

Linguistic and Cultural Formalism

God has bestowed numerous bounties upon man and one of these is his capacity to learn from his past experience. If he strikes his on a path, foot, he tries to find out the cause of it; removes the stumbling block from his way or deflects his steps to avoid it. But if he finds his way impassable or littered with similar obstacles ,he takes to another even and straight path. Whenever he commits a mistake or fails in his venture, he tries to analyse and understand the cause of his failure. He tries to avoid the mistake once committed so that he does not take the wrong track again and so come to grief for the second time. Man's capacity to analyse cause and effect, to understand the relationship between antecedent and result is undoubtedly a Divine blessing bestowed upon him alone.

It is this distinctive capacity enjoyed by man which distinguishes him from cattle and beasts and has been the sole reason for all man's progress in the arts, sciences, culture and civilization.

It is not that man never makes a mistake. On the contrary, to err is human. Man is prone to stumbling: it is a legacy inherited from Adam. But it is more praiseworthy acknowledge one's mistakes, repent, feel sorrow for them and try to make amends. This is the way to retrieve the loss suffered by a man. Sometimes this erring but conscience-smitten man is so repentant, melted and touched that he attains, in a few seconds, those celestial heights of sublimity which can not be achieved by years of toil and tears. Even the angels are then envious of him. The progenitor of the human race also made a mistake. He owned this mistake and fell down on his knees to beg for the mercy of the Most Merciful. In no time Adam rose to that lofty spiritual height of Divine propinquity which he had not enjoyed before committing that grievous error. He cried to his Lord thus:

Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost (Ala'raf: 23).

And what did Adam achieve by his repentance? The Qur'an itself bears eloquent testimony to his marvellous achievement:

And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray. Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him (Ta-Ha: 121-22).

But, unlike Adam, Satan insisted on his disobedience and tried to justify his actions thus:

(Lblis) said: I am better than him. Thou createst me of fire while him Thou dearest create of mud. (Al-A'raf:1)

Mistakes or Blessings

The cultural advancement made by man as also the headway in many other fields of human activity owe their origin no less to the blunders committed by man than to the endeavours guided by his correct decisions. It would, of a fact, be no exaggeration to claim that certain epoch-making achievements were made possible only through mistakes. The history of mankind on this planet lists many such incidents; or, to say it conversely, it is as much a record of man's errors as of his faultless decisions and right actions. You can cite many such

examples from recorded history which corroborate this assertion. The prophet Moses and the Children of Israel safely crossed over to the Sinai and Pharaoh was drowned with his legions in the Red Sea; this because Moses had lost his way on a dark night. The American continent was discovered by Columbus as a result of his mistake in taking a wrong seaway, since what he really wanted was to discover a navigable route to India.

It does not behoove a sensible and prudent man to shut his eyes from a mistake once committed or not to analyse the causes of his failure. Only a fool would repeatedly commit the same blunder or be stung by the same reptile more than once. Further, such behaviour does not befit a believer who has been endowed with Divine guidance and wisdom and who is called upon to make the most of his intellect and experience. To take no lesson from past experience is, as the Qur'an says, a characteristic of the hypocrites. It is really they who never profit by their experience and are tested day in and day out.

See they not that they are tested once or twice in every year? Still they turn not in repentance, neither pay they heed (Al-Tawpa: 126).

Placing reliance in the prudence of the behaviour, the Prophet once said: "A believer is never stung twice by the same reptile."

Linguistic and Cultural Ignorance

It was only a few days back when in a country with a Muslim majority, with its innumerable mosques and monasteries, and famous as the abode of numerous religious teachers and Sufi saints, a storm of linguistic and cultural prejudice blew up with such a tempestuous rage that it swept away the centuries long, endeavours of all the saints and men of God. Basically, one Muslim killed another Muslim without the least compunction. Human beings were put to death in such a way as if they were snakes scorpions. There was no refuge for those who had once fled to that land to save their lives. Without a heart melted with compassion, without an eye on the edge of tears, men went hunting after man as one caste one's net for fish or goes hunting in pursuit of wild game. Neither the chastity of women was respected nor the weak and the old spared nor innocent children shown any compassion. Every torture, every suffering, be it hunger, thirst or a fiery ordeal, was inflicted by one brother on another. The idol of language prevailed upon faith in the United of God and the brotherhood of man; national and racial zealotry smashed the brotherhood of Islam and the Ignorance of the pagan past overcame the unifying bonds of the Muslim faith so completely as it never had in any land and in any age since the advent of Islam. Fr.. in the distant past, one Musalman had never been degraded by another Musalman in this way.

Linguistic and Cultural Differences

Man has had numerous languages and cultures, rites and customs since the day he made his debut on this planet. These variations in language and modes of living have helped will to evolve new patterns of culture and enrich and beautify his life; and, indeed, as the Qur'an reminds us, these are all Divine blessings conferred on mankind by the grace of the Lord:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. (Al-Hujarat:13). And, again.

And of His signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Lo! herein indeed are portents for the men of knowledge. (Al-Rum: 22).

The history of mankind is replete with tragic fights and forays, despicable incidents and happenings but we do not know of any war fought merely on the basis of language and culture. The Arabs were renowned for their graceful language as well as their linguistic prejudice; they had nicknamed all other people as the ajmees or the dumb, but history does not list a single war fought by them for the sake of their language. Islam denounced such predictions as unlawful, and prohibited these as the zealotry of Ignorance. Islam denigrated and discredited this passion, equated it with the remnants of pagan Ignorance, derogated it as the trappy snares of idol worship and denial of God, spoke of its votaries as adversaries of God and His Apostle, and declared that all those who fight for it and die for it shall go the way of the apostates and non-believers. But we do not find even Ignorance fighting to uphold its ruling passion, its prejudice for linguistic superiority.

It is, in fact, the aggression nationalism of Europe which has endued language and culture and reverential regard. It has made it a deity on whose altar human blood in split and man is sacrificed. It has encouraged nations to revive their ancient cultures, resuscitate defunct languages and even fight for their sake. This is the new paganism of modern times which has given rise to a new type of crusade so long unknown to the world. Europe propagated its ideology with the due thought and rare foresight and gradually it caught the imagination of the Muslim peoples who were true believers and who despised all traces of its pagan past. It was expected that because of the guidance provided to them by Islam they would not fall a prey to linguistic prejudices like other peoples. Verily, they ought to have known that this animus had neither the sanction of God nor was it worth a mustard seed in His eyes.

Yet, suddenly, this new menace made its appearance in the world of Islam. Like a volcano it burst out into the heart of a Muslim country bringing death and destruction in its train. To be sure, this did not aim at the propitiation of God nor at suppressing any evil or falsehood or the sneaking whispers of Satan: its objective was not to establish peace and amity or to spread the gospel of compassion and brotherhood. It all happened because a great majority of this land lent an ear to the artful dodgers of the West and their camp followers and was, thus, given a false scent.

Irreparable Loss to Islam

What is extremely lamentable though is this spilling of Muslim blood, death and destruction. Its most shameful aspect has been to arm the enemies of Islam with one more weapons against it. The conclusion drawn by them is that Islam is incapable of uniting different peoples with racial, cultural and linguistic differences, and that, as an ideology, it is not suited to providing rallying force for the reconstruction of a society and the establishment of a state. Advertisaries of Islam cite this incident as proof of the inherent weakness of Islam to sustain and preserve the political entity of a people organised on its basis. This is the greatest harm done to Islam by this cultural and linguistic chauvinism.

You are living here in one of the business centres of India and, therefore, you should be fully aware that any rise or fall in prices, a temporary set back in business and the trade, a paltry loss or profit is never as important as the loss of the goodwill suffered by any commercial firm. A firm's good will is the sign and symbol of its established popularity in business; it is

often regarded as one of its most valuable assets, and it has a marketable monetary value. It is even purchased and sold for lakhs of rupees depending on the popularity trade.

the incident I alluded to above meant a great loss to Islam and created formidable difficulties for its savants and preachers who had been presenting their faith as a great unifying force. It has, by the same token, rendered doubtful the entire historical achievement of Islam. Now, who can assert the all-levelling characteristic of Islam which once effaced all distinctions between whites and blacks, between Asiatics and Africans, between kings and beggars and between masters and slaves? In fact, the historicity of Islam's past achievement is beyond a shadow of a doubt: the world has always marvelled at its accomplishment; but, how are we now to tell the world that sentiments of fellow-feeling and brotherhood produced by Islam transcend differences of race, colour and language and unify Believers into one, inseparable, spiritual community? This is the loss for which we have no words to express our grief: even tears of blood would not suffice to lament the calamity that has befallen Islam.

The Illness and its Causes

Let us assume that whatever happened was a political game. A few political parties bent upon crating dissension and discord succeeding in misleading a simple-minded people. But the very fact is that an entire nation was so easily duped; it was thrown off the scent so completely that it lost all discrimination between Faith and apostasy. Islam and Ignorance and harmony and discord were surely not fortuitous. Nor can it be attributed to the witlessness of a whole people nor to the artful duplicity and cleverness of its leaders. No political movement can succeed in any country unless its people are ready to accept the ideology preached by the leaders of that movement and unless it receives the whole-hearted support of the masses. Had the nation not been of a mind to accept and own that ideology, this tempest of fire and fury would have passed over their heads without carrying everything before it as by a torrent. However breath-taking the tremor of excitement may be, it is never durable. But the deep-seated disquiet, its wide-spread nature and durability shows disquiet, its wide-spread nature and durability shows that the nation had already been infected with the disease. Its sense of Islamic solidarity was surely not fully developed and it lacked the desired standard of instruction in Islamic beliefs and practices, otherwise it would not have fallen on evil days so easily.

Lack of Religious Sense

To me the greatest causes of this mishap was the lack of correct religious sense. It is not enough that one should have a heart-felt love of Islam: one should also have a developed sense of looking at things from an Islamic view-point. A man should have not only emotionally attachment to Islam but he should also hate all unislamic philosophies, thoughts and ideals. As a matter of fact, The Qur'an expresses in numerous places its hatred for the devil and the standard-bearers of falsehood and ignorance before giving a call to pin one's Faith in God. It says:

And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah had grasped a firm handhold which will never break (Al-Baqara: 256).

Even the Muslim's affirmation of faith, the Kalama, begins with the denial of gods and goddesses. It first says that "*There is no god*" and then affirms the overlordship of the Lord with the words "*except God*". The traditions of the Prophet tell us that the faith of a Believer

is not perfected or its true sense and meaning understoodly him until he learns to abhor apostasy and all its manifestations. A tradition of the Holy Prophet, related in Bukhari, runs as follows:

Whoever has these three qualities shall be informed with the beatitude of true faith. First, God and his Apostle are dearer to him than everything else; secondly, he loves a man only for the sake of God; and, thirdly, he shudders at the very idea of going back to apostasy after having been saved by God, as one fears being consigned to the fire.¹

Awareness of Ignorance

A Muslim should so abhor acting against the interests of Islam or joining hands with its enemies that he should seek the forgiveness of God at the very mention of such a suggestion. He should not even dream of such a possibility. He should not only be sentimentally averse to ignorance but should also be fully conscious of its deceitful manifestations as that he may never be taken-in by its artifices. A Muslim should never allow himself to be duped by the pious fraud of ignorance, even if it appears dressed in the coverings of 'Ka'aba and with the Qur'an in its hand. He should always seek refuge in God against it and he should be bale to identify it in whatever shape or form it is presented him.

The tactics, or, better still, the strategy of Satan in fighting the Muslims is that he always attacks wherever he finds a weak and vulnerable flank. He does not take recourse to the same device against every individual or every section of the Muslims. His sneaking whisper to the pious and elect in Faith is never an allurement to indulge in the pleasures of the flesh for he has no hope of success in such an endeavour. He tries to mislead them by a spectacles of fame and glory, self-conceit and jealousy, self-rule and love for power and self. He tells them to strive for self-government, the advancement of their culture and language and the supremacy of their nation at all costs. These are some of the high-sounding objectives which have often led astray even the most learned and erudite as well as those strong in Faith and spirit.

The Indiscretion of the Arabs

This was the song of the Sirens sung by Satan to lure the Arabs. They were told that the Qur'an was revealed in their language, the last Apostle of God was sent to them, the House of God and the resting place of the Prophet were in their land and that no people could lay a greater claim to understand the teachings and tenets of Islam than they. It was, therefore, not at all fair that the world of Islam should look forward to Constantinople as its political centre, and, that a Turk, neither of Arab descent nor speaking the language of the Qur'an, should preside over the destiny of the Arabs. The argument was quite appealing to those who had been dreaming for a long time of an Arab Empire, for self-rule, for sharing the laurels of self-government; and, since they were also dissatisfied with the haughty behaviour of the Turks, they raised the banner of revolt against them. They became a tool in the hands of British imperialists. The Sharif of Mecca sided with the Allies, the enemies of the Turks, in the metropolis of Islam, and so did the Arabs of Iraq and Syria. The nefarious plans of the Imperialist powers materialised, the Turks were defeated, the Uthmani Caliphate came to an end, and the solidarity of the Islamic world was torn to pieces. This, however, was not the end of it. With the downfall of the Caliphate the bulwark of Islam was also demolished. The European powers now had nothing to fear; no power to reckon with; and they achieved a free hand in the lands of Islam. A national home for the Jews was conceived, the State of Israel

was carved out and strengthened and, finally, the Arabs were made to part with Bait-ul-Muqaddas, the Dome of the Rock also. All this was the result of attachment to pagan ideologies which has so powerfully captured the Arabs hearts and souls.

Partnership; the Zealotry of Ignorance

Every student of the Qur'an and the tractions of the Holy Prophet of Islam knows that the blind partisanship of any faction merely for the sake of race, blood, colour, language or culture is a tradition of the pagan past repeatedly denounced and denigrated by the sacred scripture and the percept of the Prophet. The Writ of God declares in no uncertain words:

When those who disbelieve had set up in their hearts zealotry, the zealotry of the Age of Ignorance... (Al-Fath: 26).

Similarly, a tradition of the Prophet reads:

He is not of the Muslims who gives a call for partisanship; he is not of the Muslims who fights for partisanship; and he is not of the Muslims who dies for the sake of partisanship.²

Once a *Mahajir*³ and an *Ansari*⁴ had a scuffle and both of them cried for help to their people. The *Mahajir* gave the call of *Ya lal-Mahajirin*⁵ while the *Ansar* appealed with the slogan of *Ya lal-Ansar*.⁶ When the matter was reported to the Prophet, he admonished both of them, saying: "Give up these battle-cries for they are filthy, odious." This Prophet so hated the zealotry of the Days of Ignorance that he always discouraged those who raised this slogan or who called the people to rally in its name. The Prophet never called names or used a harsh word even against his bitterest enemy but he did permit the reproving of pagan zealotry as severely as possible without the least courtesy or consideration or taking resort to a figurative language.

Confusion of Languages

The differences in the languages spoken by human beings are but natural and, in fact, a blessing. The Qur'an calls these variations a Divine favour and a sign of the 'Lord's craftsmanship:

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Lo! herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge (Al-Rum:22).

But when languages are extolled and magnified, consecration and raised to a pedestal of divinity, they become a curse rather than a blessing; a vehicle of destruction instead of a means of goodwill and amity. Then this happens human beings are jettisoned at its altar like the living sacrifices offered to deities. Languages are meant to unite rather than to divide; they are to communicate and not to separate; designed to bring people together, make them share each other's cares and worries and act as befrienders and ministrants. If their purpose were to drive a wedge between people, create animosity and engender malice, spite and rancour, it would be better that man was born without a tongue and remained dumb for ever. There would indeed be less cruelty, less blood-shed, less torture, less anguish and pain if all men were made to speak by signs and gestures. This would at least save innocent women and children from unspeakable horrors and whole lands from going to rack and ruin.

Man is Invaluable

Man has not been made for language: rather language has been made for man. The life of one man is in very truth much more valuable than the entire treasure of a language and literature, the whole collection of prose and poetry, all the elegant and ornate writings, all the coup de plume. Languages come into existence, expand, change and wither away but man has ever remained the same and shall always remain so.

The Consciousness of Islam

There can be no denying the fact that our endeavours have not been directed as much to the development of Islamic consciousness as to the inculcation of religious sense and the observance of religious duties. We find, in result, a disproportion between the general awareness of the overall objectives of Islam and the observance of its religious duties in most of Muslim lands. You can find a man over-scrupulous in performing the Prayers and pure in soul but he could at the same time have an undeveloped and childish sense of Islamic consciousness. He could meticulously follow the tenets and dogmas but be unaware of its fundamental postulates. He could commit a mistake unbecoming of any well-informed Muslim. He might even be completely blind to the difference between Islam and Ignorance, and so easily fall victim to deception by any clever imposture. He can be made a tool for the destruction of Islam. And he might do all this in good Faith, without feeling the least contradiction between his action and his Faith. We can find many such examples in Islamic history, and perhaps, recent events furnish the most appropriate example of all.

of all the Muslims of this subcontinent these people had always been known for their sincere Faith, religious enthusiasm, warmth of heart and loving regard for their Religion: they always used to assemble in tens of thousands in religious discourages and concourses; but, alas, they have fallen prey to the manipulations of tricky politicians. These simple-minded Muslims were either lured to become a party in this tragic drama of blood and fire or they could not stand up resolutely and courageously to face the zealotry of Ignorance as they ought to have done by virtue of their being Muslims and members of a self-conscious *millat*.

The Companions of the Prophet

The case was quite different with the Companions of the Prophet. The training imparted to them by the Prophet was so perfect and complete and embraced the entire gamut of human behaviour that we search the pages of history vain for similar specimens of sagacity and foresightedness. Prophetic guidance produced a discernment in them which could always distinguish between right and wrong, justice and injustice and Islam and Ignorance. The inner recesses of their heads and hearts were so conditioned that nothing crooked or unjust could gain their acceptance.

At times if they were unclear about the Prophet's instructions and admonishments or if these seemed in anyway contradictory. They would question the Prophet about the same. For his part, the Prophet never once reproached his companions for such classification.

Disobedience to God is not Permissible

In another example enlightened Islamic consciousness, the Prophet dispatched an expedition under the leadership of one of his Companions, Abdullah ibn Mazafah. He instructed the troops to implicitly obey the orders of their leaders. There was, however, some delay in Abdullah's comrades carrying out his orders. He became enraged and ordered them to collect firewood. When these had been done he set them on fire and asked his followers to jump into it. They refused. "Did not the Prophet ask you," demanded Abdullah, "to obey my orders?" "Of course," they replied, "but he did not mean this. We embraced Islam to save ourselves from fire, so why should we get into it again?" When they returned to madina, the matter was reported by Abdullah to the Holy Prophet. The Prophet not only commended the decision of Abdullah's comrades but he also said: "Had they gone into that fire they would have never come out of it." The Prophet further said: "Obedience is permissible only in virtuous acts."⁹

This was the maxim which was always helped Muslims keep to the straight path of virtue and goodness in every age. It has held them back from yielding dutifully to the call of autocratic kings and rulers as well as misguided leaders. The guiding principle for them, as expounded by the Holy Prophet, is: "No obedience to any creature involving disobedience of God is permissible."¹⁰ On many a critical occasion the Muslims were able to maintain their balance of mind and steer their course savely without getting themselves embroiled in the emotional turmoils whipped up by the zealotry of Ignorance. They produced innumerable reformers and savants of redoubtable courage who refused to swim with the expression, its idioms and rhetoric, its smiles and metaphors and derived from a pagan tradition and world-view; if it looks up to pagan characters, poets and writers as ideal personages worthy of emulation and it harbours a feeling of estrangement with the Islamic atmosphere, Muslims heroes and their thought, then, be careful, for that nation is susceptible to the pitfall of intellectual and cultural apostasy. Its pagan impulses can always be aroused to addle its wit. Any slogan of racial or linguistic jingoism is enough to take leave of its senses. We have seen how it happened on by a few days back. Now it is your duty to plug the source of this evil.

You must not only learn these languages but also feed their literatures with Islamic works and compositions in full measure, Islamise them in spirit and content, and infuse Islamic temper and outlook into them. You should rid them of that intellectual inferiority which takes them away from Islam and pushes them closer to pagan modes of thought. You have to create that sense which can discriminate between Islam and Ignorance and instill into their hears such a love of Islam and an abhorrence of un-Islam that no zealotry of the pagan past, no paganish jingoism, no call to muster their forces for race, language, country or nation can drive a wedge between them and Islam in the future.

The Dawn of a New Era

If God enables you to accomplish this task then our past mistakes and the tragic losses we have suffered can usher in a greater and ennobling achievement. These brothers in Islam constitute an emotional current of the time. They refused to be driven in the common groove and rejected the popular motto which always exhorts people to keep in step with the order of the day. The story of their indomitable courage which began with the martyrdom of Karbala can still be seen continuing in one form or the other. It is all, in truth, the result of the golden principle of no defiance to the Creator and Lord, come what may.

The Fatal Wound

The wound is fatal, no doubt; but there is not an ailment which has no cure. Only wisdom and determination are required to get along. If you want to regain the treasure you have lost, to bring back the prodigal son or to find out the lost sheep then you will have to work for it. If poison can be injected by word of mouth, its antidote too can be provided by you. This is, in fact, easier to do for languages have been created by God for bringing people closer to each other. A Persian poet has expressed the same idea in a short and sweet verse which says:

"Thou hast come to unite;

And not divide."

The Greatest Danger

It is extremely difficult to keep any language deprived of Islamic thought and spirit, phraseology and the stock of words connected with Faith. Languages are closely in touch with the inner recesses of our hearts and minds. If the language of any people is stamped with unislamic ideas, if its way of thinking and mode of invaluable part of the Millat who have produced hundreds of pious saints and savants and they still carry in their hearts the flame of Islam. They are the people whose forefathers accomplished such feats of valour under the flag of Hazrat Syed Ahmad Shaheed in the thirteenth century of the Islamic era that even one of the most inveterate critics of Islam, Dr. Hunter, had to pay glowing compliments to their bravery and religious enthusiasm. If you can rise to the occasion, a new era of Islamic regeneration will undoubtedly dawn upon this unfortunate land.

And in that day believers will rejoice in Allah's help to victory. He helpeth to victory whom He will. He is the Mighty, the Merciful (Al-Rudi:4-5).