

ISLAM AND MODERN HUMANISM

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The study of English Language and Literature, at the higher level, is essentially a study of Western Civilization in its sources, evolution and contemporary effects. The student of a language absorbs ideas and expresses them. His aim is proficiency in the language, but he ends up by acquiring a philosophy of life.

Situated as we are today, it would be rewarding to use the English language for a lay attempt at defining Islam as a way of life. Inevitably such an attempt would involve references to Islamic History and the immutable and unchanging Islamic values and injunctions. Likewise it will be necessary to refer to modern humanism as manifested in English literature and point to inferences in the hope that this exercise may be useful for a better understanding of the Islamic State.

It is appropriate and even necessary to begin these comments with a reminder of the proneness to error to which the contemporary student of Islamic statecraft is subject. This hazard consists in looking upon the expressions 'Islam' and "Muslim" as political group labels such as oriental or western or capitalist or communist. The attitude inherent in the language of modern political science makes for the tacit assumption that the human species is basically a-moral and aggressive, and that idealism of any kind is against the mainstream of biological drift, and must ultimately yield to egoism and the unlimited pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others. The Western historian and political scientist has, therefore, treated the emergence of peace movements and attempts at co-existence with, at best, polite contempt. Students of history have doubtless noted the covert ridicule with which the idea of the Concert of Europe mooted in the 19th century by the Czar Alexander was treated by those who imagined themselves to be serious historiographers.

Later the role of the League of Nations and in our own time the United Nations has been regarded as a largely make-believe refuge of the powerless. The logical result of this pseudo—scientific logic is fatalism and predictable disaster.

Obviously this is not the ethos in which Islam as the basis of statecraft

can be rightly presented. The language of modern political science is loaded with overtones and associations implying cynicism and hopelessness which are attitudes which Islam seeks to dispel, oppose and replace with faith and hope in human destiny. How pressing this need is in the modern times can be gauged from the circumstances that though the possibility of a nuclear clash is acknowledged with horror from which the imagination flinches, the compulsions of war-profiteering cause the minority which has seized control of the mind and money of the western world, to compel western governments to steer ever closer to the brink of total confrontation. The human race is indeed drifting on to the rocks of doom, and the quest for the Islamic State is the only credible objective left for those who reject the drift of despair.

Our primary task, therefore, is to clear away the cobwebs of prejudice and misrepresentation that cloud the universality of Islam in modern thought. We must reject the injustice of presenting Islam through such symbols as turbans, scimitars, domes, chopped hands and feet and harems filled with semi-naked women wearing yashmaks. For in Islam we are seeking a way of life for living beings entrusted with a special role in creation. The misrepresentation of Islam was needed by the upcoming European hegemonies in the 19th century when the Middle East was the nearest target of western political and military expansion. The period of Muslim world-dominance is still called the Dark Ages in European historical compilations which are the source material of educational texts produced in the mighty and multitudinous west. What aggravates the difficulty of the student of Islamic statecraft is that in his search for a definition of the Islamic State he constantly comes up against warped and partisan interpretations which vitiate modern source material. Recourse to original Arabic, Persian, Turkish and other texts is very necessary, for those who would do worth-while work in defining the Islamic State for contemporary readers. It is unfortunate that the powerful Western initiative

in International relations, the media, education and the realm of ideas generally has engulfed many Islamic countries and cut them off almost completely from the precious source materials of Islamic history and statecraft still available in Samarkand, Bokhara, Khokand and many other centres of old Islamic learning in the Southern reaches of the Soviet Union. It is to be hoped that these countries in the exercise of their sovereign independence and freedom will enable their scholars to have free access to

the diverse streams of thought that flow over the globe.

There is no doubt whatsoever that it was because of the rise of Islam that the centuries old stagnation of human societies of the old world was broken and mankind started on a course of progress of which the moral dimension appears to have been halted in our own days, The pre-Islamic societies became static since some sections of these societies adopted a posture of implacable oppression and exploitation against some others and neutralized the collective energies of the race. It was as though the human species had become incapable of higher evolution, and the limit had been reached beyond which large masses of humanity could not further join their capabilities to achieve the conquest of the palpable universe. In the orient one section of the society appeared to have the moral right to oppress another section of human beings, to treat them as untouchable, inflict on them holy torture ; bar them from drinking water and hold cattle as better, purr and more holy than they. In the occident the serfs were treated as chattels and if a lord was offended he could yoke a serf to his carriage and drive him till he dropped.

In this ethos Islam declared the immutable principle of the unity of the Creator of All and the unacceptable sin of SHIRK or holding that there could be a plurality of creators. "There is no god but God" the first part of KALIMA became the cornerstone of the way of life called Islam or the Path of Peace. Everything thereafter, individual or collective, social or political, of peace or of war, was to be moored to the sheet-anchor of the Unity of the Godhead. The sociological effects of the declaration of the principle of WAHDANIYAT' were truly far reaching, and changed the entire pattern of human gregariousness. The brute animality in humans was placed in a strait-jacket and a new era dawned for mankind. The rational law which flowed from the One and Indivisible Godhead was the same for all human creation, rich or poor, high or low, black or white. It became impossible for some to oppress and deprive some others beyond compatibility with the principle of equality in creation. Thus at last, a basis was established on which men could be sure of equitable treatment, and cooperate in ever growing numbers to move mountains and rivers and establish the dominance of Man, the vice-regent of the Creator, on the earth.

It is interesting to speculate if mankind would have progressed if Islam had not dawned on the earth Human aggregates had been stagnating for centuries because of internecine social struggle, and what man built he also

destroyed under the directionless compulsion of brute passions. In order to tame and harness the destructive animality of man, forces of the intellect and spirit reached out to him from the Infinitude of Being. In the shifting sands of time there rose a fixed tower of granite strength from which the understanding of man could take its cue of backward and forward, right and wrong, and what creates and what destroys. Instead of going in circles and clashing in the dark, the human caravan could now march onward and not stray in the blind void of moral chaos. With LA ILAHA ILLALLAH or the mandate that there was no god but GOD, Islam dawned on the earth. The rest of the religion was a paraphrase of this principle for the better understanding of men. The Prophet, the Messenger of God, announced to his people: I am a man like you, and the Quran, the Word of God, proclaimed that the Prophet had been sent to be a Blessing to the Worlds. The Prophet exemplified in his life the relations between men and their dealings among themselves. He conveyed to men the will of God which was that the children of Adam should be fair and just to each other ; should protect the weak and the helpless ; should be generous and forgiving ; should avoid mischief and trouble-making ; should arrange their affairs by consultation among themselves ; should pursue knowledge and in all matters exercise TA'AQQUL, TAFAKKUR and TADABBUR or reason, thought and understanding.

The Islamic State carries out these injunctions. Contrariwise, where these Islamic injunctions are implemented there we have the constituent factors of the Islamic State. Here we may repeat that Islam is for all humanity and the tendency to look upon Islam as the badge of a territorial, cultural or racial group is not rightly conceived. The Islamic State has obligations to its citizens and to all members of the family of Adam. The assumption tacitly fostered by several modern sociologists that Islam like some other systems of thought and conduct, is monopolistic and exclusive is again incorrect and has to be rejected. On the other hand Islam recognises the countinuity of human progress from the beginning of time and endorses all past prophets, teachers

and guides of mankind who exhorted their people to carry out the injunctions of approved conduct. Thus in history we have many instances of Muslims who were close to the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and were thus in better knowledge of the manner and spirit in which Islam was applied to statecraft.

Early Muslims interpreted and implemented Islam in the widest terms of sympathy, forbearance and human responsibility. A concrete instance in point is to be found in the early history of Pakistan. Muhammad bin Qasim set up the first Islamic State in the Sub-continent in the 8th century. Till then the people living in the delta of the Indus had been governed by caste, untouchability, cattle worship and other usages of animistic belief. They had seen nothing so egalitarian, so moral and so humanitarian as the philosophy of Islam by which the invaders lived in peace and war. As a result four thousand Jats joined the Muslims in giving battle to their ruler Dahir who was defeated and slain.

Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Manchester, writes: "Within the occupied towns Muhammad bin Qasim established a social and religious framework of life which reflected the early Islamic policy of tolerance. The conqueror proclaimed the general principle of the freedom of religion, allowing Buddhists and Hindus be included among the 'People of the Book' or Protected Peoples as Jews and Christians had always been and as the Zoroastrians of Persia had become." That the Hindus and Buddhists should have been declared AHL-E•KITAB, or people who had received guidance, by the First Muslim Ruler of Pakistan and should have been integrated into the Islamic State and society on those terms, should serve as an indicator to the attitude of tolerance and co-existence prescribed by Islam.

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Because of the historical situation there exists a reticence in western knowledge regarding the Islamic sources of modern humanism. In the present day human predicament we cannot afford to suppress any evidence of sociological change in historical time. The West does not really need to further aggravate the political or economic exploitation of the Muslim lands of the Middle East. Indeed some noted Western scholars have begun to

acknowledge the fact that Islam brought modern civilization the enlightenment and egalitarianism on which the modern edifice of the human dominance of the earth rests. It cannot be repeated too often that the essential and basic factor in this great change in human history consists in the conquest of the faults of animality and the subjection of the biological being to the discipline of the intellect and the spirit. Because of this discipline the energies of the race are integrated and used for the control of the material environment. Today we are obliged to consider whether the discipline of the capacities and urges connoted by the vice-regency of God can be made to prevail so that the human race does not destroy itself with the material power which it has acquired.

Humanism seeks the well-being of mankind and is thus Islamic in its goals. However humanism is disorganized, weakly related to concrete action and not capable of offering firm resistance to those whose brute animality masters their being and operating as vanity paralyses their exercise of reason. It is here that Islam takes precedence over humanism for it makes the defence of universal values obligatory on the individual wherever the individual may be. Likewise it enjoins collective effort even to the limit of war against forces which seek to spread the use of force and fraud for the perpetration of oppression and injustice. Humanism despite its goal of human well-being similar to that of Islam, is not prevailing for it lacks the framework of SHARIA, prescribed exercises of IB and imperatives of the FARAIZ. In millions of well-intentioned individuals Humanism remains a pose and its beneficent results cannot materialize for it is rarely accompanied by the intensity of conviction or IQAN which drives men to resolute action in the defence of their beliefs. Nevertheless humanism remains the ally of Islam and the Islamic State in the maintenance of the sociological framework of Islam is likely to find invaluable support from humanism. In this regard the observations of the Soviet scholar Kerimov quoted in the Islamabad daily *The Muslim* of 1st December, 1983 are indicative of the attitude of the humanist who is not oppressed by imperialist assumptions. Mr. Kerimov said, "Pakistan was created on the basis of Islam and it should remain so. In Muslim countries there can be a social revolution under the banner of Islam. What is important is the revolution itself. The banner was of secondary

importance. It is a welcome change if the social problems are resolved through religion. When we are reviewing a social process we should not look at the surface alone, we should also see what was there in the depth "Islam is not only a religion, it's a way of life."

Perhaps no other canon of Islam has contributed to the recognition of the dignity of the individual as much as the concept that there is direct, immediate and ever-present contact of Man with his Maker; The divine Being is constantly and unremittingly in contact with the individual and aware of the individual's total activity. In the history of Islamic philosophy this has given rise to discussion that since God is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent, therefore, in the ultimate analysis the individual human being's responsibility for the actions he or she commits, is qualified by the fact that human will and capability operates within the limits permitted by God.

The Omnipresence of God has operated against the tyranny of primitive faiths by which a selected class of persons made themselves out to be the earthly agents of the Almighty. They oppressed the common people by threatening them with the wrath of God, and became intermediaries of Divine Power for punishment and reward.

Islam came as a liberating force and emphasized the direct access of all creation to the Creator because of the Omnipresence, Omniscience and Omnipotence of God. In Islam the services of professorial priests are not necessary at births, deaths, marriages or divorces. The psychology of solemnization of social contracts make it easy and convincing for the common people to go to the person who specializes in assisting at religious duties, but in view of the philosophy of the Quran, it is not possible for the man of religion to become a tyrant as was the case in India and Europe in the pre-Islamic Era.

However, in societies marked by the decline of Islam, tendencies began to be apparent by which the religious leaders and teachers began to coerce the populace by threatening them with divine displeasure which they tacitly made a function of their own interpretations. Yet the constant presence of the immutable and changeless scripture made the worst excesses of an entrenched priesthood impossible.

There is a close relationship of the rise of a priesthood and discouragement of the Quranic injunction to all men to exercise their reason, judgement and understanding of the Will of God, The Quran which is the Word of God began to be recited not for comprehension and aid to understanding of the laws of God but as a holy exercise sufficient unto itself. There is a dangerous parallel between this and un-Islamic incantations and mantras. These pre-Islamic tendencies were more aggravated in Islamic countries during the days when Imperialism held sway and the alien state power tried to use the ministers of religion for exploiting the masses in the interest of foreign rulers.

The effects of these essentially un-Islamic tendencies still persist may be noted in such curious developments as calling on state power to make people conform to certain behaviour patterns in daily living through the machinery, of law enforcement comprising police, courts and jails. The thought and action of these groups operating in the half shadows of religion and politics is in marked contrast to the early evangelists of Islam who came into strange and populous lands, in the grips of idol worship and castes and won the hearts of millions including princes and slaves by proclaiming the word of a Just and Merciful Creator of All. It can be said that groups who seek to build an Islamic State through state coercion and penal action against those who do not conform to their version of the Islamic way of life, need to understand Islam in its basics and essentials, and the spirit in which the last of the Prophets (peace be upon him) who was sent as a blessing to the worlds, spread the faith which saved mankind.

In the contemporary context, when fourteen centuries have passed since the revelation of the Quran, nothing could be clearer than the injunction that there is no coercion in religion. Reason and logic dictate that this should indeed be so, for God in His fathomless Wisdom and mercy is a Knower of the mysteries of the human heart ; and a society dominated by fear, hypocrisy and the nameless cruelties of secret vice is the reverse of an Islamic society

wherein the sense of individual dignity is the first attribute of the high office of the Vice-regency of an Omniscient Creator.

This leads us to the most important feature of Islamic polity viz: the ceaseless quest for knowledge of the true relation-ship of things. As has been stated already, the advent of Islam in early 8th century of the Christian calendar and its subsequent expansion carried the message of human dignity, equality, reason and justice to the static and stagnant civilizations of Europe and India and started them on the course of evolution and change. The fact that though the teeming millions of these ancient societies did not adopt Islam in the ritualistic sense, and though only a section of the people became declared and formally initiated Muslims, yet the largest mass of these populations tacitly accepted the main directions of the new faith which was so much closer to the needs and urges of human nature. Above all Islam barred oppression of the weak by the strong, and laid down norms of mutual dealings on a sub-stratum of essential equality. In pre-Islamic societies knowledge was regarded as a privilege of the few and its pursuit an activity related to witchcraft and magic which decent persons avoided. In fact men who inquired into the mysteries of nature were often regarded as being in league with the devil. In India knowledge was deemed the right of only the highest caste and if by chance the untouchable Sudra should hear the words of knowledge, horrifying punishment was to be inflicted on him. The Islamic injunction to all men to pursue knowledge was in complete contrast to the pre-Islamic beliefs. Today when the status of a student confers on the individual the right to the social approval and regard, it is forgotten that Islam signalized the change in human evolution by which knowledge was made a universal right and duty for all members of the human family. This view of knowledge provided the foundation for the European renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. It is an unfortunate feature of Western historiography that the urge to knowledge was linked to Grecian sources only and the Islamic period was named the Dark Ages irregardless of the fact that most Grecian texts were lost and were preserved only in Arabic translations and corn mentaries.

Thus the pursuit of knowledge and making knowledge prevail in the governance of society, is a cardinal feature of the Islamic State. To the extent that this principle was falsified or perverted in subsequent times, the Islamic peoples suffered a decline and became subject to the domination of nations

who owned and fostered discovery and dissemination of knowledge. In our own day i.e. after the end of the 2nd World War, the stagnation of the economics of newly-liberated Western Colonies and their political instability is mainly due to the fact that they neglected knowledge in the administration of the state. In fact in some unfortunate countries the pernicious doctrine of keeping people with the attitude of educational research and inquiry out of state business, has become the source of much suffering and deprivation for the masses and ever-deepening exploitation by foreigners. This state of affairs is the reverse of what Islam calls for. When such states profess adherence to Islam and claim to be working for the revival of its past glories, their efforts amount to no more than slogan-mongering and idolatory of symbols including heroes and philosophers. The logical, persuasive and reasonable approach of the educator which really wins supporters and convinces workers is absent for the simple reason that the profound scholar is absent from the business of government which is conducted behind a system of graft, fear, penalties and unreasoning hustle thinly veiled by politeness. Seeing that Islam forbids coercion in the matter of religion and belief, the other logical course for making Islam prevail is a vast process of education, explanation, analysis and making the logic of cause and effect obvious and understood. For this purpose nation-building departments of the Islamic State have to become vast exercises in the spreading of enlightenment manned by those who can describe and name the processes, engage in research and inquiry and above all have the courage to admit the errors of the past and accept correction.

One of the modes of deviating from the stern egalitarian path of Islam in the ordering of matters of the State, is protecting the vested minority privileges and setting up a professional priestly class which should become an agency for coercion and oppression of the common people. This can be the result of the un-Islamic division of knowledge into religious and secular spheres. According to Islam the worlds of matter and spirit are not separate and mutually exclusive. On the other hand matter and spirit are facets of the same integral reality of human existence. The entrenched pre-Islamic concept of the duality of matter and spirit crops up again and again in societies of which the organization is basically contrary to the canons of Islamic sociology. When we apply this acid test to these societies some of which are constantly claiming allegiance to Islam, we find that their basic thinking is warped by a marked duality because of which they tend to divide life into

religious and secular spheres.