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**Said Nursi and the Nurculuk Movement:  
Navigating Secularism and Islamic Consciousness in Türkiye**

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**Abstract**

The paper explores the life, ideology and works of Said Nursi, who is known as a prominent Muslim scholar and the founder of the Nurculuk movement in Türkiye. It investigates the impacts of Türkiye's secular establishment on religious and ethnic minorities, particularly conservative Muslims who endeavoured to preserve their Islamic culture, traditions and economic spaces to sustain their identity. Said Nursi's significant contributions to Islamic ideology, democracy, human rights and the free trade economy are explored. His life story and crucial role during World War I, as well as his services to the state, are examined. The paper also examines Nursi's Dershanes Centers, which were mainly established to promote his ideology and the value of his work. A descriptive-analytical approach is employed to explore and analyze the life, writings and work of Said Nursi, as well as the impact of his ideology on Turkish politics, society and the Nurculuk movement, utilizing data from secondary sources. Finally, the paper addresses the fragmentation of the Nurculuk movement following Nursi's death. It examines the emergence of the Fethullah Gülen community, which drew inspiration from Nursi's teachings to promote human values and social harmony.

**Keywords:** Said Nursi, Nurculuk Movement, Turkish secularism, Islamic consciousness, Fethullah Gülen community, Kurdish identity, Ottoman Empire

**INTRODUCTION**

Said Nursi (1873-1960) was a notable Muslim scholar and the founder of the Nurculuk movement. He is an important figure in modern Turkish history. His life and work highlight the conflict and interaction between religious beliefs and the secular state in a diverse society. The establishment of

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a secular state in Türkiye, guided by Kemalist principles, marginalized various religious and ethnic groups, such as conservative Muslims and Kurds. This marginalization pushed the conservative class to promote, develop and practice their own spiritual, cultural, political, economic, financial and social ideological norms, as well as to create avenues where these groups could preserve and express their identities.

Nursi was born in Eastern Türkiye and belonged to a Kurdish family. He was a member of the Naqshbandi school of thought, a Sunni Sufi brotherhood. In 1907, he began developing an educational curriculum integrating religious and scientific education. However, Sultan Abdulhamid II refused to accept his suggestion to establish a secular-religious school in Eastern Türkiye. Nursi later joined the constitutional reform movement of the Young Turks and actively participated in its activities. He was arrested multiple times by the state on accusations of participating in rebellious activities against the government but was released each time when the allegations were proved false. Initially, Nursi supported Atatürk, but in 1925, he was arrested for alleged involvement in the Sheikh Said Revolts in Eastern Türkiye, which aimed to restore the Caliphate. During his imprisonment, he wrote an extensive and influential book known as *Risale-i Nur* ("Epistles of Light"), which was his interpretation of the Holy Quran. The Nur Movement gained significant prominence following the dissolution of the Sufi brotherhoods in 1925 (Vahide, 2005).

It established reading circles whose main purpose was to preach and disseminate Islamic ideology, empowering people to preserve their Muslim identity under secularism and fostering the transformation of Türkiye in line with Islamic principles. The movement's main objective was to regain Islam in Türkiye by integrating religious studies with modern scientific education to promote social and political development while preserving Islam as a key aspect of Muslim identity. Nursi supported certain Western ideas, such as nationalism, but emphasized communalism over individualism. His works and writings were banned by the state. Both Nursi and the movement supported the Islamic government of Neçmeddin Erbakan. However, after his death, the movement fractured into various groups, with the most influential being the Gülen Movement led by Fethullah Gülen (Markham & Pirim, 2011).

Nursi played a crucial role as a Muslim scholar and religious leader by contributing his ideological and religious thoughts to the promotion of democracy, human rights and a free trade economy. His major written work, *Risale-i-Nûr* (Treatises of Light), is an interpretation of the Quran aimed at enhancing and developing the religious understanding of Muslims in Türkiye and beyond. His ideology and beliefs emphasized the value of Islam, democracy and human rights, countering the belief that democracy and Islam were incompatible.

As the founder of the Nurculuk Movement, Nursi held a strong influence in social and religious circles. The movement, based on Nursi's teachings, faced many restrictions and state-imposed bans. Despite these challenges, Nursi's ideology spread across the country through secret networks and his writings. He inspired a devoted community of followers who established study groups known as Dershanes. These Dershanes were dedicated to disseminating the ideological beliefs of Nursi, focusing on his Islamic teachings as well as ideas about democracy, human rights and science, which had a significant impact on Turkish society (Markham & Pirim, 2011; Vahide, 2005).

The paper explores various aspects of Nursi's life, including his ideology, work and writings, as major contributions that brought substantial changes to religious and social Turkish factions. His contributions preserved Islamic culture and traditions in the face of growing secularism. He addressed challenges faced by religious minorities and Muslims under a secular government, advocating for the maintenance of Islamic identity and traditions while opposing secularism in the state. Furthermore, the paper investigates the division of the Nurculuk movement after Nursi's death and the rise of the Fethullah Gülen community, which drew considerable inspiration from Said Nursi's legacy. The main purpose of the paper is to highlight the contemporary significance of Nursi's ideas for modern Türkiye and the Muslim world.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Şükran Vahide, in his book "Islam in Modern Türkiye," narrates the entire life of Said Nursi, from his childhood to his death. Nursi was an intellectual Muslim philosopher and scholar who dedicated his life to advocating his ideas and promoting Islam as an ideal religion compatible with modernity. He gained significant popularity among the Turkish Muslim young generation after Türkiye became a Republic. Following his death, his followers continued to spread his message throughout the world. He (Nursi) had a good command of Tafsir, Islamic teachings, and hadith and was an influential speaker. He addressed the difficulties and requirements of the modern age in light of Islamic principles. His spiritual and religious ideas continue to resonate with a large circle of young supporters. Over six decades, he strove for Pan-Islamism, advocating for the unity of Muslims as one nation. He preached to Muslims to align their lives with Islamic teachings. His writings were a great source of his increasing popularity among the people, offering profound understandings of Turkish history, from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. His main purpose was to revive Islamic values and teachings during the Republic period among Muslims.

Ian Markham and Suendam Birinci Pirim, in their book "An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings," discussed in detail the ideas and efforts of Said Nursi. The writers wrote this book to revive and highlight the significance of the philosophy and struggle of Nursi, portraying him (Said Nursi) as a great source of inspiration for all other contemporary Islamic movements in the region. The book extensively explores the ideas of Said Nursi and his contributions to Islam in Türkiye and beyond. Said Nursi declared that Islam is compatible with modernity and should be followed in this light. He emphasized that Islam does not stop Muslims from pursuing modernity, technology and scientific development. Moreover, Nursi argued that Muslims can live harmoniously within a secular state and are committed to peace with non-Muslims. He asserted that Islam and its values should guide humanity, as all modernity ultimately derives from Islamic principles.

Tubanur Yesilhark Özkan, in his book "A Muslim Response to Evil," explores the reasons behind the evil nature of humanity, the divine and human problems and the creation of Satan. The writer's work mainly focuses on immorality. He explores the reasons for evils and immorality in the light of the Holy Quran and the writings of Said Nursi. Özkan evaluates and compares the works of different scholars with Said Nursi's Resale-i-Nur and concludes that free will, (ego) and sharr (Evil) drive individuals' actions (Özkan, 2016).

Necati Aydin, in his book 'Said Nursi and Science in Islam,' conducts a semantic analysis of the term 'Sharr' in the Quran, while also examining Said Nursi's views on theodicy based on his

contemporary work in *Risale-i-Nur*. The writer identifies three groups of scholars' reactions to the scientific advancement in Muslim countries; the first group forbids scientific development to defend the religion, declaring science as a source that takes Muslims away from their beliefs, the second group considers religion and science as two different and unrelated subjects—science as necessary for worldly matters and religion as important for the afterlife. The third group of Muslim scholars associated scientific technology with secularism and they demanded to separate science from secularism to integrate it into Islam. Said Nursi falls in the third group of religious scholars, arguing that science should be free from all forms of religious bias and emphasizing that Islam and science came from the same divine source. The main purpose of Aydin's work is to inspire readers to adopt an encouraging perspective on science through an Islamic lens (Aydin, 2019).

Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, in his book "Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought," describes Said Nursi as one of the most significant Islamic scholars and philosophers who brought major social changes to Turkish society. The writer highlights the role of Said Nursi in addressing the challenges posed by Western modernization in Türkiye. Nursi maintained a deep association with Sharia and he wanted to resuscitate the Muslim community. He studied Western scientific logic and philosophies to understand their society and ideas, yet he always prioritized the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah, trusting them as the ultimate solution to all challenges. The writer has also discussed the spiritual and moral ideas of Said Nursi (Abu-Rabi, 2016).

The literature review provides extensive and enriched data on the political philosophy of Said Nursi, and his beliefs regarding the revival of Islamic values which were once a dominant part of Turkish history. It sheds light on the role of Said Nursi in the revival of the Turkish Islamic legacy, the challenges posed by modernizing Türkiye, the compatibility of his ideas with modern Türkiye and his enduring influence. However, the review falls short of fully addressing the influence and impact of Said Nursi's ideas on the emergence of Western modernization in Türkiye. It also does not address the role of Nursi's students in reducing Western influences and pressures in Türkiye or the broader impact of his ideas and struggles on the political and social lives of individuals.

### **SAID NURSI AS A MUSLIM RELIGIOUS SCHOLAR AND REFORMER**

Nursi was born in Nurs Village in the Bitlis province of Eastern Türkiye (Ghurayb, 2011) in 1878. He was brought up in Nurs and received his education in nearby districts. His name, Nursi, reflects his association with his hometown, Nurs. Which means "The Light". He completed his primary religious education in the eastern part of Türkiye. At the age of ten, he left home to join a madrassa. He gained knowledge from great scholars and Islamic ulema (Markham & Pirim, 2011). Known for his intelligence and vision from a young age, he spent most of his life in Bitlis and Van, earning a sincere, intelligent and faithful person. By the age of twenty, he had studied Islamic religious courses as well as scientific subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry and astronomy. In Van, he established a madrassa where he introduced a new educational system that integrated the teaching of sciences and religious studies. This educational pattern was part of Nursi's broader educational reforms, aimed at removing backwardness and ignorance and addressing the social and political challenges of Turkish society (Ghurayb, 2011).

Between 1878 and 1960, many religious scholars and intellectuals in Türkiye wanted to foster unity among Muslims of all ethnicities, sects and groups. One of these scholars was Said Nursi, who

strongly advocated for the unity of Muslims. During this period, the concept of Muslim unity, or 'Ittihad-i-Islam,' gained prominence in the Ottoman Turkish era. Efforts to promote Pan-Islamism brought fruitful results, uniting the empire's diplomats, bureaucrats, military personnel and individuals in pursuit of Muslim unity. Other Muslims worldwide recognized the Ottoman Empire as a central force for Muslim unity, Sultan Abdul Hamid II greatly promoted Pan-Islamism globally.

The primary goal of Pan-Islamism was to stop the domination of Europeans over the Ottoman Empire. However, this idea ultimately failed by the end of WWI, as the Ottoman Empire collapsed. In 1923, the Caliphate was abolished and by 1924, Türkiye adopted a secular and liberal foreign policy. Despite this, the idea of Pan-Islamism or Ittihad-i-Islam persisted among individuals who continued to believe in its ideals.

Said Nurse played a significant role in incorporating Pan-Islamism both before and after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Through his writings and speeches, he emphasized the necessity of Muslim unity. During the Republican era, he continued to advocate for Pan-Islamism, establishing connections with religious scholars and leaders worldwide. Like many other religious scholars, Nursi viewed Kemalism as a threat to Islam (Cook, 2016).

In 1907, Nursi went to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, during its final years. Soon, he established himself in the political and intellectual spheres of the Ottoman Empire. He actively participated in national affairs, becoming a member of the Committee of Union and Progress, the Constitutional Movement and the Society for Muslim Unity. Between 1914 to 1916, he organized resistance against the Russian Tsarist and Armenian invasion of the Ottoman Empire. Captured by the Russians, he was imprisoned from 1916 to 1918 but later escaped and reached Istanbul via Berlin, Germany, where he was celebrated as a hero (Ghurayb, 2011).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as WWI unfolded and the Ottoman Empire disintegrated, Said Nursi witnessed these transformative events firsthand. He made great efforts to preserve the Ottoman Empire, striving to safeguard the honour and identity of Islam. He emphasized the unity of the global Muslim community and promoted the idea of 'Pan-Islamism' as a means to achieve political, divine, economic and social unity among Muslims. He delivered speeches advocating Muslim unity and warning against the disadvantages of nationalism, greediness and philosophical ideas that contradicted Quranic teachings. He consistently highlighted the importance of Islamic unity (Markham & Pirim, 2011).

He participated in many liberation organizations against Western forces. He served at Madrasa *Darul'-Hikmeti'l-Islamiye*, promoting an Islamic ideology and offering guidance to address the shifting political order from an empire rooted in Islamization toward a state government embracing secularism. In 1923, Mustafa Kemal came to power and founded the newly independent state of Türkiye with a policy of secularization. Kemal and Nursi held opposing ideologies; Nursi supported implementing Islamization within the state, whereas Kemal Atatürk vehemently opposed Nursi's ideas, viewing him as a great threat to the state. Kemal wanted to make Nursi silent, perceiving him as a threat to the country's modernization efforts (Ghurayb, 2011).

Nursi came back to Van to proceed with his educational goals, realizing the need to defeat the secular mindset that had sidelined Islamic ideology and practice from Turkish society in the name

of advancement and modernization. Under Kemal Atatürk's leadership, Türkiye quickly transformed from Islamization to secularization and nationalism. In 1928, Islam was officially removed as the state religion and in 1937; secularism was enshrined as the constitutionally imposed ideology. Secularism was reaffirmed as a fundamental part of the constitution in 1982.

A new secular culture emerged, accompanied by reforms that transformed dress codes and living styles. In 1925, the wearing of the turban and other traditional garments was constitutionally banned. In 1934, further restrictions were imposed, particularly targeting Sufi circles, where the wearing of head and shoulder coverings was prohibited except during religious ceremonies. Around seventy people were sentenced to death for opposing these bans. Nursi stubbornly refused to follow this ban. He continued wearing traditional dress, including the fez and turban and used a traditional hat during prayers. Kemal's government tried its best to enforce these bans but failed to make him abandon his dress.

Nursi was entitled to Bediüzzaman meaning "Wonder of the Age" and Ustad, meaning teacher and guide. He was very popular in Eastern Türkiye, particularly among the Kurds people. He organized and launched a non-violent campaign to reinforce and revive Islamic ideology and Quranic teachings in Turkish society. From 1925 to 1956, Nursi was internally exiled, and accused of involvement in the Kurdish Independence movement. Nursi believed that killings and conflicts among Muslims were prohibited in Islam. During his 25 years of exile, he remained in police custody and endured mental torture, harassment and many attempts on his life through poisoning during the Kemalist era. He faced numerous public trials and judicial proceedings which he used as opportunities to promote his nonviolent campaign for Islamic ideology. Ultimately, he was cleared of all charges. During his imprisonment, Nursi survived primarily on a diet of olives and bread.

Nurses emphasized promoting positivity in response to hostility toward Islam and advocated for prioritizing modern sciences alongside Islamic teachings. His non-violent movement, known as Cihad-i Mânavî (Moral Spiritual Jihad), aimed to reinstate Islamic ideology and Quranic teachings in the lives of Turkish people. He endorsed this mission by writing essays, letters, articles and short books. He deliberately wrote in Arabic script to preserve the Islamic legacy of the Turkish Empire rather than adopting the Latin script promoted by Kemal's regime (Ghurayb, 2011).

Said Nursi founded the non-secular Nur Movement (Nurçuluk), whose main purpose was to reinterpret and propagate Islamic teachings and values for modern Turkish society. Similar efforts had previously been made by the Young Ottomans, who wanted to make Islam compatible with and as part of the constitution. He (Said Nursi) sturdily criticized positivism, believing that meaningful transformation could only come through changes in mindsets, rather than reforms imposed on institutions (Harvard Divinity School, 2003).

Nursi launched the *Risale-i Nur* campaign, during which his voluntary supporters secretly distributed thousands of his writings throughout the state. These writings were copied by his followers by hand, despite the dangers involved. His followers were under the observation of state authorities. Their homes were checked out for his writings and many were arrested and imprisoned. By 1947, two duplicating machines were being used to copy his writings even in the Latin script of the modern Turkish language. His writings got immense popularity in Istanbul and Ankara, which were hubs of bureaucrats, army officers and young university students. In 1956, the

court lifted the ban on his writings and in 1957, his book *The Risale-i Nur* was printed in Latin script by the modern state press (Ghurayb, 2011).

Thus, Nursi was a religious scholar and philosopher of recent history who witnessed and contributed to many significant events that had a profound impact on the world. These events included the disintegration of the Turkish Empire after W.W.I. which led to the birth of secular Türkiye, the colonization and subsequent decolonization of Muslim states that adopted state-nationalism, the rise of major ideologies such as communism and capitalism and the emergence of major movements like materialism, anarchism and atheism. The world was being restructured culturally, religiously and scientifically. Nursi was deeply concerned about the issues and challenges related to religion and humanity that Muslims faced (Markham & Pirim, 2011).

Said Nursi's ideology and writings remain highly influential and admired, even in the West, as they insisted on keeping Islam separate from politics. His ideological beliefs are a great source of admiration and encouragement for Muslims, as he upheld and preached the core beliefs and principles of Islam. He was profoundly concerned about the issues and problems related to religion and humanity that Muslims faced (Markham & Pirim, 2011).

### **Negative Effects of Secular Establishment Provided Alternative Spaces**

Türkiye is a diverse country with multiple ethnicities and religions, but the secular state has limited its social and political legitimacy by excluding various religious sects. In Turkish secularism, both Islam and Kurds have been perceived as threats to state security. Traditionally, the state has supported only groups that closely follow Kemalist ideology. Those who did not accept Kemalism found alternative spaces in cultural, political, financial and social spheres. They shaped and maintained their Islamic society and identity, effectively creating a parallel Islamic community within the secular state. These alternative spaces provided conservative Muslims with a renewed sense of life and identity. Despite these state bans and suppression, Muslims found ways to raise their voices through TV channels, radio programs, newspapers and magazines. In the early 1980s, the middle and lower-middle classes, predominantly from Anatolia and often referred to as the "Anatolian Tigers," established their first business and trade association, MUSİAD.<sup>3</sup>

### **Importance of Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Society in Türkiye**

These alternatives like MUSİAD and various TV channels played a significant role in understanding and maintaining Islamic ideology, stability and identity. The exclusion of Islam and these alternatives could undermine democracy political and social progress and the overall growth of the country. As a result, Türkiye's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society forced the country to pursue integration within the framework of secularism. The role of Islamic circles was significant in fostering the development and stability of the country. These groups did not pursue radical goals: their main purpose was to safeguard Islamic ideology, traditions and identity.

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<sup>3</sup>MUSİAD (Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği - Independent Industrialists and Businesspeople Association) was established by those excluded from TUSİAD (Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği - Turkish Industrialists and Businesspeople Association), a powerful and pro-establishment business group. Some secular groups argue that the "M" in MUSİAD stands for Müslüman (Muslim) instead of müstakil (independent). Many MUSİAD members openly describe their organization as a Muslim business association.

## Background of the Nurculuk Movement

Nurculuk was a major religious and social movement in Türkiye, led by the popular Islamic Turkish scholar, Said Nursi. He is still remembered and known for his great historical role. He played a pivotal role in renewing awareness of Islam, primarily through his writings and discussion circles. His ideology promoted Islamic knowledge and understanding while reimagining the concepts of democracy, human rights and a free-market economy for both the state and individuals.

Nursi was born in Bitlis, an Eastern Anatolian province and was of Kurdish ethnicity. As a prominent religious leader, he spent much of his life in exile or under court trials. He authored *Risale-i-Nûr* (Treatises of Light), a collection of detailed and compelling Quranic interpretations, aimed at enhancing the religious awareness of Muslims in Türkiye and beyond (Yavuz, 2000; Sacmalı, 2019).

He believed that fostering a better understanding of Islamic ideology among Muslims was essential to retaining and maintaining Islam within Turkish politics and society. He emphasized the need to strengthen the Muslim faith to better resist secularism. The Nurculuk Movement gained immense popularity in Türkiye due to its unique approach to the text,<sup>4</sup> writings, strategies and reforms, which made this movement different from all other movements. In 1909, Nursi was arrested for a short time due to his suspected involvement in an Islamic reactionary rebellion movement but he was released after being found not guilty.

## Nursi's Ideas on Islam and Democracy

Nursi preached that democracy and Islam are inherently associated and not separate concepts. He argued that democracy represents freedom, which is necessary for establishing a state that upholds equality and justice in society (Balci, 2005). He emphasized individual freedom and liberty as necessary foundations for fostering the development of people's skills and abilities. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of maintaining justice within society (Vahide, 2005). He identified poverty, ignorance and internal conflicts as major issues of the Muslim community. He urged the people of Eastern Anatolia to move beyond tribal and regional loyalties, advocating instead for the creation of a unified Muslim identity that transcends local affiliations.

## Impact of Military Service on Nursi's Ideology

Nursi served as a regiment commander during WWI, fighting against Russian and Armenian forces in Eastern Türkiye. During the war, he taught his students a Qur'an commentary known as *Isharat al-I'jaz* (Signs of Miraculousness). He was wounded in battle, captured by Russian forces and spent two years as a prisoner of war in Siberia.

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<sup>4</sup> Most Kurds in Turkey belong to the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam, whereas most Turks belong to the Hanafi School. Some Hanafi Turkish *Nurcu* follow the Shafi'i rites during their daily prayers due to their loyalty to Said Nursi. Said Nursi was consciously Kurdish. Yet he always rejected Kurdish nationalism and considered Turkey the common homeland of the Ottoman nation. Due to the prevailing political situation since the establishment of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), many Turkish *Nurcus* react strongly to any mention of Nursi's ethnic origin. Some Kurdish Nationalists seek to nationalize the personality and writings of Said Nursi as "Kurdish."



In 1918, he escaped and returned to Istanbul via Europe. Nursi spoke and wrote extensively on various issues, urging people to raise awareness and take action against foreign occupation in Ottoman lands. Even during the British occupation of Istanbul in March 1920, he actively supported the Turkish National Struggle (1919-1922) through his articles and speeches, advocating for the expulsion of foreign invaders from Türkiye.

### **Nursi's Initial Responses to Opposition**

In 1922, Nursi was invited to Ankara by Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha to speak at the newly formed National Assembly. However, upon seeing some deputies' dismissive attitudes toward Islam, he delivered powerful speeches that sparked heated exchanges with Ghazi Mustafa Kemal and other officials. Until then, Nursi had believed that political solutions were key to addressing the problems of Muslims and the Ottoman State. This experience prompted a major shift in his perspective, as he came to realize that change would not come from state institutions, but from individuals themselves (Nereid, 1997).

### **Nursi's Concept of Islamic Law**

Nursi's view of Islam was rooted in his understanding of human nature. He believed that the absence of religion leads to conflict and wars. He applied this idea to society, arguing that removing God from public life causes many of humanity's problems. Rather than proposing an Islamic constitution or a specific legal system, Nursi focused on encouraging Muslims to reconnect with Allah through a different approach to understanding and practising their faith.

### **Nursi's Works and Readings Banned by the State**

Nursi's collection of written works is known as the *Risale-i Nûr Külliyyatı* (Epistles of Light)<sup>5</sup> (Balci, 2005). It was the major work of his life, representing a discourse of enlightenment (Markham & Pirim, 2011). The state banned both his works and their public reading. To circumvent this, a secret network called the Nur Postacıları (Postmen of Light) distributed his writings. This network, involved in distributing and copying Nursi's commentaries, grew as his followers made and spread more copies throughout Anatolia.<sup>6</sup> As a core group of followers began to form, Nursi was arrested on charges of creating an illegal Sufi order under the secular state. He was imprisoned for 11 months by the Eskişehir Court.

### **Dershanes Established Reading Circles of Nursi's Works**

Later, the *Risale-i Nûr* served as the foundation for creating numerous reading circles called Dershanes. These circles evolved into textual communities, where membership was based on reading and embracing the philosophy of the texts. Over time, these circles spread across Anatolia, introducing Islamic teachings alongside global discussions on democracy, human rights and science. Today, the number of people who follow the *Risale-i Nûr* is in the millions.

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<sup>5</sup> Nursi wrote some of his best work of *Risale-i-Nûr Külliyyatı* in Eskişehir Jail in 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Since Nursi wrote all his commentaries in Arabic script, his followers insisted on hand-copying the texts to preserve the use of the Arabic alphabet in Turkey.

### **Nursi's Sources of Knowledge: The Quran, the Prophet and the Universe**

Nursi's work was grounded in three main sources of knowledge: The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Quran and the universe. His understanding of these sources was profoundly shaped by the Holy Quran. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was studied as a source of ethics and justice. Nursi's Qur'anic commentaries were tradition-based and characterized by a different language and approach. He employed a blend of Persian, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish to express his ideas and foster a sense of unity among Muslims.

### **Popularity of Nursi's Ideas in Turkish Society**

Nursi's ideas gained widespread popularity among the large Turkish population due to their different and vibrant approach, with reading circles playing a key role in their dissemination. He played a pivotal role in the transformation of Islamic ideology and values from traditional oral methods to modern print media. Nursi emphasized providing religious education grounded in reason. For Nursi, increasing the religious consciousness of individuals was a crucial first step in establishing a just society governed by the rule of law. Thus, the Nurculuk Movement is not a political Islamic movement but a faith-based movement focused on enhancing religious awareness.

### **Nursi's Ideas on Islam and Politics**

Nursi was always hesitant to engage in politics, viewing it as a realm where diverse groups with conflicting interests often clash. He believed that religion should not be used to advance specific agendas, as it represents a fundamental pillar of society's survival. Associating religion with a particular party or faction would, in his view, distort the essence of true Islam. Consequently, Nursi opposed the concept of an Islamic Party. In his writings, Nursi advocated for gradual change, emphasizing that Islamic values should first permeate individuals, then spread throughout society and eventually influence the political sphere. He regarded politics as a reflection of societal values and avoided defining any religion in opposition to Islam.

In the later stages of his life, Nursi deliberately distanced himself from politics, focusing instead on enhancing the religious awareness of Muslims.<sup>7</sup> When Türkiye transitioned to a multi-party system, Nursi favoured the Democrat Party due to their positive stance towards Islam, notably their decision in 1950 to restore the call to prayer (azaan) to its original Arabic form after 19 years of being recited in Turkish (Nereid, 1997; Yavuz, 2000).

### **Nursi's Death and Standing of the M. Fethullah Gülen Community**

Nursi passed away in Urfa in 1960 at the age of 87. After his death, the Nurculuk Movement fragmented along ethnic, class, educational, generational and sectional lines. Nursi made a significant impact on reviving Islamic thought and interpreting Islam in modern contexts. Inspired by Nursi's works and other prominent Muslim thinkers, the Fethullah Gülen community, initially a faith-based group, emerged as a notable movement. This community focuses on educating younger

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<sup>7</sup> During the Republican period, Nursi wrote *Emirdağ*, *Kastamonu* and *Barla Lahikaları*. (The addenda or letters written from the towns of Emirdağ, Kastamonu and Barla where he was under house arrest.) These were collected by his students and included Nursi's communication with his students and followers. They are in conversational form including questions and Nursi's responses.

generations to become versatile and resourceful individuals who embrace universal human values such as love, tolerance, the pursuit of knowledge and coexistence—principles deeply rooted in Islam. Its mission includes fostering social harmony and establishing different institutions to promote these ideals (Balci, 2005).

### **Findings**

1. The secular state policies undermined Turkish religious and minority groups. This exclusion led to the creation of alternative spaces where these groups could preserve and express their Islamic ideology, cultural traditions and identities. They established their business community, known as MUSİAD. Along with various TV channels.
2. Said Nursi played a significant role in enhancing Islamic consciousness among Turkish Muslims. His treatise, the *Risale-i-Nûr*, gave insightful explanation and understanding of the Quran that consolidated the faith of Turkish Muslims and stabilized their development and religious identity. This growing religious awareness played an active role by inspiring people to resist secularism.
3. Nursi believed that democracy and Islam are compatible. He argued that the Islamic values of freedom and democracy are essential to be implemented in society to maintain justice and equality. He emphasized the implementation of Islamic values, laws and traditions, alongside the principles of freedom, human rights and a free trade economy.
4. The Nurculuk Movement, rooted in Nursi's teachings, became a powerful social-religious force in Türkiye. Despite government bans, Nursi's writings were disseminated secretly, expanding his circle of followers. The movement successfully integrated religious teachings with modern concepts of democracy, human rights and sciences.
5. Nursi's meetings with opposition parties and groups encouraged him to focus on bringing individual and social change rather than relying on political solutions. He believed that genuine transformation could be achieved by fostering individual change and promoting religious and social awareness, rather than depending on state institutions.

After the death of Nursi, the Nurculuk movement fragmented into various groups. Among these, the Fethullah Gülen community became the most influential. This community was influenced by Nursi's teachings. This community followed the legacy of Nursi and promoted his teachings of human rights, democracy and other Islamic values to the people.

### **CONCLUSION**

Said Nursi's life and works provide profound visions into the relationship between Islamic religion and secularism in contemporary Türkiye. Due to his great role in promoting awareness of Islamic ideology and values to incorporate democracy into society, he left a lasting influence on Türkiye. The Nurculuk Movement successfully dealt with the challenge of secularism through its teachings, writings and the creation of alternative spaces to preserve Islamic values and traditions. It still holds a large community of followers who strive to keep Islam alive in secular Türkiye.

Nursi was a great Islamic scholar and reformer who emphasized transforming individuals' beliefs and minds by fostering religious awareness and understanding. He played a significant role in maintaining the Islamic identity of Muslims in Türkiye. Following Nursi's death, the Fethullah Gülen community emerged, strongly supporting his legacy and promoting his mission to address the

challenges of modern Türkiye. Nursi's legacy of incorporating democracy and Islam within the state presents a valuable model for multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies like Türkiye that grapple with secularism. His inspirational thoughts encourage Turkish society to implement and maintain Islamic ideology, democracy, equality justice and human rights.

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