

## The Fifteen Century Hijri

The dawn of the fifteenth century of Hijri today tends its air throughout the world. The Hijri Calendar began with the migration of the Holy Prophet? Normally, (peace be upon him) every era is reckoned from the birth or death of any great personality or a victory gained or the establishment of kingdom.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that the Religion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was not named after him; rather the name of his Religion speaks of his Message. Islam is not the name of any person : it means a conscious decision to submit oneself to God. The same characteristic is to be found in the nomenclature of its Calendar : it does not begin with the birth of any great personage, not even that of the last Prophet (peace be upon him) whom Muslims love and revere only next to God.

The Calendar of Islam neither begins with the birth of the Prophet, nor with his death, but instead with his migration. This means that whenever a new Islamic century begins, it brings a Message for you. It does not remind you of any person or class of persons, but refreshes your memory of the great cause for which the Prophet (peace be upon him) left his hearth and home to settle down in a new city. It was undoubtedly a great cause — a great Message — which took him there, not meant for the safety of his own life nor that of his Companions. The step was taken to preserve and deliver the Message of God to the whole of mankind. The advent of this century, then reminds us that even those things which we hold dearest can be given up for the sake of a great cause. The incident it conjures in our minds was one of the most daring steps ever taken in the annals of the world. It also gives up hope and courage by demonstrating that whatever the hardships and adverse circumstances be and, however great the opposition may be, if a cause is meant for the good of humanity and it is pursued with sincerity and resolute will, it is bound to live and thrive and ultimately succeed in achieving its end.

Thus, the fifteenth century of the Islamic era is not a Message of hope for Muslims alone; it is a gospel for the whole of mankind, especially for those who have anything to offer for the good of humanity and who also want to strive for it.

So will this century prove a blessing for Muslims and humanity, at large, or will it be a calamity? This cannot be predicted at present. These are things that are determined by God. But there are also truths pointed out by the Qur'-an which remain unchanged for ever. One of these truth is:

*That man hath only that for which he maketh effort. (Al-Rjdi:39)?*

Man gets only that in his life of the world and in the Hereafter for which he strives and makes an effort. Verily, he can lay claim only to the efforts made by him and to the outcome of such an effort. God further says in the same context:

*And that his effort will be seen. (Al-Radi:40)?*

What God says is really a heartening Message for the whole of mankind. It means that in every time and clime, the efforts made by man will bear fruit. Anyone who strives for any cause will see the result of his efforts.

*And afterward he will be repaid for it with fullest payment. (Al-Radi:41)*

The promise made for the outcome of human effort, as spoken of in the above verses, is really a Message of hope for mankind. Iqbal has alluded to the same fact in one of his couplets in which he says:

*Effort fashions the life, makes it heaven or hell;*

*Man, by nature, is neither a saint nor a devil.*

I would substitute the word 'century' for man in this couplet. This also applies to the oncoming fifteenth century as well as to the centuries that are past: they were neither a blessing nor a curse. The virtue or vice of a century depends on the effort made by man. We cannot foretell whether a century, a year, a month or even a day or a moment is auspicious or inauspicious. Islam does not admit to any such theory of luckiness or ill-fetedness of time as found in other nations which have been deprived of the guidance of God's Prophets (peace be upon him). To say that the coming century will be propitious for the Muslim nation or that it will bring ill-luck and dishonour to any people is not the Islamic way of thought. There is nothing in the scripture or the traditions of the Prophet to support such predictions. Actually, the vary prognostication about time is highly injurious to human effort. If a man were to know beforehand that the approaching hour was inauspicious for him, he would cease to make any effort or he would indolent become irresolute and indolent.

The last Prophet (peace be upon him) of God plucked out superstition and credulity (peace be upon him) by its root and branch. Once there was an eclipse of the sun during the Prophet's; life time or, perhaps, it was willed by God for the guidance of the Prophet's followers. The Prophet's (peace be upon him) son Ibrahim had died a short prior to this.<sup>2</sup> This was the time when ignorance and superstition pervaded the entire world and its vestiges still lingered on in Arabia. The bereavement suffered by the Prophet (peace be upon him) was highly emotional. So much so that some Muslims came out with the comment: "the sun has been affected by the bereavement of the Prophet (peace be upon him)." Any other religious leader or founder of a movement would have kept rather quiet at this instead of contradicting such an innocent remark. The Prophet (peace be upon him) however, was not party to this rumour, one which actually enhanced his prestige and influence. The people themselves had thought of it and, therefore, it was not incumbent on him to disclaim the notion. There is though a difference between a Prophet (peace be upon him) of God and a worldly leader of people. The very things which are considered advantageous by worldly-minded people and political leaders are treated as infidelity by the Messengers of God. I do not know if anyone else has given such a good account of himself as the Prophet (peace be upon him) of Islam. Of course, we might come across similar examples of rectitude among the others Prophets (peace be upon him) but it would be difficult to find a similar example among political leaders. The Holy Prophet addressed his followers, saying:

The sun and the moon are two of the signs of God. They do not undergo an eclipse on the life or death of human beings.

The Prophet made it clear that the view some people had expressed was wrong. The sun and moon are governed by another law which takes no notice of the death or any other happening connected with any man, however great he may be. If the Prophet (peace be upon him) had remained silent, nothing untoward would have happened. At the most it would have been

taken as the spontaneous expression of love and affection or the result of the over-credulousness of certain persons, but the Prophet (peace be upon him) of God could not condone such superstitious ideas. He immediately rejected it as if declaring to posterity : "No, no! My family and my progeny has nothing to do with it. The universe created by God is much more important than my family, and the Lord of the world is independent of all creations. His Law is above everything else." This was the Prophetic guidance meant for the intellectual development of the human race. There is no doubt that human intelligence is much more important than the human species. It is man's intellect which rules over the human race : the human race cannot claim to have superiority over the intellect of man. The remark made in connection with the Prophet's (peace be upon him) son amounted to a waywardness in human intellect and therefore it was dangerous. It needed to be set right there and then.

No century can be branded as auspicious or inauspicious. Take the example of a tumbler. If it is empty, you cannot say that it is good or bad. Its goodness or badness depends on the thing contained by it. In the same way, it depends on our own efforts whether this century is propitious or doomful for us.

I would like to cite three examples in this connection. Two of the centuries I will mention here began in a very somber and gloomy mood but we do not find that the then historians and writers lamenting or grieving at its oncoming. Ibn Athir and Ibn Kathir, in their writings, show us the reactions of the Islamic world to the beginning of the seventh century. Storm petrels at that time were clear enough to predict that the oncoming century would be gloomy and sinister not only for the Muslims or the Islamic world but for the entire world at large. The century began with such a horrible incident that Ibn Athir (d.638/1239) said:

"If anyone were to claim that no such happening has come to pass since the days of Adam to this day, he would not be incorrect, for history does not record any incident even half so disastrous."

I am referring here to the onslaught of the Tartars in 616/1219 against the strongest Muslim Kingdom of Khwarizam Shah. The seventh century of the Islamic era and the thirteenth Christian century had just begun when the Tartars rose as a tempest and swept away the whole of the Islamic world. They pulled down entire cities in Turkistan and Iran and raised minarets of human skulls to announce their victory. Flourishing cities were turned into graveyards.

It appeared to all intents and purposes that Christianity would emerge successful in this contest. The Tartars had not fought their battles against the Christians and a number of Gtughis Khan's sons had taken Christian wives. Christian clergymen had also gained entry into the courts of Mongol warlords. It thus appeared to be a foregone conclusion that the Mongols would ultimately embrace Christianity. But, do you know what happened finally? Let me quote Arnold:

But Islam was to rise again from the ashes of the former grandeur and through its preachers won over these savage conquerors to the acceptance of the faith.

"In spite of all difficulties, however, the Mongols and the savage tribes that followed in their wake were at length bought to submit to the faith of the Muslim peoples whom they had crushed beneath their feet.

That century which began with a most inauspicious incident — if there is a word like inauspicious in a dictionary of Islam — became a century of luminous victory while the world stared wide-eyed at such a turn of events. The Mongols, whose swords were still dyed with Muslim blood, became followers of Islam. Such previously had been the animosity of the Mongols against the Muslims that Howarth writes in the *History of the Mongols* that:

So notoriously brutal was the treatment they received that even the Chinese showmen in their exhibitions of shadow figures exultingly brought forward the figure of an old man with a white beard dragged by the neck at the tail of a horse as showing how the Mongol horsemen behaved towards the Muslims".

The fact is that the Muslims had then lost everything except their Faith in God. They had not lost their trust and conviction in God, nor their inner strength of spirit. So the question becomes, who suffered the defeat? I would say — with regret — that unworthy Muslim Kings had been put to rout and a sickly and weak Muslim society had been humbled. As for Islam, it remained where it was; it was never thrown out of court. The Muslims considered the Mongols as invincible because their swords had rusted or broken. The Tartars proved their valour by their superior military organisation. They had not fallen to a life of ease and comfort like the Muslims who wallowed in an excess of wealth. They were still fresh, had vigour and could undergo hardship like the early Arab conquerors who came out of the desert to subdue the world. No power could face them merely with the munitions of war.

Then, who prevailed over the Tartars? Who won them over to Islam? Those who had the power of spirit came forward in this hour of crisis and surrounding gloom and made them enter the fold of Islam within half a century of their conquests. We have innumerable examples of individuals, families and tribes, even the entire inhabitants of a city, embracing Islam but there are only three or four instances when a whole people came to the threshold of Islam. The Arabs were the first to accept Islam *enmasse*. The Afghans were also converted to Islam as a people and then the Tartars and Turks accepted Islam as a people. But it is a riddle of history — and I am myself astounded at it — that no historian has been able to bring to light the names of those persons who succeeded in converting a whole people to Islam. It was an event which turned the course of history, but why do we not know who those missionaries of Islam were? Why did these people never allowed their names to be mentioned?

This reminds me of another incident recorded by history. When Madayn, the capital of Persia, was conquered, a Muslim soldier, found the crown of Chosroes. He hid it under his garment and brought it to S'ad bin Waqqas, the Commander of the Muslim army, as if he was stealthily taking away something very costly. Then handing over the crown to his Commander he said: "O Amir, it appears to be costly. I am giving it to you to be deposited in the Treasury". The Commander stared open mouthed at his infantryman for he was himself astounded to see the crown, studded with costly jewels. He was still more amazed to see that the poor man had brought it instead of keeping it with him. S'ad asked the soldier's name but he turned his back and replied: "He knows my name for whose sake I have brought it here." And then he departed without caring to know his Commander's comment.

This incident relates to one man only. But I believe that all those people who enabled the Tartars to accept the Faith of Islam acted in a similar manner. So far, I have only been able to search out the names of two people so involved and this after turning thousands of pages on the subject. One of these was the pure hearted Amir Tuzaun who occupied the office of Prime Minister in the court of a Tartar King of Iraq. Being a man of God, he always tried to advise the King to take the path of virtue and goodness. His efforts bore fruit and the inhabitants of Baghdad saw one Friday that King Ghazan and his courtiers were entering the mosque with rosaries in their hands.

Another man was Shaikh Jamaluddin whose unfathomable sincerity, perfection of spirit and well-intentioned sympathy for the savage Tartars succeeded in converting its Chaghtai branch, known as the middle Kingdom, which ruled over Kashghar. Once the Shaikh was going somewhere these were the days when the Tartars treated the Iranians as an inferior stock and lost no opportunity to humiliate them and unwittingly trespassed the game-preserve of the Crown Prince who was out hunting that day. The Tartars were a superstitious folk who took ill of any trespass in the game-preserve. The Shaikh was immediately apprehended and produced before an angry Prince. He had his dog beside him. When he saw the Iranian Shaikh, he asked: "Are you better than this dog?" The Shaikh remained cool and quietly replied: "If I do not die with my Faith intact, I would certainly be worse than the dog." Struck by this unexpected reply, the Prince asked further what the Shaikh meant by Faith. The Shaikh explained how man's ultimate end in the hereafter depended on having a sound Faith in God. Think of the confidence and courage it would have taken to give this answer to an autocrat Prince. Consider what a conviction the Shaikh had in life after death and his dependence on Faith in God. His sincerity of purpose and his strength of conviction was not lost, for the Prince, who was to shortly, ascend the throne replied: "I cannot do anything now, but meet me when I have taken the sceptre in my hand". This story has been related by a number of Persian historians and is also included by Arnold in his *Preaching of Islam*.

Shaikh Jamaluddin now awaited the Prince's coronation, but he died before the event came to pass. At this death-bed, the Shaikh bade his son Rashid Uddin complete the task left unfinished by him. He told his son to go to the Prince, after he had ascended the throne, and remind him of his promise. Rashid Uddin did as he was bidden by his late father, but it was not easy to gain access to the King. He was not allowed to enter the royal palace, but he did not lose heart and waited for an opportunity to complete the task left unfinished by his father. He took up residence under a tree by the side of the royal palace, performing Prayers and giving call for them at the appointed hours. One early morning, he began to chant the call to Prayers in his sonorous voice and this disturbed the slumbering King. He ordered the guards to produce the man before him. This was the opportunity Rashid Uddin had been seeking. In reply to the King's interrogation, Rashid Uddin referred to the conversation the King had had with his father. He told him that he had asked his father if the latter was better than a dog. He had then replied that it all depended on whether or not he died with his Faith in God. "Now, the matter has been decided," said Rashid Uddin, "for my father has actually died with full conviction and trust in his Lord."

The King recalled the conversation and called for his Prime Minister. Taking him into his confidence, he recounted the story to the Prime Minister and said that he intended to embrace Islam. The Prime Minister replied that he had already accepted that Faith but had kept it a

secret. Other ministers were also summoned and they all agreed to follow the King in accepting the new Faith.

The Tartars were rulers but they hardly had any religion, culture, arts or sciences worth the name. They accepted Islam and promulgated the law of Islam:

Allah's are the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is ever Mighty, Wise. (XLVIII:)?

There is hardly any doubt that all this happened according to the pre-determined Will of God Almighty. The Tartars were a simple-minded people who could not have run the administration of their vast conquests, of countries which were way ahead of them in terms of culture and civilisation. They had, at the most, a code of criminal law whereas they needed men to run the administration, keep the canals flowing, organise the revenue administration and the like. They were bound to take the help of Muslims who could assist the running of the administration. In this way, the Muslims impressed the superiority of Islamic cultural attainments on the minds of their new rulers. Thus, it was only Faith that remained to be borrowed by the Tartar rulers from their functionaries, and ultimately they succumbed to the charm of Islam.

Shortly after the acceptance of Islam by Tughluq Timur Khan in Iran, all the Tartar tribes in that country followed suit. The Tartars in Iraq had already embraced Islam through the efforts of Amir Tuzaun. Historians are on record that the way the Tartars accepted Islam in those days resembled the falling of the beads of a broken rosary. It was all the accomplishment of Muslim missionaries, scholars and pious men whose sincerity and perfection of spirit was beyond doubt. History bears witness to the fact that they worked ceaselessly behind the scenes without anyone coming to know of their efforts until they changed the course of events. The millions of Tartars who accepted Islam will be witness to the greatest service rendered by these men of God when they rise again on Day of Judgement.

I have spoken first of a century which began with dreadful forebodings of death and destruction for Islam but one where the Muslims did not yield to despair. Although they lost an empire they did not lose heart. Empires can be lost ten times and won in the eleventh attempt, but the heart once lost can seldom be regained. The votaries of Islam continued their efforts silently without any fanfare. I do not know if they ever formed any organisation or society for the conversion of the Tartars, or if they publicised the benefits accruing from their acceptance of Islam, or the effects of the re-establishment of the ascendancy of Muslims. Nothing of this sort, as far as I am aware, was done by them. Those who engaged themselves in the task continued their efforts so silently that even other Muslims did not know what was happening. Then, suddenly, everyone was amazed to find that the entire Tartar nation had accepted Islam.

The illustration I have given here pertained to the seventh century of the Islamic era, that is, the thirteenth Christian century. A century whose beginning was so terrifying that it scared the Muslims to death. God forbid, if they had also lost conviction in their Faith, there was every likelihood of their undergoing cultural and intellectual apostasy even if they had not abjured their Faith in Islam. Yet nothing of the kind took place; there was no cultural or intellectual apostasy, much less a renunciation of Islam.

I will now look at another illustration, namely the tenth century (the sixteenth century of the Christian era). I will not take you to any other country of the vast Islamic world, but instead refer to India which was then about to overthrow the ascendancy of Islam. Apparently, it looked as if the die had been cast and the change over was just a matter of a few days. You can examine the prease details of it in the many books written about it. The then world had two Muslim empires, that of the Ottoman Turks in Asia Minor and the Middle East and the other was headed by the Moghuls in this sub-continent. Iran's Safawid Kingdom occupied third place. The ruler of this country was young, energetic, intelligent and courageous and had won a number of brilliant victories. He happened to have among his courtiers a few talented scholars or rather master spirits of the age, among them Faizi and Abul Fazl. They lent support to a movement designed to replace the grip of Islam over India by the *Din-i-Ilahi* of Akbar<sup>10</sup> euphemistically given the name of "universal toleration", but really meant to positively prohibit essential Muslim rites.

This was a dangerous union of material power and intellectual acumen or rather a deep laid conspiracy by an autocratic power in unison with latitudinarian thought so for as to oust Islam. We rarely come across another examples of this nature. It was then openly preached that the first millennium of the Islamic era was to come to an end with the tenth century, that a thousand years were more than enough for any religion. A number of Iranian and Indian scholars, lacking any awe of God or having little knowledge of Islam, readily came forward with illustrations to show that several religions were replaced by another after a thousand years. They pleaded that the Religion of the Arabs had completed its term and that the followers of the Arabian Prophet (Place be upon him) now needed a new Faith to pattern their lives according to the changed conditions. Such thoughts are very often a product of speculative thought which wants to rid itself of every moral obligation.

Now you can imagine the dangers involved at that time. The new movement had as its symbol the very man whose arms were invincible in India. He had emerged successful in every battle fought by him, had never come across any defeat or discomfiture. He was young and courageous, the descendant of a man as ambitious as Taimur and as strenuous as Baber. He as not only the Emperor of India but also one of the most intelligent and sagacious rulers to leave his mark on the pages of history.

What was the result? The closing decades of the tenth century foreshadowed the decline of not merely Islamic political power in this country but also an end to its religious and spiritual supremacy. It also forebode that the vacuum created by Islam's departure was to be filled by other alien.