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Societies of the Future

If the present societies, civilizations, and cultures are not to be considered as belonging to diverse species, it cannot be denied that they have different forms and colours. What about their future? Will these cultures, civilizations, societies, and nations continue to exist in their present form, or is humanity moving towards a certain unified culture, civilization, and society? Will they abandon their own specific individuality in the future, in order to assume one common character–a character that is closer to their real human nature?

This problem is also associated with the problem of nature and essence of society, and the type of relationship between the collective and the individual spirits. Evidently, on the basis of the theory of man's primordial nature–according to which his social existence, his social life and, as a result, the social spirit are the means chosen by human nature to attain its own ultimate perfection it may be said that societies, cultures, and civilizations are moving towards homogeneity and unification, and ultimately would merge into one another.

The future of human societies lies in a highly developed, single and universal society, in which all positive human values shall be realized. Man shall attain true perfection and shall finally realize his own authentic humanity.

According to the Qur'an, it is evident that the ultimate rule shall be the rule of righteousness, which would lead to complete annihilation of falsehood and evil. Eternity belongs to the pious and the God-fearing (muttaqun).

In his Qur'anic exegesis, Al Mizan[1], `Allamah Tabataba'i holds that:

Any profound examination of the conditions of the universe shows that man, as a part of the universe, shall realize his ultimate perfection in the future. The statement of the Qur'an that establishment of Islam in the world is a necessary and an inevitable matter, is just another way of saying that man shall ultimately attain to complete perfection. The Qur'an says:

مَن يَرْتَدَّ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّـهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ

"Whosoever of you turns from his religion, (***know that in his stead***) ***God will assuredly bring a people He loves and who love Him*** (***for the purpose of communicating and for establishing God's religion***)***."*** (5:54)

Here the Qur'an aims to describe the purpose of creation of man and his ultimate future, which, in another verse, is explained in the following words:

وَعَدَ اللَّـهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا ۚ يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا

"God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the earth, even as He made those who were before them successors, and that He will surely establish their religion for them which He has approved for them, and will give them in exchange safety after fear (***by destroying their enemies***)***. They shall serve Me, not ascribing with me anything*** (***as partners***)***…"*** (24:55)

Similarly in another place it states:

أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ...

"….My righteous servants will inherit the earth." (21:105)

In the same book, under the title "The Frontiers of the Islamic World are Faith, not Conventional or Geographical Borders", it is said, Islam has annulled the role of tribal and national distinctions, and denied them any effective role in the evolution of [the structure] of human society. There are two main factors responsible for these divisions. One is the primitive tribal life, which is based on genealogical associations, and the other is geographical and regional diversity.

These two main factors are responsible for division of humanity into various nations and tribes, giving rise to racial, linguistic, and colour differences. Also, these two factors are responsible for a nation's loyalty to a particular region; every nation calls its territory its homeland and is prepared to defend it in the name of `the motherland'.

Though it is a natural human urge to be identified with one's group, but it is, at the same time, opposed to the demand of man's nature that mankind should live as a `whole' or as a single unit. The laws of nature are based on bringing together scattered elements by creating harmony and establishing unity in place of diversity.

By means of this, nature achieves its ends. This fact is evident from the natural course of evolution, which shows how primordial matter is transformed into different elements and then how elements are

combined together to evolve plants, and then animals, and finally culminate in the emergence of man.

Although the regional and tribal diversity unifies members of a particular region or tribe and imparts them unity, it also brings one unit into confrontation against other such units. As a result, although the members of a nation have the feeling of fraternity among themselves, they tend to regard other peoples who are treated as `things' and not as human beings with hostility to them the outsiders are mere means whose value lies only in their practical utility.

This is the reason why Islam abrogated tribal and national diversity of men (which divides humanity into sections), and laid the foundation of human society on conviction and belief (in which the opportunity to discover the truth is equal for every individual), and not on race, nationality, or native soil. Even in affairs of matrimony and inheritance, Islam made common belief and conviction the criterion for human relations. 2

In the same book, under the title “The Religion of Truth is Ultimately Victorious”, `Allamah Tabataba'i says:

Mankind, which has been endowed by nature with an urge to attain self perfection and true felicity, strives collectively to achieve the highest stages of material and spiritual evolution, which it would, positively, achieve some day. Islam, the religion of tawhid (monotheism), is in fact a programme of attainment of such an end or summum bonum (sa`adah).

The deviations that hinder man from traversing his long path, should not lead us to a negation of his nature and of his humanity. It is the sole natural law that actually governs human nature. The deviations and faults should be considered as a kind of error in application of the natural law. The objective of attaining perfection, for which man aspires, is directed by his restless, perfection-loving nature itself-an end which he is likely to attain sooner or later one day. Some verses in Surat al-Rum (30-41), which start with the verse:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا

فِطْرَتَ اللَّـهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

And end with **لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ** lead us to the same conclusion that the demand of the law shall ultimately be

fulfilled, and man, after wandering in different directions and experimenting with different ways, shall finally discover his own path and adhere to it.

One should not pay any attention to the opinions of those who say that Islam, like other cultural movements, has fulfilled its function as a phase in the development of human culture and is now an out-dated part of history. Islam, as we know it and as we have already discussed it, aims at the ultimate perfection of man, which in accordance with the laws of nature, has to be achieved one day.[3]

Contrarily, some people claim that Islam has never favoured the unity and unification of human culture and human societies. Islam has always, they say, favoured diversity and variety in cultures and societies, and this diversity and plurality is not only recognized, but it is also reinforced by Islam. They say the personality, the nature, and the `self' of a nation are synonymous with its culture, which is the manifestation of its social spirit.

And this social spirit is moulded by the specific history of that nation, which distinguishes it from other nations, who do not share it. Nature has moulded man's specific essence history shapes his culture, and, in reality, moulds his personality, character, and his `selfhood.' Every nation possesses a particular culture compatible with its particular nature, taste, perfume, and essence. This culture not only affirms the personality of that nation, but also safeguards its distinct identity.

As in the case of individuals, whose individuality and personality is an inseparable part of his self, the loss of which means distortion of personality and alienation from one's own self, so also imposition of any other culture except the one evolved by a nation through the course of history and which affirms its selfhood, causes self alienation.

The fact that every nation has a particular sensibility, vision, orientation, preferences, tastes, literature, music, customs, etiquette and rituals, and prefers certain ways, contrary to those accepted by other nations is an outcome of its history, during which, due to various causes arising from its successes, failures, achievements, frustrations, climate, migrations, contacts, connections, and its eminent personalities and geniuses, develops a specific culture of its own.

This particular culture moulds the national and social spirit in a particular form and in special proportions. Philosophy, science, literature, art, religion, and ethics are the sum total of various features, which through centuries of common history, have become common characteristics of a particular group, and are synthesized in a special form, which distinguishes it from other human groups and renders it a particular identity.

Due to this synthesis `the social spirit' is born, which integrates the individuals of a certain group with the whole, in the same way as different parts of the body are organically interrelated and are responsible for its life. The same `spirit' not only gives a nation its independent, specific, and individual existence, but also gives it a `life' that distinguishes it in the course of history from other cultural and spiritual forms of expression.

It is because of this spirit that a particular culture and its social orientation, thought, customs, and behaviour are distinguished from those of other cultures. It is reflected in its approach to nature, life, historical events, feelings, preferences, ideals, beliefs, and even in its scientific, artistic, and technical products and achievements. The impact and imprint of its spirit is manifested in all the material and spiritual manifestations of a nation's life.

It is said that religion is a type of ideology. It is a faith which affirms certain feelings and approaches. But nationality means 'personality,' which brings into existence specific distinguishing characteristics that are common in the spirit of the individuals who share the same social destiny. According to this view, the relationship between nationality and religion is the relationship between personality and belief.

It is said that Islam's opposition to racial discrimination and national prejudice should not be taken to mean that Islam does not accept diversity of nations in human society. The proclamation of equality by Islam does not amount to a negation of plurality of nations. On the contrary, it implies that Islam accepts the existence of various nations as undeniable natural realities. The following verse of the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

"O, mankind, indeed we have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah, is the most God-fearing among you..." (49:13)

Contrary to the argument of those who use it for a denial and negation, actually approves and affirms the diversity of nations. Because, they say, the above mentioned verse, firstly, accepts the division of mankind according to sex (male and female), which is of course the natural division then it immediately goes on to refer to national and tribal divisions.

It shows that grouping of individuals in nations and tribes is also a natural, God-willed phenomenon, like their grouping as men and women. This proves that in the same way as Islam favours a specific relationship between man and woman, and does not intend to eliminate sexuality and its manifestations, so also it favours relations between various nations on an equal level and does not intend to negate nationalities, which are regarded as a natural phenomenon inherent in the process of creation.

Further, the fact that the Qur'an considers ta'druf (to know one another) as the purpose and philosophy of the existence of differences among, nations, suggests that a community identifies itself and discovers itself in comparison and contrast with other nations, and it realizes its individuality and vitality vis-à-vis other nations.

Hence, they say, contrary to the unduly propagated general belief, Islam affirms nationalism in the sense of cultural heritage, and it is not opposed to cultural pluralism. What Islam negates is nationalism in the sense of racialism.

The theory (which aims at an Islamic justification of nationalism) is inconsistent for several reasons. It is primarily based upon a particular outlook of man and a specific view with regard to the essence and constituents of human culture that is philosophy, science, art, morals, etc. Both of these views lack soundness.

It is presumed with regard to man that his essence is potentially blank. It is supposed to be devoid of any prior intellectual and emotional content or perceptual disposition to view his world, himself, and his role in it, even on the level of potentiality. It is assumed that human essence is equally neutral towards all modes of thought and emotion, purposes and goals. Man is assumed to be an empty container devoid of form and colour, totally subservient to that which fills it.

He acquires his `egohood,' his personality, his path, and his goal from the content that is poured into the empty vessel of his essence. He assumes any form or personality and adopts any path and goal that is bestowed upon him by the content. His content in fact the first thing that is poured into this vacuum moulds man in any form, colour, and character his `real' personality and essence being actually identical with the characteristics bestowed upon him by this content.

That is so because his `ego' or `self' is shaped and affirmed by his acquired content. Whatever is offered to him after this, which would suggest a change in his personality, colour, or shape, is only borrowed and alien stuff, because it contradicts with his first personality formed by historical accident. In other words, this theory is inspired by the fourth theory regarding the nature of individual and society. It maintains the idea of absolute primariness of society, and has been critically examined earlier.

From both philosophical and Islamic points of view, such a judgement regarding human nature cannot be justifiable. Man, according to his own special nature–although only potentially has a definite personality, path and goal that is determined by his God–given nature. It is his very nature that determines his real self. Distortion and dehumanization of human existence are measurable only on the basis of man's essential nature, and not according to criteria based on historical factors.

Every system of education and culture which is in harmony with the human nature and is helpful for its development is man's real culture, though it may not be the first culture imposed upon him by historical conditions. Any culture that does not suit human nature is alien to him, and, in a way, distorts and deforms his real nature and converts his `self' into `non–self,' even though it may be the product of national history.

For instance, the ideas of dualism and the sanctity of fire were distortions imposed on the human nature of ancient Persians, although these notions are considered products of Iranian history. But belief in the unity of God (tawhid) and rejection of all forms of worship of non–Gods signifies man's return to his real nature, even though this faith is not the product of Iranian soil and history.

Also, it has been wrongly presumed regarding human cultural material that it is a colourless and formless stuff to be moulded and shaped by history. It means that, according to this view, philosophy,

science, religion, morality, and art, whatever form and colour they may assume, are genuine. But as to what colour, mode, type, or form these should have is relative, and dependent upon history. It is the history and the culture of every nation which necessitate its own special philosophy, its own system of education, religion, morality and art.

In other words, as man himself is considered as being without any specific essence and form, and who draws his identity subsequently from culture, in the same way, the principles and basic materials of human culture are also devoid of any form, colour, and expression. It is history which gives them an identity, a form, and an expression, and stamps them with its particular seal. Some have gone further to the extent of claiming that even “mathematical thinking is influenced by the particular approach of a culture.” 4

This conception is based upon the theory of relativism of human culture. We, in the Principles and Method of the Philosophy of Realism” have dealt with absolutism and relativism in regard to the principles of thought. There, we have proved that whatever is relative is concerned with subjective and practical perceptions of reality.

It is these perceptions of reality which are different in different cultures, according to the changing conditions of space and time. These perceptions do not provide us with any test of truth or falsehood, and right or wrong, regarding the reality lying beyond them, to which they refer. But the theoretical sciences, scientific thought, and theoretical principles, which provide secure ground for philosophical and theoretical knowledge of man–like the principles of religious world outlook and the primary principles of ethics, are absolute, permanent, and non relative. Here, I am sorry to say, we shall abstain from further prolongation of this discussion.

Secondly, the claim that religion is belief and nationality is personal identity, that the relation between the two is determined by the relation of faith and personality, and that Islam affirms national identities as they are, and officially recognizes them, amounts to a total negation of the most important mission of religion.

The most important mission of religion, and above all that of Islam, lies in offering a world outlook on the basis of a universal system whose central idea is the belief in the unity of God (tawhid) –and in moulding the spiritual and moral personality of man on the basis of this world outlook. It seeks to cultivate and develop a new relation between the individuals and society.

Such a project necessitates the foundation of a radically new culture a culture which is human and not national. The culture which Islam offered to the world, and which is known as the Islamic culture today, was not aimed to be a culture similar to those cultivated by other religions by assimilating more or less the elements of the previous culture of the people.

Such religions were influenced by the pre–existing culture, and in their turn influenced the society. The culture that Islam developed was peculiar in the sense that culturalization was inherent in the basic

message of this religion. The message of Islam is dissociation of man from cultures unworthy of him and association with a culture worthy of him.

It affirms only that which is essentially positive in an existing culture. A religion which has nothing to do with various types of cultures, and which adjusts with varied cultures, is a religion which feeds itself upon the cultural leftover, and is satisfied with a casual, once-in-a-week visit to the church.

Thirdly, the meaning of the verse (49:13) that says:

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَى

Is not that `We have created you as two sexes,' so as to substantiate the claim that mankind is classified in various groups on the basis of sex, and is similarly divided into different nations and nationalities, and, in this way, to justify the conclusion that the verse means to say that, as the difference of the sexes is natural, an ideology should be based on affirmation of such differences and not their negation, and the differences of nationality are of the same kind as those of sex!

In fact what the verse wants to say is that `We have created you from a male and a female.' This either means that all human beings are genealogically related to and originate from one man and woman (Adam and Eve), or it means that all people are equal since they are the progeny of the same father and mother, and there should not be any discrimination.

Fourthly, the phrase **لِتَعَارَفُوا** , which has been used in the verse to refer to the purpose of creation, doesn't mean that nations are diversified so that `they may be distinguished from one another,' so as to justify the conclusion that all the nations should retain their specific character permanently in order to be identifiable as compared with other nations.

If the Qur'anic verse aimed at emphasizing this point, it should have used the word **لِيَتَعَارَفُوا** (that they may know their identity) instead of the word **لِتَعَارَفُوا** (that you may know one another). As those who are addressed are the individuals, the Qur'an tells them that `the divisions that have taken place in such a manner are inherent in the process of creation, so that you individuals may know each other by means of the national and tribal associations.' We know that the purpose of this I verse is not to preach that different nations and communities should necessarily retain their individualities, remaining independent of one another forever.

Fifthly, whatever we have described in the last chapter concerning the Islamic point of view regarding homogeneity and heterogeneity of societies is sufficient to prove that, according to Islam, the natural and creative process itself leads different societies towards the establishment of a unified society and culture, and the main programme of Islam is to establish such a culture and such a society. It is also sufficient to reject the above mentioned view.

The concept of Mahdism (the belief in the coming of the promised Mahdi) in Islam is based upon such a view of the future of Islam, mankind, and the world. Here, we conclude our discussion on society to initiate the discussion about history.

1. Al-Mizan, vol. IV, p. 106
2. Ibid, pp. 132, 133.
3. Ibid, p. 14.
4. Spengler, the well known sociologist, as quoted by Raymond Aron's Main Currents in sociological Thought, vol. I, p. 107.

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