

Prologue

The question of fate and destiny that forms the subject matter of this book is a philosophical question, and should normally be looked for in the books of philosophy. But here in this book it has been taken out of its proper context and placed along with some other questions.

All scientific and philosophical questions are classed in accordance with the subject with which they deal or the purpose for which they are studied.

The reason why the philosophical questions form one class, the mathematical another and the physical a third, is that there is a special common link between the questions dealt with by each set of these questions or at least there exists some common theoretical or practical objects which may be achieved by its study.

The question of destiny and fate is classed as a philosophical question. But in this book it has grouped with the questions with which it is connected neither with regard to its subject nor with regard to the object of its study.

Here this question is being studied under the heading of “The causes of the decline of the Muslims”. This heading includes multifarious subjects, events and questions, some of them being historical, others psychological, moral, social or purely religious. A few of them are philosophical also. Thus a large number of subjects belonging to various classes and categories form a part of this study.

The only link which binds these subjects together is their positive or negative effects on the progress and the decline of the Muslim society.

The aim of raising this question in this book is to see whether a belief in destiny as required by philosophical reasoning is one of those ideas which lead their adherents to lethargy and lack of vigor. Are the people who believe in it automatically dragged to decline and decay or is it a doctrine which has no bad effect provided it is expounded in a sound manner. It is also to see how Islam has presented this question and with what effect on its followers. This being the only aim of those aspects of the question which have no bearing on it, have been left out.

I do not remember exactly since when I have been interested in the question of the causes of the decline of the Muslims and have been thinking about it. But it may be claimed with certainty that for the past few years, this question has been engaging my attention. During this period I have either myself been thinking over it or reading what others have written.

Whenever I came across a writing on this subject, I read it with interest and tried to comprehend the view-point of the writer. This was my practice till one day while I was talking about an authentic hadith accepted by both the Shi'ah and Sunnis, to the effect that: "Islam is to have an upper hand; it is not to be suppressed".

I realized that what I had read or heard till then, though useful, was not convincing. As I found that like me my listeners were also deeply interested in the subject, I decided to study it more thoroughly and minutely. I felt that any improvement in the present position of the Muslim world largely depended on ascertaining the causes of its decline. For this purpose it was necessary not only to study as far as possible the views of others, both Muslims and non-Muslims, but to make a comprehensive study of all the relevant subjects including those which have not so far been studied from this angle.

It was here that I was struck by the vast magnitude of the problem. I realized that it was not possible for one individual to make a scientific inquiry into all the relevant subjects. This job at least required many long years. Anyhow I decided to do the preliminary work and then to study one or two subjects in detail as a test case. If some other people apply themselves to other subjects, it is hoped that a useful study of an important social subject will be completed with a sort of joint effort and mutual co-operation.

There is no doubt that the Muslims have left behind the most brilliant period of their history. At one time they were not only the rulers of the world, but, what is more important, were the standard-bearers of human culture. The world has witnessed many rulers and conquerors who imposed their will on others for some time, but before long they were wiped out like froth of water. That was not the case with the Muslims. They brought about an unparalleled intellectual awakening and founded a brilliant culture which lasted for several centuries. It is still celebrated as a golden link of the chain of human culture, and history itself is proud of the illustrious achievement of the Muslims. For so many centuries the Muslims excelled in sciences, crafts, philosophy, art, morals and higher social order throughout the world. Others have borrowed much from them. Many unbiased investigators have admitted that the wonderful civilization of modern Europe which today runs supreme in the whole world was inspired by the magnificent Islamic culture.

Gustave Le Bon says: "Some Europeans feel shy to admit that a heathen nation is responsible for their emergence from barbarism and ignorance, and for that reason they conceal this fact. But their unreasonable attitude is extremely regrettable.....It was the moral influence of the Muslim Arabs that humanized the European people who had toppled the Roman Empire. It opened the door of sciences, arts and philosophy to those who were totally ignorant of such things. These Arabs were for 600 years the teachers of us, the Europeans".

Will Durant in his "History of Civilization" says:

"The inception and decline of Islamic culture has been a big historical event. During the five centuries from 81 A.H. to 594 A.H. Islam was the world champion in regards to military power, law and order, good morals, developed life, human and just laws, religious tolerance, literature, scientific investigation, medicine and philosophy.

He further says: The Muslim world exercised its influence on the Christian world in various ways. From Muslim countries, Europe imported food, syrups, medicines, weapons, tools, artistic taste, industrial and commercial methods, laws and maritime practices. It also borrowed from the Muslim languages. The Arab (Muslim) scholars learnt Greek, mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy and medicine. They further developed them and conveyed the Greek heritage in a richer form to Europe. The Arab (Muslim) physicians preserved the works of Aristotle for Christian Europe and incidentally altered them. From among the oriental philosophers Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) influenced the European philosophers. Their skill was as reliable as that of the Greeks.....This Muslim influence penetrated to Europe through trade, the crusades, the translation of thousands of books from Arabic to Latin and the travelling of the European scholars to Andalus.

He also says: Only during golden epochs of history a society is able to produce in a short time all such luminaries in the field of politics, education, literature, language, geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, philosophy, medicine etc. as were produced by Islam during the four centuries from the time of Harun al-Rashid to that of Averroes. A part of the brilliant activities of the Muslim was based on the works of the Greeks, but a major portion of them especially in the fields of politics, poetry and art was strikingly original".

It was an admitted fact that the illustrious phenomenon known as 'Islamic culture' continued to exist for centuries before it vanished. Today the Muslims as compared to many other nations and to their own glorious past are in a pitiable state of decline and backwardness.

Naturally a question arises as to why the Muslims have retrograded after making all these achievements in sciences, arts, crafts and organizational matters. What is the cause of their decline and retrogression and who is responsible for their present pitiable state? Is it the fault of certain individuals or groups? Or was it because of certain events that the Muslims deviated from their original course? Is it natural that every nation makes progress during a limited period and then as a matter of course its decline begins?

If it is admitted that some particular factor has been responsible for the decline of the Muslims, we must identify that factor. Some Europeans (not all) who are biased because of their Christian prejudice or their imperialistic propensities blame Islam itself for the backwardness of the Muslims. Are they right? Or is it that instead of Islam, the Muslims are to be blamed? Or is it that the fault lies with those non-Muslim nations which have in various ways come in contact with Muslims during the past fourteen centuries? The answer to these questions is not a simple affair. It requires a comparatively lengthy discussion. Every alternative is to be weighed and investigated scientifically.

Before entering into this discussion, the following preliminary points are naturally to be considered:

- The extent of the glory and splendour and Islamic culture.
- The causes that led to the flourishing of Islamic culture.
- Islam's contribution to the progress of the Muslims.
- Contribution of the Islamic culture to the modern European culture.
- The present position of the Muslim world as indicated by the signs of its backwardness.
- Though Islamic culture has disappeared, Islam is still a living, active and expanding force, and rivals the most powerful new social and revolutionary forces.
- Muslim people are awakening and are trying to stand on their own feet again.

After completing this preliminary discussion which requires a separate book, it is necessary to undertake a deep philosophical discussion of the nature of time to ascertain whether it is true, as claimed by some philosophers of history, that what causes the progress and advancement of a nation, causes its decline also. In other words, every factor can only under certain conditions related to a particular period, push forward a society, and with a change in the circumstances and with the beginning of a new era of history, it loses its vitality and ceases to be a pushing force. Then it automatically becomes the cause of its decline.

Should this philosophy be true, every culture should disappear because of the same factors which contributed to its promotion. There is no need of the introduction of any foreign factor. All old factors are, to say, reactionary, and new factors progressive. New social factors give rise to a new culture which by its very nature is different from the old one.

Should this rule be true, naturally the Islamic culture cannot be an exception to it. In that case it is useless to discuss the cause of the decline of the Muslims, for they cannot be discussed independently and in isolation from the factors which gave rise to Muslim culture.

According to this philosophy it is not necessary to hold any person, group or event responsible for the decline of the Muslims. Islamic culture disappeared, because every culture has to disappear one day. Every living phenomenon has sooner or later to die its natural or unnatural death. Islamic culture too was born. It grew. It matured. It superannuated and then died. To wish for its revival is tantamount to wishing for the revival of the dead; which is not natural and can be effected only by some miraculous cause, the bringing about of which is after all beyond human control.

After a preliminary study of the various aspects of the glory and decline of the Muslims we come to this important philosophical-historical question which cannot be overlooked, for in this connection there was

already been much worthless talk, and many people have been influenced by immature views.

The philosophical study of this question will be incomplete unless the question of the conformity of Islam to the requirements of the time is also thoroughly investigated. This discussion will naturally consist of two parts: the first part will be purely philosophical and the second one Islamic. Both the parts are worth consideration under one heading, 'Islam and the requirements of time'.

When I finished this study I came to the conclusion that the above mentioned philosophical rule was untenable. I could not believe that the causes of the decline of the Muslims were necessarily the same as those of their progress. Now the time has come that we should study the causes of the stagnation, decline and backwardness of the Muslims and see what others have said in this connection.

Considering what others, both Muslims and non-Muslims, have said and keeping in view the questions and the events which are naturally to be considered in this connection, this study will have to be undertaken in three sections:

- Section of Islam
- Section of Muslims
- Section of Foreign factors

Each section consists of a number of subjects and questions. For example, someone may hold the Islamic tenets to be responsible for the decline of the Muslims. Some others may think that the moral system of Islam produces degenerating effect. Still some others may maintain that the social laws of Islam are the real causes of the decline of the Muslims.

Incidentally, this charge has actually been leveled against certain doctrines, moral principles and social laws of Islam.

Similarly in the other two sections also there are many questions which are to be considered.

In this connection, the following Islamic tenets and doctrines have to be especially considered:

- Belief in fate and destiny
- Belief in the hereafter and the disparagement of this worldly life
- Intercession
- Dissimulation
- Expectation of solace (the advent of Mahdi (a) – the Occult Imam)

Out of these five doctrines the first three are common between the Shi'ah.

Sometimes it is said that the real cause of the decline of the Muslims is their belief in fate and destiny. And sometimes it is said that the importance which Islam attaches to the next world and its ever lasting life has diverted the attention of the Muslims from the problems of life. Again some people say that the belief in intercession, which has existed during all periods of Islamic history and which has been upheld by all Muslims except a few, has made the Muslims indifferent to the sins. The only deterrent against the sins is the fear of their evil consequences. As the Muslims hope for intercession, they feel no need to abstain from any vice or crime.

The two doctrines peculiar to the Shi'ah, the dissimulation and the expectation of solace are also criticized in this connection. It is said that the doctrine of dissimulation in the first place means hypocrisy and double-facedness, and in the second it has rendered the Shi'ah timid, weak and unable to face the facts of life boldly. In connection with the expectation of solace (See: *The Awaited Saviour*, ISP 1979) it is said that this doctrine has deprived the Shi'ah of every initiative to improve their condition. While all other nations of the world are making efforts to improve their lot, the Shi'ah are waiting for the appearance of a saviour.

Out of the Islamic moral principles, austerity, contentment, patience, satisfaction, submission to the will of Allah and trust in Him have been charged with having a hand in the decadence of the Muslims.

Out of the administrative rules of Islam which fall in this category, the most important is the question of government. According to some critics Islam has failed to determine the duties of the Muslims clearly in this respect.

The penal laws of Islam have since long been ignored by the Muslims, and the Muslim countries have replaced them with the alien laws, though with unfortunate results. Nevertheless the penal laws of Islam are still being criticized.

Two provisions of the Islamic civil law have been especially criticized during the modern times. One of them is the question of the rights of women and the other that of the economic laws of Islam in respect of property and inheritance.

Many people feel upset by the restrictions imposed by Islam on the relations between the Muslims and the non-Muslims, such as the rules in respect of marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, meat of the animal slaughtered by a non-Muslim and the uncleanness of the infidels as described in Islamic jurisprudence. These questions are regarded as the factors contributing to the backwardness of the Muslims.

These are the subjects in the section of Islam which need investigation and thorough study.

Fortunately favorable conditions for such an investigation exist now and it is possible to clarify these questions and remove any doubts about them lurking in the mind of the young and the educated classes.

Next section is that of the Muslims. In this section our attention is concentrated on the Muslims instead of Islam. In other words, we ascertain if it is true, that it is the Muslims themselves who are responsible for their decadence by deviating from the teachings of Islam.

In this section also we face many questions. First of all we have to determine what are the points of deviation and to find out what teachings of Islam have been abandoned by the Muslims and which practices foreign to Islam have been adopted by them. Secondly, we have to see whether the Muslims generally are responsible for their decadence or only leading sections of them.

It is known that Islam first appeared among the Arabs and thereafter spread to other nations such as the Iranians, the Indians, the Copts, the Berbers etc. All these people had their own national, racial and historic characteristics. It is to be seen whether these people or some of them influenced Islam through their characteristics and diverted it from its original course in such a way that if it had gone to some other nations, for example the Europeans, the destiny of Islamism and the Muslims would have been different today. Or is it that the Muslim masses had no role in this respect and whatever damage has been done to Islam and the Muslims, was wrought by the two influential classes, namely, the rulers and the divines.

In the section of foreign factors there are many events which must attract attention. From the very beginning Islam has always faced the hostility of its internal and external enemies. The Jews, the Christians, the Zoroastrians, the Manicheans and the heretics among the Muslims themselves, were not idle. They stabbed Islam in the back whenever they got an opportunity. Many of them played an active role in distorting the Islamic facts by fabricating hadiths (traditions) or by creating new sects and sowing the seeds of dissention. If they could do nothing else, they fanned the differences among the Muslims.

In Islamic history we come across many political or religious movements started by the non-Muslims with a view to weakening or obliterating Islam.

Occasionally the Muslim world was subjected to a large scale invasion also. The crusades and the Mongol invasion are the outstanding examples.

The western imperialism did even more harm during the past few centuries. It sucked the blood of the Muslims and sapped their energy under the pressure of its oppressive policies.

Imam Khumayni, the leader of the oppressed nations of the world has said:

“The Muslims of the world should make a united effort to regain the lost glory of Islam.

It should be clearly remembered by one and all that those who spur up disunity among the ranks of the Muslims are neither Sunnis nor Shi’ahs; they are lackeys of the imperialists whose only aim is to destroy Islam.”

In view of what has been stated above, the subjects which should be considered are the following:

Spectacular progress of the Muslims and their decline. (This subject is preliminary to the rest of the

study)

Islam and the requirements of time. (This subject has two parts: the first is related to the philosophy of history and the second deals with the application of the Islamic rules in the changing circumstances. This study also has a preliminary aspect)

Fate and destiny

Belief in the hereafter and its effect on the progress and decline

Intercession

Dissimulation

Expectation of solace

Moral system of Islam

Islamic view about the government

Islamic economy

Penal laws of Islam

Rights of woman in Islam

International law of Islam

Points of deviation

Forgery and fabrication of hadiths

Shi'ah–Sunni differences and their contribution to the decline of the Muslims

Ash'arism and Mu'tazilism

Stagnation and ijtihad

Philosophy and mysticism (irfan)

Rulers of the Muslim world

Leadership of ulema

Subversive activities of the minorities in the Muslim world

Crusades

Fall of Andalus

Mongol invasion

Imperialism

These are the subjects which in my view should be included in this study. I do not claim to be exhaustive or to have been able to arrange them in an ideal order. There may possibly be some other subjects which should have been included in this list but have been missed by me. I know that I have neither capacity nor time to deal with all these subjects alone, but in some of them, including No. 1 and 2, I have prepared notes and hope to be able to publish them as early as possible.

I shall be highly obliged if some other writers and eminent scholars could choose a subject of their liking, carry out necessary investigations.

Some twenty years back when I first noticed that the Europeans regard the belief in fate and destiny as a cause or even the main cause of the decadence of the Muslims, I was still a student at the Islamic Educational Centre at Qum.

I was reading the second volume of the “Life of Muhammad” by Muhammad Hasnain Heikal. The final portion of the book consisted of two articles.

- Islamic culture as explained by the Qur’an
- Orientalists and Islamic culture.

In the course of the second article he has reproduced what the well-known American writer, Washington Irving has said in his book about the Holy Prophet (s). According to Heikal, towards the end of his book after explaining the Islamic tenets about faith in Allah, the Angels, the Scriptures, the Prophets and the Day of Resurrection, Washington Irving said:

“The last and the sixth fundamental principle of Islam is that of predestination. Muhammad used it for the advancement of his warfare, for according to his rule every event which occurs in the world is already predetermined in the knowledge of God and is recorded in the ‘protected tablet’. The destiny of everybody and the time of his death are predetermined and unalterable. Nothing can advance or delay an event. The Muslims who believed in these points and regarded them as indisputable, attacked the enemy fearlessly during a battle. They looked upon death during a fighting to be equal to martyrdom, which ensured Paradise. That is why they were sure of victory in either case, whether they were killed or overpowered the enemy.

Of course, there are some Muslims who consider the theory of predestination, which says that man is not free to avoid sins, to be contrary to the justice and mercy of God. Certain sects have emerged which have tried and are still trying to explain and modify the doctrine of predestination, but their number is small and they are not considered to be the followers of the practice of the Prophet..... There could

be no doctrine better than that which could drive the uninformed and self-conceited soldiers to the battlefield, and assure them of spoils if they survived and of Paradise if they were killed. This belief made the Muslim soldiers so bold and mighty that no other soldiers could rival them. But still this belief was a poison which annihilated the influence of Islam in the long run. When the successors of the Prophet gave up the policy of fighting wars and making conquests, and sheathed their swords, the doctrine of predestination revealed its devastating characteristics. Peace and tranquillity weakened the nerves of the Muslims.

The material comforts allowed by Islam, which distinguish this religion from Christianity, a religion of purity and self-negation, also had their effect. The Muslims ascribed all their sufferings and hardships to fate and regarded it as their duty to bear them patiently. According to them and any human effort and knowledge was of no avail in getting rid of them. The followers of Muhammad gave no importance to the golden rule: 'God helps those who help themselves'. That is why the Cross replaced the Crescent. If the Crescent still has some influence in Europe, that is because the big Christian powers want that to be so. In other words the influence of the Crescent is due to the mutual of its influence is a fresh proof of the maxim that anything gained by the power of sword, is taken away by the power of sword only."

Heikal in reply to this American has given a detailed explanation according to his own thinking and taste. His explanation, though it contains many good points, is not methodical, and hence it is controversial and can be refuted.

In this book we propose to prove the baselessness of the statement of Washington Irving and other Europeans and show that the doctrine of fate and destiny is miles apart from the theory of predestination. We will show that the same soldiers of early Islam whom Mr. Washington Irving arrogantly describes as uninformed and self-conceited, were fully aware of the difference which he is unable to comprehend.

Secondly, the Qur'an itself has supported human liberty in a number of its verses. Those who advocated the doctrine of free will and described the theory of predestination as opposed to the justice and mercy of Allah (viz. The Shi'ah and the Mu'tazilites), contrary to the assertion of the orientalist, did not go against the teachings of the Qur'an, nor did they modify what the Qur'an had said. Actually they derived their view from the Qur'an itself.

Thirdly, this great writer who, according to Heikal is a biased Christian and who calls Christianity a religion of purity and self-negation because unlike Islam it has given no heed to the problems of life, refers to the eternal Divine knowledge sarcastically.

Is it possible that a person believing in God may deny His eternal knowledge of everything? Is it a fault of the Qur'an that it describes Allah as All-Knowing?

Fourthly, he says that the followers of Muhammad did not give importance to the rule that 'God helps those who help themselves'.

This writer did not take the trouble of reading a translation of the Holy Qur'an even once, otherwise he would not have made such a frivolous assertion. The Qur'an expressly says: ***“As for him who desires the hereafter, strives for it as he should, and is a true believer, it is such people whose efforts shall be appreciated by Allah. We help both these and those with the favour of your Lord and more is deprived of it (in this world)”***. (Surah Isra', 17:19–20)

The followers of Muhammad attained even a higher stage of self-reliance, when they believed in the teaching of the Qur'an saying: ***“If you help Allah, He will help you and will make your foothold firm”***. (Surah Muhammad, 47:7) The Qur'an did not say: *“If you help yourselves. . .”* because that expression would have smacked of cupidity and personal profit. Instead it has used the expression: *“If you help Allah”*, which has a general and human aspect and implies service to humanity.

As for the ascendancy of the Cross over the Crescent, which is regarded by Washington Irving as final and everlasting, we will discuss this point later at a suitable place in this book.

These views are not peculiar to Mr. Washington Irving. Similar views have been expressed by almost all other European writers, including those who appear to be unbiased to a certain extent. They all agree that Islam is a predestinarian creed. The only difference is that some of them do not regard this as a factor responsible for the decadence of the Muslims, whereas some others maintain that it is. Some European authors have even declared it to be main cause of the decline of the Muslims.

Will Durant in his “History of Civilization” after referring to the Qur'anic verses regarding the omnipotence and knowledge of Allah says: Predestinarianism is an essential part of Islamic thinking. In consequence of this belief the faithful endured the severest hardships of life with equanimity. But during the last few centuries it has blocked the progress of the Arabs and numbered their thinking power.

In contrast, Gustave Le Bon maintains that the belief in predestination was not a cause of the decline of the Muslims, and that the causes of their decline should be looked for somewhere else.

At first I intended to mention all the points connected with the progress and the decline of the Muslims in the introduction prefixed to this book. But later I gave up the idea, for if the necessary details of all the points were given, the introduction would have become lengthier than the main book and if brevity was observed that would not have served the purpose. Hence I preferred to be contented with what has been mentioned as an illustration. The details may be given in a separate treatise.

In this book, not all the points and the questions related to fate and destiny have been mentioned, because the aim is only to study whether this doctrine has actually been a cause of the decline of the Muslims. Hence certain aspects of this question which appeared to be irrelevant for our present purpose, have been omitted.

The question of fate has a long history among the Muslims. The expounders of the Qur'an, the scholastic theologians, the philosophers, the mystics, and even the poets and the literary figures have all

discussed this question. An account of the views expressed by them requires an independent book. Besides, this question is covered by a large number of the Qur'anic verses and the hadiths (traditions) which are a model of the depth of Islamic knowledge. These very verses and hadiths have guided the Muslim philosophers and have enriched the Islamic philosophy to the extent pre-Islamic Greek philosophy paled in comparison to it.

Furthermore, there exist some other connected questions in the Islamic teachings that are not easy to explain by means of logical reasoning. One such point is Laylah al-Qadr (The Night of Destiny) which has been expressly mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, and about which there is no difference of opinion between the Shi'ah and the Sunnis. Another point is that of Bada' (Divine exposition), which is an indisputable Shi'ah doctrine based on the Qur'anic text. (See: The Beliefs of the Shi'ite School, the forthcoming Seminary Publication).

Predestination, free will and human liberty are the questions which if considered from various psychological, moral, philosophical and social angles, will require too lengthy a discussion.

It is hoped this book will prove useful and interesting to the inquisitive reader, and it would also remove his doubts in regard to the subject discussed, and would enlighten him to an appreciable degree.

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