

## INDIAN ISLAM AND REFERRED-FUTURE

Divining, prophesizing and forecasting of the future has been a sanctified and solemn function of every religion. The yearning to survive the flux of nature/time has led man to visualize the two eternities : the past and the future. Human aspirations and expectations out of the short span of life find fulfilment in a bliss to come, in a heaven where nothing is wanting. The failure to lead a life within a certain framework also delivers him to the perdition of living hell. Whether life's ultimate end is heaven or hell, or a beatitude of Nirvana or moksha or an on-going cycle of harrowing life in this world, the process is the same—a big leap in the future, into fear, hope, renunciation, anxiety, unease, alternately shaking the roofs of consciousness.

Islam too has projected its visions into the future, predicting and prophesying. Besides the Utopia of heaven and the despondency of hell, as ultimate ends, there are plentiful prophesies in every place and all ages holding out the expectations of bright futures or forebodings of bleak times. Astrology may have been forbidden by the orthodoxy but astrology a la Grecque, entered Islam anyhow and was readily resorted to by all and sundry for a peep into the future. Soothsaying and necromancy were used and interpretation of dreams was a profitable profession for all times. There have been quite a few compilations to tell you what the dreams portend or forebode. Even the Quran speaks of Joseph dreaming “ the eleven stars and the sun and the moon ” making obeisance to him when he was a child; and as the ruler of Egypt, he addresses his father ‘ O my father ! this is the meaning of my dream of yore ’. Joseph, too, according to the Quran, was an adept in interpreting dreams from a dream he forecast, among other things, seven years of plentiful harvest and seven years of lean years for Egypt. He also advised, since he must have been a good planner, and a farsighted prophet to store from the seven years of plentiful harvest to tide over the

seven grievous years of draught and famine. But all this was the result of the intertwining of the Jewish & Arabic culture.

The religious and scriptural sanctions to delve wisely into the future gives one sufficient courage to look ahead. However, let me utter a warning, that this exercise goes entirely against the Ash'ari school with its atomistic thought and occasionalistic outlook. The pre-deterministic attitude of Ash'ari theology would not allow any encroachment on divine processes. But my effort is not at all related to spelling out the future; mine is merely to see, if at all Islamic values could be synthesized with the Indian ethos to usher in a better future and halcyon days.

In its universal sense, Islam may be said to have three levels of meaning. There is an all pervading humanistic tendency. To begin with, all human beings, according to Islamic Muslims, i. e. submitting theory, belong to Islam in that they submit to the will of God. A tradition of the Prophet says that every child is born in the rhythm and modality of Islam, but it is their parents who make them Christians, Jews or Magians. Within no time, the tradition, notwithstanding, they also started becoming Muslims. Another tradition of the Prophet says : Islam consists in being just to and critical of yourself, being at peace with the whole world and spending for and looking after the destitute. The Prophet also says ' The best of Islam is to feed the poor and be at peace with one you know and one you don't. '

The second level of Islam is provided by its all pervasive Shari'a. This obliges the faithful to those who accept and surrender their will to a body of law which was built up within three hundred years after the death of the Prophet.

Finally, we have the level of pure knowledge and understanding. " It is that of the contemplative, the gnostic ( 'arif ), the level that has been recognized throughout the Islamic history as the highest and most comprehensive. The gnostic is Muslim in that his whole being is surrendered to God; he has no separate existence of his

own. He is like the birds and the flowers in his yielding to the Creator; like them, like all the elements of cosmos, he reflects the Divine light to his own degree. He reflects it actively; however, they passively; his participation is a conscious one". The gnostic is one with God and one with nature. He has more or less become the channel of grace for the universe. At both the first and the third level, Islam as a differentiative element of prescribed religion disappear. Both these levels are elitist in nature—elitist in a different connotation. I do not want to refer to them. My concern is with the second level, Islam as it is understood by its expositors and its followers.

Islamic Shari'a as I have said is all pervasive. Like, Christianity, Islam did not have a Caesar to allocate to him any portion of its domain. Islam had within sixty years of its inception prostrated the Sassanids and humbled Byzantium. Its empire extended from the shores of Atlantic to the borders of Sind. It is reported that during the rule of the second Caliph, a twice repeated formula in 'adhān,' the 'call to prayer' for the believers, was dropped at his behest. The formula was 'Come for the best of deeds to be performed'. Umar is reported to have said that if prayers to God were going to be the best of deeds, then who was going to fight the wars? To ensure that the war-efforts may not slacken, he deemed it fit to drop a formula which was an important part of adhan. When one builds up an empire every instrument that comes handy is use an religion is no mean an instrument. Islam that evolved with the conquest and as a political instrument was substantively different from what it was evolving in Mecca and even in Medina. In the name of Islam were created political institutions and political theories Islam being itself the law giver, the morality and the law were treated as sets of obligations imposed from above. The social, political, moral and legal all derived their sanctions from the religion. In the name of Islam was laid down the code of behaviour *in extenso* not only for the professors of religions amongst themselves but for

their relations with professors of other religions. However, behind the growth of these rules and regulations in *munutiae* were social and political pressures. But this took nearly four centuries.

However, with the swift expansion of the empire, Arabs came into contact with the Sassanid and Byzantin civilizations. The early phase of Islam was an open-mind-phase. Islam absorbed quite a good deal from many sources. Greek, Chaldean, Persian, Indian, and Chinese, all were welcome and a tradition of the Prophet said "Wisdom is lost possession of a believer, he should take it wherever he finds it." Another, urged the believers to obtain knowledge even if it was imparted in China. The Greek and Indian science were translated and adopted. However, the Greek influence was dominant because of the vast numbers of scholars, well versed in Arabic, being available from the erstwhile provinces of Byzantium. Not only was there an open mind but there was also remarkable freedom of discussion. The Mutazila, the rationalists of Islam, refused to accept any authority beyond the Quran and claimed a right to interpret it. There were more than ten schools of law, each claiming its own geographical boundaries. There were differences amongst all of them and these were tolerated and even respected. Even a tradition of the Prophet was cited to validate this situation. The tradition said "The difference within my Uma, is a sign of mercy from God". Independent right to arrive at one's own decision was respected. This was the prescriptive period of Islam—the open-mind and the open-mouth phase.

But soon, the political conditions of the fourth century, which I need not go into here, forced the orthodoxy to stop the proliferation of legal school. The four orthodox schools were recognised as the only possible schools to which a muslim was expected to belong; and no other school was allowed to be founded. The words of a fourth century savant "The *din* (religion) is incumbent throughout the world on every human being and every one who will be born till the day of resurrection. It is certain that there is no

sense in the talk about the changes of times and places and conditions. What has been established is established for ever, for every time, every place and every condition."

It was from this time that *iftihad*, 'use of one's independent judgment,' was forbidden. The only *Mujtahid* that orthodoxy and for that matter all the sects of Islam, know is the fettered *Mujtahid* whose only responsibility is to search for a solution from the elaborious compilations of law and theology, if an opinion is asked for. But this still did not completely shut out the rationality within Islam. At an intellectual level the philosophers still flourished and either reproduced or added to the Aristotelian and Neo-platonic philosophy. Although, they did not question the legal and theological positions; yet they did contribute to the thought. This was the phase of open-mind and closed mouth. Open-mind was, it must be confessed, confined to a very small section.

Imam Ghazali is considered to be one of the greatest intellectual figures in Islam. But he was, being an intellectual, the greatest politician and strategist. His achievement was that he utterly destroyed the independent ratiocination by writing his *Tahafatul-falasifa*. He did away, with rationalistic philosophy within Islam and from these days onwards there has been nothing but closed mind and closed mouth. Islam has since then lost all its absorbing capacity. The future then within Islam, becomes merely an extension of past.

Let me mention another fact. If one studies objectively the development of Islamic theology and law, one cannot but come to the conclusion that all problems connected with them were considered in terms dictated by the particular situation of muslim society during the early centuries, and the mental make-up of the jurists, had been formed by the same setting. Many a important regulation and institution in Islam depend merely on the consensus and not on the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet. Consensus, in other words is nothing but the social and political pressures. A number of prescriptions of the Quran and the Sunna stand cancelled on the

authority of the consensus. The acceptance of the text of the Quran and six canonical works on traditions of the Prophet, the recognition of the Sunna of the Prophet, the infallibility of the Prophet, the acceptance of Qiyas, analogy, as a principle of jurisprudence, the Ash'ari theology, the admission of Sufism within the Islamic fold and a host of other doctrines and institutions owe their existence and validity to the consensus.

Legislation, legal fiction and custom help to keep the law in conformity with the changing conditions of a society. The classical theory of Islamic law did not countenance the legislation and refused to grant recognition to custom. The legal fiction took the form of Hila, a device or stratagem, which indicated ways and means of evading, laid down religio-legal prescriptions. This created wide gulf between the theory and practice and soon portions of Islamic law started falling into disuse. The law of property and commerce was the first to fall out of step from the practice and it was in these matters that the western notions at first and later European codes began to displace the Islamic law. The Islamic political system disappeared with the abolition of the caliphate and the only solace a Muslim has that some of the Moslem majority states declare themselves as Islamic Republics. Laws of crime and evidence have undergone a sea-change and even the personal law—a term gifted to the Islamic law by the west, has also undergone varying degrees of transformations in all the West Asian and South Asian countries. What is left of the Islamic Shari'a, is only a very minor portion, but that too is being slowly narrowed down, as the social structure is getting transformed under the stress of uncontrollable international and national political and economic pressures. What obtains today in contemporary Islam is what was happening during the early Islam. Each national state is having a fresh look at the law and replacing the old with entirely new codes or are trying to use the right of interpretation and formulate new regulations. Each is looking at Islam and trying to adapt it in terms

of its own social needs. This is not only the present position. In the past also, histories written from three different centres had, entirely different viewpoint to present. Even the books of traditions, North Africa relies upon Muslim whereas the rest of the Asian countries prefer to depend upon Bukhāri. Even at theological levels Bagilani, Ash'ari had their areas of influence, not to speak of others. When Islam came to India, it had closed its doors, absolutely. It had given, in early centuries, recognition to other religions it came in contact with, that too was on a political level. But during the Meccan even in Madinese period the recognition was on equal footing. The Quran says addressing the Christians and Jews, "Come along, let us agree on common values". When Orthodox Islam came to India, there was no possibility for an Indian perception of Islam and to this day, the attempt has not been made. The only attempt at fantastic synthesis came from the Ismaili Islam but that is of no relevance here.

Since, the Shari'a has been gnawed at to an extent where it almost ceases to have any relevance to the life of a Muslim to a very large extent, one needs to examine the possibility of rediscovering some of the innate humanistic values of early Islam. If the early Muslims could deliberately select and interpret certain verses of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet and frame regulations in order to validate their social situations and developments, the present day Muslims in India, I am sure, can prepare a better value system from the same sources. Let me only quote a few: 'The equality and brotherhood of all human beings is referred to the famous sermon of the Prophet at his last pilgrimage to Mecca, 'O Mankind' your God is but one and you have all descended from Adam. The Arab has no supremacy over the non-Arab, the fair-coloured over the black, or the black over the fair, except by righteousness he displays.' A tradition of the Prophet says 'All creatures of God form the family of God and he is the best loved of God who loveth all his creatures. Mankind is a fold, ever'

member of which is a Shepherd unto every other and will be accounted for the welfare of the whole fold. Freedom and equality are the oft-repeated values the Quran envisages.

The Quran and the Sunna recognize all the previous scriptures and confirm them. They insist on equality of all the Prophets and the Quran refuses to countenance any compulsion in matters of religion. Tolerance to others for their way of life is variously emphasized upon in the Quran : In whatsoever Book of God hath sent down do I believe : God is your Lord and our Lord. We have the result of our work; you have the result of yours; between us and you there is no strife; God will make us all one and to him shall we return.

### Restore Smile

The concept of *Ibādat* has a broader basis and it points to moral values of Truth, justice and love. These values are not to be realized for one's self but for the whole humanity.

The Quran speaks not only of right to property but also of right of others in one's property. It talks of basic rights to food, comfort and residence. It enjoins right to knowledge and right to freedom of expression,

Nature is to be harnessed in the service of man. Even the Sun, the Moon and the planets are made subservient to him. Nature has only to play the guiding role to his ultimate goal, temporal or eternal.

At the economic level, the Quran, although supporting the right to private property, lays tremendous emphasis on one's social responsibility to the group. The *Zakat*, the alm-tax, one of the principal obligations of Islam, was largely meant for the poor, the destitute and have-nots of the society. It was fixed during the Abbasid period at  $2\frac{1}{2}\%$  of the total wealth of a property owner. There is no provision anywhere in the Quran to fix at that level.



The Zakat is the help one gives for other members of the Society, in the religious terminology, to purify oneself. Today, the Muslims give Zakat, a mere pittance, in the begging bowl that goes around in the mosque after Id prayers. The principle of Zakat is to help the needy orphans and the poor and widows and if this is done, by any agency, where Muslims contribute, he has performed his obligation. His obligation, these days is to see that this is being done. It is only after laying down to provide for the needs of whole society, that a tradition of the Prophet forbids begging. There are several traditions of the prophet which uphold the dignity of labour.

A tradition says that drops of perspiration from a forehead of a labourer are collected by the angels of God to reward him for his labours and another says : ' I ' i, e. the prophet shall remonstrate with three types of people on the day of judgement and make them feel ashamed. One of them is he who having taken work out of a labourer does not pay him adequately.' Clean living, cultivation of Art & Craft, fair dealing, prohibitions of usury are all mentioned with emphasis.

### **A Tradition Runs.**

There are numerous ways of offering prayers to God and the best of them is a clean living.

These, then are some of the Islamic values that ought to be strengthened, or may be rehabilitated, in our country. It should, however, be clear from my discussion of the vicissitudes of Islamic values in different countries over the centuries that the survival of certain values and the eclipse of others is intimately connected with larger historical forces. I am not really sure about the chances of the future success of the Islamic value framework that I have envisioned for India. The vision may materialise. It may not. But to the extent that the dreams that we dream influence our destiny, the exercise is not altogether futile,

Let me end this with a verse from the Quran and a tradition of the Prophet. God says :

‘ My mercy compasseth All. ’

and the tradition says and I have quoted it before :

“ Knowledge is the last possession of a believer,

let him take it where he finds it.

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