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Part 3: Onslaught of Christian Europe on Islam

This aspect of the question provided a pretext to the Christians of Europe to assert that the main cause of the decadence of the Muslims is their belief in fate and destiny and that Islam is a predestinarian system which totally deprives man of his liberty and volition.

While in Europe, Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839 - 97), took notice of this criticism and replied to it in his articles. In the introduction of an article he said that if the spirit of a people was not pure and congenial, even the pure tenet of its faith were bound to be perverted. In their new form they only would add to its misery and error. They would be converted into a force which would lead it to further wicked deeds.

He further said: The true doctrine of fate and destiny has been greatly misunderstood by the uninformed. The Europeans are mistaken when they say that a nation believing in this doctrine losses its boldness, courage and other good qualities, and that all the undesirable qualities of the present day Muslims are the outcome of this very belief. Today the Muslims are poor. They are politically and militarily weaker than the European nations. Corruption, malice, dissension, disunity, ignorance, lack of insight and satisfaction with a subsistence level of living are rampant among them. They are not concerned with their progress and are not keen to pushing back their enemy. The ruthless armies of the enemy are attacking them from all sides, but they are not perturbed. They submit to every humiliation. They have fallen into slumber and left the treasures of wealth and independence to their enemies and the aliens.

He continued to say: The Europeans ascribe to the Muslims all the evils we have enumerated. According to them all these are the products of a belief in fate and destiny. They say if the Muslims will continue to stick to this belief for some time more, they will be doomed.

He added: The Europeans do not differentiate between a belief in fate and destiny and a belief in predestination according to which man has no liberty of action.

Mental Complex

From the foregoing it should not be concluded that the question of fate and destiny and that of predestination and free will have arisen among the Muslims for any social or political reasons. As we will explain later these questions are primarily a scientific problem, a philosophical unknown, and a mental complex. They arise for every individual and every nation which is capable of thinking over general questions. Probably there is no nation in the world which has not thought over them in one way or other.

Material Philosophy And Destiny

Some people are under the impression that this dilemma presents itself only to those who believe in religion, and the materialists are not faced with any such problem.

This is a false impression. The people having the material way of thinking are also faced with this problem, though with a little difference.

According to the law of causation every event and every phenomenon is the product of one or more causes, and that cause (or causes) in turn is the product of some other cause or causes. It is an indisputable corollary of this law that in the presence of the relevant cause the effect must appear and in the absence of it, the appearance of the effect is impossible.

The materialists accept this relationship between a cause and its effect and consider it to be the basis of their material philosophy. Now obviously the human acts like all other phenomena must be governed by this law. They cannot be an exception to it. If that is so where can theory of free will and human liberty stand?

This is why we see that in all old and new philosophical systems the problem of compulsion and free will exists quite well. As we will explain later, some variation in the nature of the problem makes no substantial difference In fact the belief in fate and destiny has certain advantages that are missing in the belief in physical compulsion.

Oneness Of Allah And His Purity

The dilemma faced by the theologians and the religious philosophers was that they on the one hand believed that nothing could happen without the Will of Allah and on the other knew that nothing dirty or wicked could be ascribed to Him. Consequently they wavered. Some of them held that human acts and deeds, which could often be dirty or wicked, were not subject to the Will of Allah. Others maintained that everything was subject to His Will because He alone is the Primary Cause of the existence of everything.

It is reported that Ghaylan of Damascus who was a supporter of free will once said to the well-known

scholar, Rabi'ah al-Ray: "Do you think that Allah likes to be disobeyed?" What he meant was the Rabi'ah believed that even the sins occurred by the Will of Allah. Rabi'ah at once resorted: "It is you who believe that Allah is disobeyed against His will". He meant that according to the belief of Ghaylan it was possible that something might happen which Allah did not will.

Once while Abu Ishaq Isfarayini was sitting with Sahib Ibn Ubbad, Qazi Abd al-Jabbar, a Mu'tazilite arrived. As soon as Qazi Abd al-Jabbar who denied the generality of fate and destiny, saw Abu Ishaq, he remarked: "Glorified be He who is free from every indecent thing". He meant that Allah was above - that indecent things be ascribed to Him. He alluded to the belief of Abu Ishaq that everything was from Allah which necessarily meant that indecent things wee also from Him. Abu Ishaq retorted without hesitation and said: "Glorified be He in Whose domain nothing happens except that which He Wills". He meant that according to the belief of the Qazi, the things which Allah did not will could happen. Such a belief went against the cardinal tenet of monothesism.

As we have pointed out earlier, so long as this question was not affected by political and social motives, it was purely a philosophical problem. A certain section of the people could not acquiesce in the belief that evils and vices were imputable to Allah. They considered Him to be far above such things. Another section which was more familiar with the idea of monotheism, believed that in the universe everything was sustained by Allah and hence the existence of anything capable of taking an independent action against His Will was untenable. This difference of view gave rise to divergent creeds.

Each section tried to prove the correctness of its idea by leveling criticism against that of the other but without being able to answer the objections raised against its own point of view. A reference to the books of scholastic theology will make what we mean clear. The fact is that neither of the doctrines of fate defensible in the form in which they are enunciated by their respective exponents. If both sections could understand that what they say is only partially true, the dispute would have been settled. In fact the belief in fate, destiny and monotheism does not necessarily mean predestinarianism, nor does the doctrine of free will imply the negation of fate.

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