter of Hereafter in Turner, \textit{The Quran Revealed}.

\textsuperscript{75} For detailed explanation on all these subjects consult Nursi, \textit{The Words}; Nursi, \textit{The Letters}; Nursi, \textit{The Rays}.
5.1.3 Benefits of the method:

Nursi’s method of reflective thought inspires in a person conscious belief which in turn provides an impetus for “conscious sense of worshipfulness.”\(^76\) This makes every moment and action of a person’s life an embodiment of the worship of God. Humans have been endowed with different faculties by the Almighty God. The faculties such as heart, spirit, intellect, imagination have all worships to perform peculiar to each of them.\(^77\) Human faculties have a twofold objective. Firstly to understand divine attributes; secondly, and as a result of the first objective, to thank and worship the Creator.\(^78\)

“The perfect man is he who, driving all those subtle senses towards reality on the different ways of worship particular to them, marches heroically like the Companions in a broad arena and rich fashion towards the goal, with the heart as commander and the subtle faculties as soldiers.”\(^79\)

So in this way man has no choice except worship. However, Nursi differentiates between ‘performing sacred acts’ and ‘making all the acts sacred’. The latter could be achieved through understanding of the divine attributes and accepting the responsibility of ‘human I’. Any act, as long as permitted by shari’ah, can be made sacred through zikr, by remembering God at the start of an action; fikr, by contemplating his attributes during the action; and shukr, by thanking Him at the end of the action. “All deeds, therefore, so long as they are permissible, can be sacralised by adhering to the principle of zikr, shukr and fikr.”\(^80\) In Nursi’s words:

“These [three duties] are remembrance [zikr], thanks [shukr] and reflection [fikr]. Saying, “In the Name of God” at the start is remembrance and “All praise be to God” at the end is thanks. And perceiving and thinking of those bounties, which are priceless wonders of art, being miracles of power of the

\(^{76}\) For detailed explanation see Turner, \textit{The Quran Revealed}, 301-02, 11-12, 18; also see and compare with Şerif Mardin, \textit{Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi} (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 165.


\(^{78}\) Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 139.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 511; for explanation see Vahide, “Spiritual Themes of Risale,” 12-13.

\(^{80}\) Turner, \textit{The Quran Revealed}, 320, 22.
Chapter-5: Revitalization of Belief and Spiritual

Unique and Eternally Besought One and gifts of His mercy, is reflection. However foolish it is to kiss the foot of a lowly man who conveys to you the precious gift of a king and not to recognize the gift’s owner, it is a thousand times more foolish to praise and love the apparent source of bounties and forget the True Bestower of Bounties.”

This is the conduct which Nursi named as “acting in the name of God”. Turner comments “Indeed, when everything is sacralised in this manner, all [permissible] acts become ‘acts of worship’, whether they have been prescribed formally or not.” Thus Nursi connects every action and practice of a believer with a conscious sense of servitude ‘ubudiyya’. And “in acknowledging the fact that he is created in servitude, he becomes a willing bondsman (‘abd) of God” In addition along with awakening the confirmed and verified belief, Nursi educates one in a way revealing practical benefits of rites and rituals. Turner explains:

“This much is clear from the way Nursi sees the ‘pillars of Islam’ in the Risale-i Nur. Bediuzzaman was not a jurist and did not concern himself with detailed expositions of the rules and regulations covering the external practices of Islam. For him, as for Ghazali and other theologian-mystics before him, what was important was to uncover the psycho-spiritual significance of rite and ritual and to understand the many layers of meaning beneath them. Nursi delves into the inner meaning of all of the ‘pillars of Islam’ throughout the Risale-i Nur, devoting the lion’s share of his attention to canonical prayer (salat) and fasting (sawm).”

For example Nursi’s point of view about salat is:

“Just as man is an example in miniature of the greater world and Sura al-Fatiha a shining sample of the Qur’an of Mighty Stature, so are the prescribed prayers a comprehensive, luminous index of all varieties of worship, and a

81 Nursi, The Words, 17.
82 Ibid., 16.
83 Turner, The Quran Revealed, 322.
84 Ibid., 311.
85 Ibid., 312.
86 Ibid., 323.
Nursi’s treatment and style of training about *salat* can be seen in treatise on times of prayers where Nursi illustrates at length the wisdom behind specified time of each prayer. Turner summarizes in following words:

“As for the specific times of day at which the five canonical prayers are to be offered, each of these, he says, symbolizes a season of the year, an epoch in the history of the creation or, more importantly, a stage in the life of man or in the creation which has particular significance for his spiritual growth or awareness… A full day’s cycle of canonical prayer, from *fajr* through to *‘isha*, and on through the darkness of night to *fajr* again, is likened by Nursi to the whole lifetime of man, and even to the lifespan of the created realm itself, of which man is a microcosm. Each of the five specified times represents a particular stage or rite of passage – a ‘revolution’, as Nursi puts it in the life of man and in the life of the cosmos. Through the times of the canonical prayers man is thus reminded of his true nature as a being who is born, who matures and ages, and whose eventual demise means that he is dispatched to the darkness of the grave, only to be brought back to life with the dawn of a new but very different ‘day’.”

Similarly, Nursi awakens a conscious sense of worshipfulness about the month of Ramadan just as he does about *salat* by explaining personal, spiritual and social benefits of *sawm*. He describes in length the multiple facets of the wisdom that lies in annual fasting during Ramadan, enumerating the whole range of benefits this month affords to the believers. Nursi assures that

“Fasting in Ramadan will awaken even the most negligent and obstinate of individuals to the reality of his soul’s impotence. Through hunger, he will

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88 Ibid., 52-58.
understand his need for the One who nourishes; through fatigue, he will understand his need for the One Who sustains. In giving up those things which, if not understood properly, tend to fuel the self-aggrandizement of the soul, the fasting believer is able to chip away at the despotism of his own ‘I’ and make it aware of its true Owner.”

Then as established Nursi’s theology of raising mindful sense of belief instills conscious sense of worshipfulness in Muslim individual which is not confined to formal practices of worship rather it covers all the aspects of believer’s life. This second feature of Nursi’s spiritual training will be studied in next section.

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5.2 Raising the faith of individuals by training them for different life stages, conditions and behaviors

Previous section was an effort to examine one aspect of Nursi’s spiritual training for the revitalization of individual’s belief describing how Nursi develops conscious and verified belief in the heart of individual which consequently influences every action and practice of his whole life. This section aims to study another aspect of Nursi’s spiritual training for the revitalization and reconstruction of belief in which he guides individuals about what should be their conduct in different life stages, while fulfilling different responsibilities and in facing different situations. Nursi’s methodology for the training of individuals is unique in a sense that he gives instructions by addressing different age groups, genders and different sections of society to explain that when verified belief is awakened in the heart of a believer, what benefits one gets in every stage of life even in the worst conditions. And being believers what belief demands from them in their personal and collective life. In addition to this Nursi also has focused his attention on different tribulations and tragic conditions that an individual may encounter in his life because he envisions trials and hardships of human life as sources of spiritual training. So he “pays particular attention to the experience of spiritual wounding or inner wounding as being transformative in a person’s life and in the development of faith.”

In order to enable a Muslim individual how to meet different challenges of life, he has written many treatises. Another worth mentioning point in Nursian way of training individuals is his particular attention on certain ethical values which play crucial role in defining human behaviors not only in their personal conduct towards God but also in social interactions. This section will examine Nursi’s method of individuals’ training and guidance for different life stages; different tragic conditions; and what Nursi prescribes as best ethical values for the better spiritual progress of individuals.

5.2.1 Nursi’s spiritual guidance for men/women and different age groups:

Nursi’s method of training encourages all classes and types of people to attain the main purpose ‘revitalization of belief”. This is one of the aspects of Nursi’s spiritual training

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towards individuals; one can find different treatises in Risale comprising instructions for youth, elderly, women, children etc.

5.2.1.1 Advice for women:

Twenty-Fourth Flash, in the collection of ‘The Flashes’ is written for the spiritual guidance of women comprising two parts. First part contains instructions on Islamic dress for women in which Nursi describes wisdom and importance of the Quranic injunction regarding veil. For instance he states: “To veil them-selves is natural for women and their innate disposition demand it.” While explaining the reasons of this natural demand he writes:

“Being weak, their creation demands that through veiling themselves they do not excite the appetites of men outside the stipulated degrees of kinship, nor allow any opportunity for assault; their weak creation gives powerful warning. It shows that their cloaks and coats are shields and fortresses.”

Another wisdom in Nursi’s view behind the injunction of veil is to take care of the feelings of less pretty women in order to save them from any kind of inferiority complex or jealousy for more beautiful women. Nursi says: “seven out of ten women are either old or ugly, and they do not want to show their age and ugliness to everyone. Or they are jealous, and they do not want to appear ugly in relation to others who are more beautiful.” Therefore, veil is also a shield for taking care of the emotions of less beautiful women.

Second part comprises instructions for believing women to make them aware of their religious duties particularly as mother and as wife. Nursi initiates this section by appreciating women’s interest in Risale for they played a very active role in Nur movement not only in reading and writing copies of Risale but also by setting their husbands free for the service of Risale, by taking up all the household and somehow financial responsibilities. Due to their service Nursi once said that in future flag of Islam will be held by women. In the second part of treatise Nursi advises them to pay special attention to the eternal life of their children.

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95 Ibid., 255.
96 Ibid; consult for further explanation Markham, Engaging with Bediuzzaman, 13-14.
97 For details see Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 205, 46-47; Camilla T. Nereid, In the Light of Said Nursi: Turkish Nationalism and the Religious Alternative (Norway: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1997), 40-41.
while upbringing them besides taking care of their worldly life and success. Nuri says an “innocent conversation with your innocent children is more pleasurable than a hundred cinemas”. Afterwards he turns his attention to women’s role as wife and strongly advises them to give attention to their conduct towards their husband in order to save family life. In Nuri’s view husband and wife are not merely in a temporary relationship of worldly life, but also are eternal companions for everlasting life, “so the older they grow they should increase also in love for each other, and compassion, and respect”. He was worried about the situation because western culture and civilization was also influencing family lives, he said family life “under the guise of culture and civilization is [becoming now] a temporary animal relationship followed by eternal separation, is being destroyed at its very foundations.” Nuri feels sorry about increasing rate of divorce and destruction of family therefore strongly recommends women to save her family life by maximum efforts. Even if she finds her husband disloyal, she should try her best to reform her “companion of eternity” instead of adopting revengeful attitude. In the end Nuri apologizes for being unable to write more for women due to weakness and illness of old age but he recommends them some treatises of Risale for their further readings and guidance for example Treatise on Islamic dress, Guide for Youth and The Short Words.

5.2.1.2 Guidance for elderly:

Twenty-Sixth Flash, treatise for the elderly, is basically a “collection of counsels to Nuri’s ageing peers” in which he tries to make the old people realize that they should be grateful to Almighty God as old age is also a blessing from Him. In this treatise “Nuri teaches others by

98 Nuri, The Flashes, 259-60.
99 Ibid., 263.
100 Ibid., 262.
teaching himself” this is one of the ways of training Nursi adopts in his whole collection of Risale. In order to guide people about “how they should behave or react when they find themselves in straitened and distressing circumstances; this [Nursi] is someone who is able to empathize completely with his audience, and whose solutions are reached only after long and often profound soul-searching.”

The treatise is comprised of “various ‘hopes’ that he has discovered in his old age, and which may serve as consolation for the distress and discomfort that growing old can bring. All of these ‘hopes’ are, as one might expect, introduced as products of the wellspring of faith.”

Then one by one he explains different hopes i.e. how belief in God and trust in His mercy, following the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and belief in hereafter helps elderly people to give them satisfaction at their old age and increase their faith. Nursi proves that impotence and weakness of old age are the means of attracting divine mercy. As Impotence and weakness, mentions Nursi, are the most acceptable intercessor at Almighty God’s court and old age is precisely the time of impotence and weakness. So one should not feel resentful at old age, which is thus an acceptable intercessor at a court, but love it.

Nursi also guides his peers in the light of his personal painful experience in old age, which he experienced at the death of his beloved nephew who was also his adopted son and closest student. Nursi faced this loss in his old age and was unable to come out of its effect even after five years because according to him, half of his private world died with his nephew’s death. But it was consolation proceeding from the Quran’s light that supported him. In the light of his personal painful experience in old age, Nursi guides his aged fellows that the remedy of such pain can only be found in the Quran:

And so my elderly brothers and sisters who like me have lost at the time of their old age a child or relative they love dearly, and who have to bear the searing sorrows of separation together with the burdens of old age! You have

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103 Ibid., 471.
104 For details see Nursi, *The Flashes*, 286-94.
105 Ibid., 300.
106 Ibid., 292.
107 Ibid., 310.
understood from my situation that while being much harsher than yours, it was cured and healed by a verse of the Qur’an. This being so, there are remedies to heal all your difficulties in the sacred pharmacy of the All-Wise Qur’an. If you have recourse to it through belief and make use of those remedies through worship, the heavy burdens of your old age and your sorrows will be lightened considerably.\textsuperscript{108}

This is best example of Nursi’s way of guiding the aged at such a stage of life when they already have become weak and helpless. And in this stage if they are afflicted with such a dreadful experience, how they can endure it. Furthermore Nursi regards the people of advanced years as blessed and advises the elderly to cultivate optimism, so that they could enjoy eternal youth and bliss in the life hereafter:

“It is only in belief in the hereafter that the elderly, who form another quarter of mankind, can find consolation, in the face of the close extinction of their lives and their entering the soil, and their fine and loveable worlds coming to an end. Those kindly, venerable fathers and devoted, tender mothers would otherwise feel such a disturbance of the spirit and tumult of the heart that the world would become a despairing prison for them and life, a ghastly torture. But then belief in the hereafter says to them: "Don't worry! You have an immortal youth; a shining, endless life awaits you. You will be joyfully reunited with the children and relatives you have lost. All your good deeds have been preserved and you will receive your reward."\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{5.2.1.3 Guidance for youth:}

Nursi’s concern for youth for their spiritual training in order to strengthen their belief is also very prominent through-out Risale. In the years of early 1940s during his stay in Kastamonu, when high school boys started to visit Nursi complaining that their teachers do not speak about God. Vahide writes: “some of the replies to the questions they asked became the basis of various parts of the Risale-i Nur”\textsuperscript{110}. Therefore, instructions for young people can be found under different treatises in whole collection of Risale. However, Nursi also has combined all

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 312-13.

\textsuperscript{109} Nursi, \textit{The Rays}, 244; also see Nursi, \textit{The Words}, 110.

\textsuperscript{110} Vahide, \textit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 247.
those instructions into a book form titled *A Guide for Youth*. The book answers the questions posed by the youth of his time for the protections of their ‘imaan’ from the temptations of life and young age. Nursi’s suggested remedy was belief in God and unconditional surrender to His creation plan. He comments:

“Your youth will definitely leave you, and if you do not remain within the bounds of the licit, it will be lost, and rather than its pleasures, it will bring you calamities and suffering in this world, in the grave and in the hereafter. But if, through Islamic training, you spend the bounty of your youth as thanks, honourably, in uprightness and obedience, it will in effect remain perpetually and will be the cause of gaining eternal youth.”

Nursi pays particular attention to youth among all other age groups because in his opinion rejection of faith or irreligion is only appealing for this age group. In sixth section of Twenty-Ninth letter he notes that among “six main sections of society, irreligion can offer only a superficial and temporary happiness to the youth. For the sick, the elderly, the weak and the poor, the children and the pious it can offer nothing.” In addition, thinking of hereafter develops a sense in a young individual that there is a check upon him, Nursi writes:

“It is only the thought of Hell-fire that checks the turbulent emotions of youths, the most vigorous element in the life of society, and their violent excesses, restraining them from aggression, oppression, and destruction, and ensuring that the life of society continues tranquilly. If not for fear of Hell, in accordance with the rule ‘might is right,’ in pursuing their desires, those drunken youths would turn the worlds of the wretched weak and powerless into Hell, and elevated humanity into base animality.

Nursi’s spiritual guidance for young people formed a far reaching impact on their lives which Nursi relates by quoting one of his experiences:

112 For explanation Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, 467-68.
113 Nursi, *The Words*, 158.
Years ago I came to know a villager who had had no education. He would visit me from time to time and ask how things were. One day while we were talking he pointed to the part of the Risale-i Nur he had in his hand and said: "These books have an extraordinary power and effect." I asked him: "How do you know? Have you studied them?" He replied: "I am not very proficient at reading and writing, and I haven't studied very much, but I have observed certain things and come to the opinion that if you put one of these treatises in the pocket of a young person and come back and see him a week later, you will see that his form, his conduct, and his face have all changed."  

5.2.1.4 Guidance for children:

Nursi also provides instructions for children in Risale. He appreciates the services of children in writing copies of Risale in his various letters. For Nursi childhood is a phase of life that is both delightful and defenceless. This period is important in shaping up the personality of an individual. Children are innocent like the elderly. They are impressionable and are easily influenced by the positive or negative behaviour of their parents. Parents should be tender and careful in their behaviour with their children. The environment in which these innocent souls are brought up considerably determines whether they will grow up to be positive contributors in society or otherwise. Negative experiences during one's childhood such as the death of a near one may prove to be detrimental for a child, leaving a perennially damaging effect on his mind. Nursi suggests that belief in the hereafter be instilled in the minds of children, so that it will serve as the comforter for their innocent minds.

Children, which form a quarter of mankind, can live a human existence only through belief in the hereafter, and sustain their human capacity. They

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117 For example see Nursi, The Rays, 244, 372.
118 See Vahide, Islam in Modern Turkey, 205, 46.
120 Hermansen, "Faith Development," 89.
otherwise live only childish, empty existences, blunting their grievous pains with trifling playthings. For the effect of the constant deaths around them of children like themselves on their sensitive minds, and weak hearts which in the future will nurture far-reaching desires, and their vulnerable spirits, makes their minds and lives into instruments of torture. But then, through instruction in belief in the hereafter, in place of their anxieties, and the playthings behind which they hid so as not to see those deaths, they feel a joy and expansion, and say: “My brother or my friend has died and become a bird in Paradise. He is flying around and enjoying himself better than we are. And my mother has died, but she has gone to Divine mercy. She will again take me into her embrace in Paradise and I shall see her again.” They may live in a state befitting humanity.\(^{121}\)

5.2.2 Nursi on spiritual development of individuals through tribulations:

There is no concept of human life without miseries and misfortunes. “Man is subject to endless tribulations.”\(^ {122}\) Every individual suffers tragic condition of some type in his life whether in the form of his personal physical illness or material loss or of those whom he is associated with. Physical sicknesses, natural disasters i.e. earth quakes, floods etc. accidental loss of dear ones or any kind of tribulation which an individual may encounter in his life leaves a strong impact on his personality. Nursi has given particular importance to this bitter aspect of human life in his collection of Risale. It is due to the reason that Nursi himself went through a long and sever hardships in his life in the form of exile, imprisonment, sudden death of his close ones etc. So he was well aware of the impacts of these miseries on human personality. Secondly he sees illnesses and calamites of human life as sources of spiritual progress for individuals. One can obtain number of spiritual benefits in this world and the hereafter by facing hardships and his belief can be more strengthen. By taking different tragic human conditions into consideration, Nursi guides individuals not only on how to act or react in particular circumstances as a Muslims. But most importantly, “to see God through any problem that one encounters, to realise that wherever one looks, there is the face of God.”


\(^{122}\) Nursi, *The Words*, 324.
This is the reason that Nursi’s methodology has also been observed under pastoral theology. Pastoral theology in the Nursian sense is the means whereby the afflicted are encouraged to see problems, trials and tribulations as coming from the Divine will, and also the means whereby they are given the conceptual and emotional tools needed in order to face those trials. Here some examples from Risale will be studied.

5.2.2.1 Guidance for the sick:

In the collection of Flashes, Second and Twenty-Fifth Flash are assigned for the guidance of sick people because in Nursi’s opinion “sick and those struck by disaster form one tenth of mankind”. In these treatises Nursi “brings together much of the teachings found dispersed in the Risale and elaborates what he has said elsewhere at greater depth.” Second Flash is based upon the explanations in the light of Prophet Job’s (Ayuob a.s) sickness whereas Twenty-Fifth Flash comprises twenty five remedies, in other words “spiritual remedies for the sickness of the soul”. Because Nursi is more concerned about “spiritual sickness” of individuals than ‘physical illness’. This helps one in providing good protection against frustration in the hard time of sickness. This illustration also “locates the problem of sickness firmly in the context of worship and faith” because according to Nursi worship is of two types; one is active form of worship i.e. five daily prayers, fasting, supplications etc. and the other is passive form of worship in which a believer spends his difficult phase of time.

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123 Pastoral theology is basically a Christian terminology, though does not exist in Muslim theology as a recognized field, but the way it studies and gives attention to human soul, while connecting its relationship with God thus concentrating on the practical side of theology, this element is also present in Nursi’s way of training individuals.

124 Turner, The Quran Revealed, 466.

125 Nursi, The Flashes, 265.

126 Michel, Insights, 117.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., 109.

129 Thomas Michel (a Catholic Christian Priest) shared his experience how he was introduced with Risale-i Nur. After having a bypass surgery he was getting recovered when encouraged by the sympathy of various Risale readers who also shared with him some of the insights which they discovered in the writings of Nursi. Thomas relates that this pushed him to study Risale more deeply in order to understand what Nursi’s approach to sickness and human infirmity might disclose about his Quranic spirituality. See ibid., 108-09.

130 Markham, Engaging with Bediuzzaman, 18.
with patience and without complains, such time period is also “counted as worship for the believer”\(^{131}\). Nursi elaborates:

It is even established by sound narrations and by those who uncover the realities of creation that one minute’s illness of some who are completely patient and thankful becomes the equivalent of an hour’s worship and a minute’s illness of certain perfected men the equivalent of a day’s worship. Thus, you should not complain about an illness which as though transforms one minute of your life into a thousand minutes and gains for you long life; you should rather offer thanks.\(^{132}\)

Nursi quotes the example of Prophet Job (a.s) by calling him ‘champion of patience’\(^{133}\) and sees in the prophet’s story a number of important points which believers should bear in mind whenever they are visited with afflictions of any kind\(^{134}\). He begins this treatise with the following supplication of Prophet Job (a.s)

\[
	ext{"When he called upon his Sustainer saying: "Verily harm has afflicted me, and You are the Most Merciful of the Merciful."}^{135}
\]

Nursi points out that Prophet only invoked Allah for health when the worms, generated into his wounds, were penetrated in his heart and tongue turning into a hindrance in his worship, before that he never asked for health. There is a source of inspiration for all believers too, that it was worship which was more important to him than his health. Nursi draws a comparison between the ailments of Prophet Job (a.s) and spiritual ailments of believer and comments how sin which is like a spiritual worm penetrates into heart of a believer and wipes out the light of belief gradually.\(^{136}\) In Nursi’s opinion when someone suffers a painful time, there is surely a divine wisdom behind that suffering. And once this illness has

\(^{131}\) Nursi, *The Flashes*, 266; for explanation of these points see Michel, *Insights*, 118; Kuspinar, "Chief Characteristics of Spirituality," 141.

\(^{132}\) Nursi, *The Flashes*, 266.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{134}\) Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, 490.

\(^{135}\) Quran 21:83

performed its duty, health has been bestowed and restored by God Almighty. Nursi illustrates his experience to elaborate his point further:

For the past eight or nine years, a number of young people have come to me in connection with illness, seeking my prayers. I have noticed that each of those ill youths had begun to think of the Hereafter to a greater degree than other young people. They lack the drunkenness of youth and have renounced to an extent animal desires and heedlessness. So I consider them and then remind them that their illnesses are a Divine bounty within bearable limits. I tell them: “Brother I am not opposed to this illness of yours. I don’t feel sorry for you because of it that I should pray for you. Try to be patient until the illness awakens you completely, and once it has performed its duty, the Compassionate Creator will restore you to health, God willing.”

Another significant argument Nursi makes is that believers have no right to complain in case of any loss due to certain reasons:

“[Firstly] God Most High has made the garment of the body with which He has clothed man a manifestation of His art. He has made man to be a model on which He cuts, trims, alters and changes the garment of the body, thus displaying the manifestation of various of His Names. Just as the Name of Healer makes it necessary that illness should exist, so too the Name of Provider requires that hunger should exist. And so on...” [Secondly] “it is by means of disasters and sicknesses that life is refined, perfected, strengthened and advanced; that it yields results, attains perfection and fulfils its own purpose.”

Then in another argument he says: “just as gratitude increases Divine bounty, so too complaint increases misfortune, and removes all occasions of compassion.” Therefore “illness and disaster cannot be the grounds for complaint because they do not happen unless they are decreed to happen” and when they happen there is verily a purpose behind, which should be recognised. Illness, like health has equally important role for man’s progress

\[137\] Nursi, The Flashes, 268.
\[138\] Ibid., 23.
\[139\] Ibid., 25.
“without the former, the latter would be unrecognisable”. The significant feature of illness is to stimulate one in his spiritual progress. Calamities and sicknesses help one not to forget his impotence and innate weakness, which ultimately leads one “to take refuge in God by meditating upon His perfections.”\footnote{Turner, 	extit{The Quran Revealed}, 491.}

Nursi also gives a detailed explanation of misfortune and their divine purpose. In his view harmful misfortune is only that one, which affects religion of an individual, whereas which do not affect religion are not misfortunes indeed. Some of them are divine warnings which are purposely designed to “dissolve man’s state of neglect and to remind him of his human helplessness and weakness.”\footnote{Nursi, 	extit{The Flashes}, 26.} Some misfortunes particularly illnesses also contain divine purpose and are means of purification from sins. Nursi again gives example of Prophet Job (a.s) that he did not ask for relief due to his fear for physical sickness rather he prayed to God for health “when disease was preventing his remembrances of God with his tongue and his meditation upon God in his heart. We too should make our primary intent, when making that supplication, the healing of the inward and spiritual wounds that arise from sinning.”\footnote{Ibid., 27.}

\textbf{5.2.2.2 Advice for prisoners:}

Nursi suffered exile, arrest and imprisonment at the hands of authorities on many occasions in his life. He is very forthcoming in expression of the maltreatment that was meted out to him. He, however, looks at his sufferings optimistically. From the vantage point of his work and learning opportunities, the imprisonment proved a blessing in disguise. Considering it God’s will he set about turning the apparent affliction into an auspicious opportunity. He termed prison ‘Josephite school’ (madrasa-i Yusufiyya)\footnote{Cited in Vahide, 	extit{Islam in Modern Turkey}, 217.} in remembrance of the prophet Joseph (Yusuf a.s). Following the practice of Joseph (a.s) who delivered God’s message in prison, he set himself to enlighten his inmates through Risale. Through his preaching work he managed to change the lives of not only imprison staff but also those of the most hardened of miscreants. Thus, Nursi does not see his span in prison as one of affliction but as a means to attain salvation.\footnote{See Turner, 	extit{The Quran Revealed}, 496-97.} He comments:

\begin{quote}

\end{quote}
“If the prisoner has been sentenced unjustly, on condition he performs the obligatory prayers, each hour will be the equivalent of a day’s worship, and the prison will be like a recluse’s cell. He will be counted among the pious hermits of olden times who retired to caves in order to devote themselves to worship. If he is poor, aged, and ill, and desirous of the truths of belief, on condition he performs the obligatory prayers and repents, each hour will become the equivalent of twenty hours’ worship, and prison will become like a rest-house for him, and because of his friends there who regard him with affection, a place of love, training, and education. He will probably be happier staying in prison than being free, for outside he is confused and subject to the assaults of sins from all sides. He may receive a complete education from prison. On being released, it will not be as a murderer, or thirsting for revenge, but as someone penitent, proven by trial, well-behaved, and beneficial for his nation. In fact, the Denizli prisoners became so extraordinarily well-behaved after studying the Risale-i Nur for only a short time that some of those concerned said: “Studying the Risale-i Nur for fifteen weeks is more effective at reforming them than putting them in prison for fifteen years.”

Nursi seems to be suggesting that his imprisonment was part of divine plan in order to make it possible for the message of Risale to reach those whom it might not have reached otherwise. The false charges that authorities levelled against him paved the way for his message to spread. If it was not for the horrors of Eskisehir, Denizli and Afyon, the beauties of madrasa-i- Yusufiyya might not have transpired. He wished to teach himself and the ones who suffered like him the lesson that such sufferings were actually rewarding for them from the perspective of their mission.

Besides the above examples of Nursi’s spiritual training of individual in the times of tribulations, a few more treatises from whole Risale can also be consulted. For example his


treatises on facing natural disasters\textsuperscript{147} and even on condition when one faces the death of a child\textsuperscript{148} are also very significant in this regard.


\textsuperscript{148} Nursi, \textit{The Letters}, 97-100; for explanation consult Turner, \textit{The Quran Revealed}, 500-04.
5.2.3 Nursi’s approach for moral and ethical renewal:

Ethics and virtues are considered to be indivisible part of religion. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has attached greatest importance to moral values and said:

"The best among you are the best in character (having good manners)"\(^{149}\)

He ﷺ also said:

"I was sent to perfect good character"\(^{150}\)

Prophet’s ethics and mode of teachings in this regard has been truly described by the mother of believers Hazrat Ayesha (r.a) she said:

"The character of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was the Qur'an."\(^{151}\)

This means Prophet’s conduct depicts the true picture of the Quranic ethics. Nursi’s project of revitalization of belief also includes moral and ethical renewal of believers and secure very significant place in whole Risale. In his system of training (tarbiyah) moral values and virtues proceed directly from belief. Both belief and virtues are not detached from each other. Belief is the springboard for virtues. This is the reason why Nursi assigns a vital importance to ethics and moral values in Risale. He takes ethical values as an integral part of the Quranic guidance. Since Risale aimed at explaining the system of the Quranic ethics coherently and comprehensively, it possess all the constituents of the moral system contained in the Holy Book.\(^{152}\) Nursi draws inspiration from the sunnah of holy Prophet ﷺ, mentioned in hadith of Ayesha (r.a) above, in adopting his method of teaching morality in the light of


the Quranic ethics. Comprehensiveness and universality are the two defining features of the ethical guidance presented in Risale. It provides guidance for a man from different perspectives. It discusses a man's relation with his Creator, his fellow humans and the entire universe with all its constituents.\(^\text{153}\) In order to illustrate his view about how human beings and universe are closely related, Nursi gives the example of three basic human qualities, namely “justice, frugality, and cleanliness”. In his view, at macro level these three qualities are reflected in the cosmos as the laws governing all existence. According to him, the wisdom behind “economy and lack of waste” principle in the universe is an injunction for a man to be frugal. Similarly, balance present in the cosmic scheme implies that a person should be just in his life. Lastly, if a man doesn't temper with it, there is a constant cleansing process going on in nature with no ugly features. In this way Nursi shows how inseparable the Quranic injunctions are from the laws governing the cosmos, so much so that if one goes against these injunctions it amounts to the defiance of the whole universe.\(^\text{154}\)

Here some examples of Nursi’s ethical program will be studied:

**5.2.3.1 Sincerity and brotherhood:**
Sincerity (ikhlas) and brotherhood (ukhuwwa) are such moral values which hold great importance in Nursi’s vision for spiritual training of a Muslim individual. Sincerity is the subject of Twentieth and Twenty-First Flash in The Flashes collection whereas the subject of brother hood has been discussed in The Letters but both concepts are “so interlinked” in Nursi’s view “as two sides of the same coin… and one cannot exist without the other.”\(^\text{155}\)


\(^{155}\) Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, 399.
Both co-relative concepts would be discussed here respectively to get clearer understanding of Nursi’s thoughts.

In Nursi’s view “Sincerity is foundational to the whole spectrum of beliefs, practices and behaviours required of the Muslim believer”\(^{156}\) it is fundamental to whole human actions. That is why he recommended his students to read this treatise “at least once in every two weeks”\(^{157}\). He initiates the treatise with the verse of Quran:

\[
\text{إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ فَعَلِمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ مُحَلِّصًا لَّهُ الْدِّينَ}
\]

“Verily We sent the Book down to you in truth, so worship God in sincerity, for God’s is sincerely practised religion”\(^{158}\)

Then he raises a question that what is the reason behind neglectful and misguided people’s co-operation with their fellow men without rivalry whereas people of religion oppose each other in hostility.\(^{159}\) He answers this question and elaborates seven causes of this painful fact. Without going into details a few extracts will suffice here. He elucidates sincerity is such an element which “may be attained by preferring the worship of God to the worship of one’s own soul, by causing God’s pleasure and vanquishing the pleasure of the soul and the ego, and thus manifesting the meaning of the verse:

\[
\text{إِنِّي أَحْرَىَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا عَلَيْ اللَّهُ}
\]

“Verily my reward is from God alone”\(^{160}\)

Thus, Sincerity means doing each and every action solely ‘in the name of God alone’\(^{161}\). In addition to this Nursi traces the major reason of disunion and dispute among Muslims in lack of sincerity. In case of any conflict and disagreement, it is sincerity which helps an individual to avoid any dispute. Nursi comments instead of sincerity “if obstinacy and egoism are present, one will imagine himself to be right and the other to be wrong; discord

\(^{156}\) Ibid.


\(^{158}\) Quran 39:2.

\(^{159}\) Nursi, *The Flashes*, 201.

\(^{160}\) Quran 11:29.

\(^{161}\) Turner, *The Qur’an Revealed*, 399.

\(^{162}\) He elsewhere mentions the disunity is one of the three biggest enemies of modern society, along with poverty and ignorance discussed in chapter four.
and rivalry take the place of concord and love. Thus, sincerity is chased away and its function disrupted.”\(^{163}\)

Nursi argues further by suggesting nine rules to be followed because in this way “sincerity will be preserved and its function perfectly performed” for instance: first “to act positively... [by] avoiding enmity for other outlooks [opinion], not criticizing them, interfering in their beliefs and sciences, or in any way concerning oneself with them”; Second “to unite within the fold of Islam, irrespective of particular outlook, remembering those numerous ties of unity that evoke love, brotherhood and concord”; Third “to adopt the just rule of conduct that the follower of any right outlook has the right to say, “My outlook is true, or the best,” but not that “My outlook alone is true,” or that “My outlook alone is good,” thus implying the falsity or repugnance of all other outlooks”; and so on.\(^{164}\)

Nursi also indicates a sickness of thought among individuals and different groups of Muslims - to consider one’s particular opinion as the only truth, and reject all other opposing ideas. This concept is a reason for dispute and disunion among Muslim communities and this is such a weakness that helps “people of misguidance to triumph over the people of truth”\(^{165}\).

Nursi deems the occasional feelings of competition and rivalry among his disciples insidious which could, if not addressed in a timely fashion, instigate hostility and factionalism among his followers. He advises his students in his treatise to adhere to sincerity so as to shun disunity and temptation to personal glory. It could only be materialized if their aim was only to attain divine pleasure. Nursi holds the moral strength of four individuals could outshine that of one thousand one hundred and eleven:

“"Yes, if three *alifs* do not unite, they have the value of three. Whereas if they do unite, through the mystery of numbers they acquire the value of one hundred and eleven. If four times four remain apart, they have a value of sixteen. But if, through the mystery of brotherhood and having a common goal and joint duty, they unite coming together shoulder to shoulder on a line, they have the strength and value of four thousand four hundred and forty-four. Just as numerous historical events testify that the moral strength and value of

\(^{163}\) Nursi, *The Flashes*, 203.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 203-04.

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 207.
sixteen self-sacrificing brothers have been greater than that of four thousand.”\(^{166}\)

Turning now to the concept of brotherhood in Nursi’s view, Colin Turner explains the spheres of impact of both concepts (Sincerity and Brotherhood) on individuals in following words:

“If sincerity is the leaven which works on an individual level to imbue all actions performed by a believer with sacrality, brotherhood is the element which works on a societal level to provide mutual assistance and support for the commonalty of believers, both as individuals and as fellow members of the single society that is the community of Islam.”\(^{167}\)

The glimpses can be well observed in Nursi’s both treatises; in the former he concentrates more on individuals that how insincerity harms an individual, whereas in the later, he focuses all his attention on such elements that are harmful for man’s collective and social life. Nursi begins the treatise with the following verses:

\[
\text{إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ قَالُوا بَينَ أَخَوَيْنَا}
\]

Verily the believers are brethren; so reconcile then your brothers.\(^{168}\)

\[
\text{وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّبَةُ أَدْفَعُ بِالْحَسَنِ إِلَيْهِ الْسَّيِّبَةَ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ يَسْتَقِيمُ الْمَسْلُوبُ وَاذْعَرُوا عَنِ الْغَيْبَةِ وَلَا تَفْعَلُوا شَجَرَةً غَيْبَيْنَ}
\]

Nor can goodness and Evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better than it; then the one between whom and yourself enmity prevails will become like your friend and intimate.\(^{169}\)

\[
\text{وَالْكَافِرِينَ الْخَيْرِينَ وَالْعَفِيفِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحبُّ الْمُحسِنِينَ}
\]

Those who suppress their anger and forgive people-­verily God loves those who do good.\(^{170}\)

This treatise comprises two parts. In first part Nursi elaborates in six points how dispute partisanship, obstinacy and envy, leading to rancour and enmity among believers, are harmful for their personal, social, and spiritual life.\(^{171}\) Whereas in second part Nursi identifies

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166 Ibid., 215; see also for explanation Michel, Insights, 30.
167 Turner, The Quran Revealed, 420.
168 Quran 49:10.
169 Quran 41:34.
170 Quran 3:134.
two such bad morals, which are the source of “all immoralities and instabilities in the social life of man”\textsuperscript{172}

The first: “Once my stomach is full, what do I care if others die of hunger?”

The second: “You suffer hardship so that I can live in ease; you work so that I can eat.”

Here the second part of treatise will be briefly discussed about which Nursi feels: “the origin of all revolutions and corruption, and the spur and source of all bad morals are just [above] two sayings”\textsuperscript{173} Nursi explains these two bad morals as such social diseases that:

“perpetuate the prevalence of usury and interest on the one hand, and the abandonment of zakat on the other. The only remedy able to cure these two awesome social diseases lies in implementing zakat as a universal principle and in forbidding usury. Zakat is a most essential support of happiness not merely for individuals and particular societies, but for all of humanity. There are two classes of men: the upper classes and the common people. It is only zakat that will induce compassion and generosity in the upper classes toward the common people, and respect and obedience in the common people toward the upper classes. In the absence of zakat, the upper classes will descend on the common people with cruelty and oppression, and the common people will rise up against the upper classes in rancour and rebellion. There will be a constant struggle, a persistent opposition between the two classes of men. It will finally result in the confrontation of capital and labour, as happened in Russia.”\textsuperscript{174}

In Ian Markham’s opinion this is the excellent summary of Nursi’s social teachings because:

“[it] extends to the entire structure of society… For Nursi, the explicit task of renewal, which is the focus of his teaching, does not preclude the social dimensions of Islam… The two corrupting dispositions are ‘selfishness’ and ‘exploitation’…. his solution to the problem of selfishness is compulsory

\textsuperscript{172} Nursi, \textit{The Letters}, 319.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 533.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 319.
social redistribution (by means of zakat); and to the problem of exploitation, he wants the prohibition of usury and interest.”

5.2.3.2 Frugality:

Nursi’s treatise on Frugality (Nineteenth-Flash in Flashes) is also very significant for the spiritual training of individuals. Turner explains Nursi’s vision in following words:

“it is with the individual – with the ‘human I’ of each particular soul – that any kind of change must begin. And any kind of change that takes a soul from wastefulness to frugality can be taught and encouraged only within the framework of worshipfulness and the imperative of God-awareness. Thus Nursi treats frugality as a wholly spiritual virtue – a means of enhancing personal growth towards God and attaining Divine pleasure – rather than as an instrument for the increase of material well-being, although naturally the two are not mutually exclusive.”

Nursi begins the treatise with the Quranic verse:

كلُوا وابذروا ولا تسرفوا إنَّه لا يحبُ العَسْرِيِّين

Eat and drink, but waste not by excess

In his opinion this verse “gives most important and wise instruction in the form of categorically commanding frugality and prohibiting wastefulness”. He elaborates the subject in seven different points and concludes the following:

“Excess and wastefulness lead to greed, and greed” results “in three consequences”; dissatisfaction, disappointment and finally destroys sincerity. He further explains:

“Excess and wastefulness lead to lack of contentment. And lack of contentment destroys enthusiasm for work; it causes laziness, opens the door to complaining
about life, and makes the dissatisfied person complain continuously.\textsuperscript{180} Also, it destroys sincerity, and opens the door to hypocrisy. And it destroys self-respect, and points the way to begging.

As for frugality and economy, these result in contentment. According to the Hadith, "The contented person is respected, and the greedy person despised," a consequence of contentment is self-esteem. It also encourages effort and work. It increases enthusiasm, and induces striving....

Also, the contentment arising from frugality opens the door of thanks and closes the door of complaint. Throughout his life, the contented person is thankful. And in so far as he is independent of others through his contentment, he does not seek their regard. The door of sincerity is opened, the door of hypocrisy closed...Indeed, just as giving zakat and being frugal and economical is proven by experience to be the cause of increase and plenty in goods and possessions, so too are there innumerable events showing that wastefulness and failure to give zakat cause increase and plenty to be taken away."\textsuperscript{181}

Nursi’s way of training in this regard becomes amply clear from the passage above. Frugality is not a virtue which should be seen in isolation, detached from others. Instead, it is interlinked with many other noble deeds. It is the combination of these interlinked virtues that benefits a Muslim. On the contrary, if a Muslim forsakes frugality and indulges in extravagance; he becomes vulnerable to many other vices too. Consequently, a person’s belief suffers untold harm.\textsuperscript{182}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{180} Nursi writes in footnote: Whenever you meet a wasteful, immoderate person, you hear complaints. No matter how rich he is, his tongue still complains. But when you meet even the poorest, but contented, person, you hear only thanks.}
\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{181} Nursi, \textit{The Flashes}, 198-99.}
\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{182} For details on Nursi’s concept of Frugality see ibid., 189-99; for further readings consult Turner, \textit{The Quran Revealed}, 504-11; Sabahaddin Zaim, "The Treatise on Frugality," in \textit{Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi The Reconstruction Of Islamic Thought In The Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi} (Istanbul: Sozler, 1995), 174-84; Markham, \textit{Engaging with Bediuzzaman}, 17-18.}
\end{footnote}
\end{footnotesize}
5.2.3.3 Other moral values focused by Nursi in Risale-i Nur:

In short, ethical renewal has a very significant role in Nursi’s program of revitalization; due to this numerous detailed accounts can be found on different virtues in the whole Risale. At some places whole treatises are dedicated to one of the moral values, some examples of this have been studied above. In addition to these, some other virtues Nursi focused on in Risale are; truthfulness\(^{183}\), justice\(^{184}\), thanks and gratitude\(^{185}\), love\(^{186}\), patience, peace and forgiveness and so on. He draws his attention to vices and negative human qualities as well i.e. “lying, hypocrisy, dissembling, tyranny, partisanship, bigotry, arrogance, egotism, despair, despotism, laziness, enmity, malice and betrayal.”\(^{187}\)


\(^{185}\) Nursi, The Letters, 428-32.

\(^{186}\) Colin Turner has assigned a whole chapter for detailed interpretation of Nursi’s thoughts on Love see Turner, The Quran Revealed, 433-62.

**Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed Nursi’s methodology for the revitalization of belief and spiritual training of individuals through Risale. The analysis was done in two major sections. First section discussed the importance of ‘I’ for the true recognition of self, universe and the Creator. Once a person understood the ultimate reality through introspection he became an embodiment of worship where the worship meant unconditional obedience to the Creator. To this end, faith by imitation was to be replaced with faith by inquiry - an ideal weapon to combat skepticism and materialism. This section also discussed how Nursi differentiated between the line of prophet-hood and the line of philosophy where the former led to salvation and the latter to faithlessness and failure. Second section of the chapter examined another facet of spiritual training which Nursi offered to a Muslim individual. It discussed the nature of Nursi’s moral and ethical training. It was all-pervasive, including all segments and age groups in society. He considered belief and good deeds inseparable. His view about hardships and sufferings in life was also discussed. He advised they be accepted as part of the Creator’s plan and a means to spiritual awakening. Inspired by the Quran, the method of his training appealed to heart, reason and conscience simultaneously. He was convinced that his approach would help his fellow Muslims not only to solidify their faith but also to counter the challenges to their faith posed by skeptics.

After this analysis one can conclude Nursi tried to inspire a conscious sense of worship for the revitalization of belief. He urged an individual to understand that he had been sent in this world to worship his Creator. For this purpose to be fulfilled, it was imperative for a human to recognize his Creator which was only possible through the practical method of inquiry. Faith acquired thus was far more practical and unshakable than the one acquired through

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*Bediuzzaman: Globalization, Ethics and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002);
Husayn Ayat Sa’id, "Ethics and Its Bases in Bediuzzaman’s Thoughts," in *Sixth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman: Globalization, Ethics and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002);
Tajdin Mustafa, "The Centrality of Ethics to Nursi’s Method of Reform," in *Sixth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman: Globalization, Ethics and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002);
imitation. Faith based on reasons and inquiry enabled a man to experience a relation with his Creator at every moment of his life and helped him combat the onslaughts of atheism. This was so even if an individual was living in a secular or godless society. His whole life became the embodiment of the worship of God and his servitude to his Creator was evident in all his actions through thick and thin. Such a person also braved the hardships in life; considering the trials a means to strengthen his faith.
CONCLUSION
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS
Conclusion and Recommendations

This dissertation has presented detailed study of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s life and his services for the reconstruction of Muslim society. The objectives of the study were to carry out a comprehensive study of Nursi’s impact on his society and the role of his magnum opus Risale-i Nur in his mission. His influence in the socio-political and educational spheres of the Turkey of his day for the revival of Islam; the services he rendered to strengthen the Muslims’ belief and what changes he made in his methodology as a revivalist to adapt to the changing conditions were the major areas to be investigated.

The study’s significance lies in the fact that little research work has been conducted in Pakistan on the contributions and services of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. So the lamentable fact that even in the academic circles of Pakistan there are very few who are familiar with the life and works of Nursi created a huge vacuum for an in-depth study of Nursi. The researcher is convinced that this study is momentous step in familiarizing the academics and students in Pakistan with Nursi and his services.

This concluding section of the research summarizes the findings of the study reached after the critical study of Nursi’s life and thoughts, introduction of Risale with the detailed examining of its subjects; and Nursi’s efforts for revival and reformation on different fronts. The findings are followed by recommendations for the future researchers about the areas of study on Nursi and his services. The scope of the present study did not allow the researcher to include those areas in this work.

The study has revealed that the greatest objective of Nursi’s life was to bring Muslims out of the scourge of darkness and make them a strong nation again. With this in view, at every stage of his life his focus had been on determining the factors responsible for decline, and the means that could rid Muslims of it. As he was mindful of the requirements of the changes in circumstances, his views were not stagnant. He fashioned his strategies according to the socio-political conditions after deep introspection.

In the first phase of his life he believed the survival of the Muslims was possible only through survival of the Ottoman Empire; so he made relentless efforts to save the Empire from downfall. In this phase his approach to reformation was top to bottom and considered political and educational reformation necessary for social change and for the survival of Empire. He was a strong supporter of constitutionalism. He believed that constitutionalism
could deliver the nation from despotism and prove beneficial in setting up a society based on true Islamic principles. He also planned to set up Mederastu’z-Zehra University to introduce educational reforms and bring about harmony in the education systems which existed at that time. Using all available channels of speech and writing, he addressed every class of the society urging them to realize the issues and play their respective roles for their solutions.

After the Empire disintegrated despite all his efforts and an aggressive secular government imposed itself on the Turkish society in the wake of WW-I, Nursi believed the very belief of Muslims was at stake. Consequently, he gave up his efforts on all other fronts and applied himself to saving the Muslims’ belief which henceforth became the prime objective of his life. This new approach was bottom to top. He distanced himself from politics and focused on the revitalization of an individual’s faith. This was the beginning of the phase known as New Said.

The prominent features of New Said phase were complete alienation from politics and persuading people to wage jihad e ma’navi. According to Nursi, such were the conditions in the political circle of the time that it was impossible to follow the injunctions of Islam if one was involved in politics. Such a degenerate system could easily make any one depraved. It was imperative to concentrate on strengthening the belief for which political system could prove a hurdle. This was the rationale behind Nursi’s alienation from politics and his advice to his students to avoid it. It was a wise decision which led to positive consequences in the long run. The other important feature of New Said was his choice of jihad with pen over physical jihad. This too proved to be a very judicious choice. The physical jihad could have worsened the conditions and caused mass bloodshed. Jihad e ma’navi and positive action forbade people from insurgency against the government stressing the importance of public order and patiently kept to the task of saving, reviving and reforming belief.

Nursi’s life and services cannot be understood without analyzing the role of Risale-i Nur. Risale was Nursi’s magnum opus. It played the most important role in the dissemination of Nursi’s teachings and ideals. He used Risale for his jihad e ma’navi on multiple fronts. When his plans to establish Medresetu’z-Zehra could not materialize due to prevailing condition of the time, Nursi used Risale to fulfill his educational goals that he wanted to achieve through Medresetu’z-Zehra. On the more spiritual front, Risale proved instrumental in revitalizing an individual’s faith. On the intellectual dimension, it refuted the allegations leveled against
Islam by the hostile forces and proved how Islam was morally and rationally superior to all other ideologies.

A major portion of Risale deals with the subject of belief and combating the evil ideologies of materialism and naturalism. To this end, Nursi stressed the importance of replacing belief through imitation with belief through investigation which could be achieved through reflective thought: observing the outer world and introspection of man’s inner world. It was the belief through investigation that could enable a person to logically refute the materialistic ideologies.

Risale-i Nur served a variety of other purposes too, ranging from strengthening an individual’s belief through appeal to reason and intuition and combating material ideologies on the intellectual battlefield; to synthesizing the Quranic teachings and modern sciences and laying down the principles for educational reforms. Methodology in Risale is connected with the post-modernism’s concept of ‘holism’ which entails "an integration of all the dimensions of personal life – affective and intuitive as well as cognitive.” It aims at bringing about a collective personality. Since the destruction was overwhelming and pervasive, the cure lied in establishing a community that had a collective heart in which ‘we’ superseded ‘I’. Collective wellbeing was thought to outweigh the importance of individualism. He instilled the same spirit of collective personality in the minds of Nur students to better combat the assaults of irreligion. He trained his students in such a way as to make them the living examples of Islamic virtues: individuals for whom worship was not confined to performing rituals but also took into its sweep every action of their and whose faith was not shaken by trials and hardships but strengthened. He made sincerity and brotherhood an integral part of Nur students’ character.

The hallmark of his struggle throughout his life was his commitment to public order and peace. Despite going through intolerable sufferings, exile and imprisonments, he never participated in or incited his students to violence. Instead, he advised his students to shun even the apparently minor practices which could harm their character and cause; advised them to refrain from the slightest of violent activities in their daily lives. Nursi’s rational behind training his students in such apparently minor matters was his belief that once the habits of positive action were formed at such small level, they will be reflected at broader level also.
Lastly, Risale also contributed in the revival of Muslim sciences of *tafsir* and *kalam*. It praised the positive aspects of spirituality and explained the importance of keeping a balance between man’s intellectual and spiritual needs. Normally, the people who follow their intellect ignore spirituality and the ones who have spiritual inclinations disregard intellect. Nursi also bridged the widening gap between men of religion and men of science. He proved to the men of science that religion was not retrogressive, nor was it against science. To the men of religion, he explained that science was not inherently wrong or against religion, rather it was the influence of materialist ideas that had infused sceptical view into the field of science. Once detached from the materialist philosophy, science could prove instrumental in a deeper understanding of The Creator by studying the phenomena present in the universe.

In view of his teachings and extraordinary services for the training and reformation of his society, Nursi certainly deserves the honorific title ‘Revivalist of Turkey’. He was an embodiment of all the qualities which a revivalist is supposed to possess. In Hacinebioglu words: A revivalist of Muslim nation should have three features in his personality, he should have sound knowledge (worldly and religious both), he should be a true practicing Muslim (in prayers and practices both) and thirdly wisdom should also be among his major qualities. Bediuzzaman had all these features combined in his personality. He had very good knowledge of religious and modern sciences of his time. He was a true practicing Muslim in his daily life (he lived a life like sahaba in our times). He was also wisdom personified as he very wisely took decisions for the revival of Muslims keeping the changing of conditions in view. So he is an Alim, Arif, and Hakeem at the same time.¹

**Recommendations:**

The scope and limitation of this piece did not allow the author to venture into some related and equally important areas of Nursi’s work and impact. The following are some the recommendations that one feels would be of interest to anyone who wants to embark on the research on similar areas.

In order to understand the importance and relevance of an intellectual’s work and impact, it is always advisable to relate it to the similar and contrasting works done by the other scholars

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¹Dr. Ismail Latif Hacinebioglu, interview by Shumaila Majeed, Suleyman Demirel University Isparta Turkey, January 16, 2014.
of the time. Turkey of the twentieth century was going through the social, cultural and political changes which were also going on in many other parts of the Muslim world. The ideological conflicts were similar in many ways too. The researcher found during the study that Nursi’s work was part of a much bigger whole. Many aspects of Nursi’s could have been comprehended and explored in a clearer way if his work was analyzed in comparison with those of his contemporaries in other parts of the world. As it was out of the scope of the present studies, they were not included here. It would be a worthwhile effort for the world of academia if future researchers explore Nursi’s services in comparison with one or more other major Muslim revivalist movements of the twentieth century.

Nursi believed in cultural and religious pluralism. He ventured to forge healthy relationship between the followers of Islam and other religions. In view of the modern world situation, gripped by interfaith rift and violence, how his pluralist ideas could be drawn upon for world peace could make for a valuable study.

Nursi’s concept of jihad is very important for further work because of his focus on ma’navi jihad as opposed to physical. The last two or three decades have seen Muslims being portrayed as terrorists in the non-Muslim world. In this perspective Nursi’s approach to jihad seems important and practical. There is a need for the study which aims to present how replacing the physical jihad with Nursi’s ma’navi jihad may impact the world scenario. Today, the term jihad has become synonymous with terrorism. It will be self-deception to say that it is merely due to the conspiracies of anti-Islamic forces. Primarily, the wrong interpretation of jihad by certain Muslim groups has allowed hostile forces to malign Islam.

Another area which affords potential for further research is Nursi’s political thoughts. Nur students distance themselves from politics even today. If these students continue to stay away from politics the reformation of political institutions may be affected. The conditions are not the same as they were when Nursi advised them to avoid politics, so there is a need for a study on the current policy of Nur students regarding involvement in the politics: would a change in the current policy prove beneficial or not. Nursi’s impact on present political, educational and social spheres of his country should also be researched along with role of Nur movement in the present de-secularization of Turkey and its inclination towards Islam.

The study of Risale-i Nur as an exegesis of the Quran is another important topic for future research. But the researcher of such a study should be proficient in both Arabic and Turkish.
languages. Further, a complete Urdu translation of Risale-i Nur is also recommended. This translation should be done directly from the Turkish version of Risale.

In Pakistani context Nursi’s concept of educational reforms can make for a valuable study. The present parallel education systems of Pakistan should be studied in the light of Medresetu’z-Zehra project to analyze how multiple education systems in the country are contributing to the overall degeneration of society.

Nursi’s thoughts on spirituality, its integration in Risale and its comparison with Sufism could of interest for future researchers. In addition the role of Risale in the revival of *ilm al kalam* and its contribution in the science of *tafsir* is another area requiring an in-depth research.
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الْيَوْمَ أَكْلَمَتْكُمْ نُكْمَ مرَّتَينَ وَأَنْتُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ يَعْمَنُونَ وَرَضِيتْ لَكُمْ الْإِسْلَامُ دِينًا

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