Shahabuddin Iraqi

IMPACT OF SUFI TRADITIONS ON KABIR-

The Bhakti movement in Northern India emerged under Ramananda (1400-1700) during the fifteenth century. Its leaders played a vital role in the development of local dialects of the vernacular. But the literature produced by them appears to be largely influenced by the Sufi traditions. In the present paper an attempt has been made to trace the impact of those traditions on Kabir (1440-1518).

Sufism was not a challenge to Islam, Quran or the Prophet but simply a reaction against the formal or external attitude of the Ulama (Muslim theologians). Thus, the Sufis tried to replace the static theology by dynamic and progressive ideas in order to achieve universal character. Islam Ghazali (1058-1111), as great mystic philosopher, has distinguished between Ulama-i zahir (external scholars) and Ulama-i batin (saints of mystics) by saying the while the former proceed from knowledge to action, the latter proceed from action to knowledge.1

On the other hand, the Bhakti saints, particularly those of the Nirguna bhakti, 2 appeared in Northern India as a reaction against Vaishnavism or Hinduism. They not only protested against the religious orthodoxy and formalism but also challenged the incarnation theory, idol worship and even the scriptural authority of the Vadas. The Nirguni saints and their followers also developed their own scriptures in the form of compilations like the Bijak of Kabir, Guru-Granth of the Sikhs and the Panchavani of the Dadupanthis, which were and are still followed and usually recited in their respective sectarian centres as essential part of their religious obligations. The philosophical base of

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rising intra-Muslim strife, violence against women, sectarian murders, violation of rights of other faith communities, violence as a political instrument under the guise of Islam are highly disturbing trends and must be arrested. Instead of a provincial bias the universality of Islamic values and history of pluralistic culture of Muslims must be projected to the outside world. The intellectual paralysis that triggers these supremacist, xenophobic, and isolationist tendencies is a corollary of the loss of certitude. If Muslims ever were in want of postmodernist garb they now possess it--soaked with the blood of fellow Muslims and neighbors in faith.

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The global ethical reconstruction is a challenging task. How this task is to be accomplished is best narrated in the words of Hans Kung: "There can be no ongoing human society without a world ethic for the nations; there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions; there can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions."

On a diagnostic note, Asma Afsaruddin argues that "Rather than the much-touted clash of civilizations, this internal struggle between the absolutists and the pluralists for "the soul of Islam," as it has been described, is perhaps the real crisis for Muslims. How this crisis will be resolved in the short term is not easy to predict; for the long term, the revival of religious learning and historical scholarship among Muslims will prove to be the most effective counterweight to the obscurantism of the absolutists. A final observation: Entrenched secularists may be suspicious of pluralism emanating from a religious matrix in Muslimmajority societies. The Western post-Enlightenment master narrative of modernity had failed to account for religion in the public sphere and had blithely assumed its shrinking role and eventual demise. Contrary to these over-confident predictions, religion in our century shows no signs of receding from public view in most areas of the world but is in fact resurgent, including in the United States. Given this context, being able to make a case for diversity, democracy, and human rights in religious terms today should not be considered a setback for modernity but a successful accommodation with it—and a resounding victory for pluralism."

The universal ideological matrix for compassion, mercy, kindness, forgiveness, harmony, and tolerance, as enunciated by the Holy Quran and the Prophetic tradition, has been explicated. Historical evidence favors the view of Muslim fidelity to their religious doctrines. However, the

On the balance sheet then, beginning from the Enlightenment and passing through centuries of modernity and approaching the whimsical domain of postmodernism, there is little substantive value-laden material that the Islamic civilization can imbibe from the West. A Muslim critique of Western liberalism, therefore, must not be confined to narrow political and shabby foreign policy considerations. It must transcend to an enlightened debate on competing epistemologies.

In the Muslim world, Islam will remain a power, an influence, a defining paradigm, a way of life. Unless the Muslim identity crisis is resolved to a satisfactory level, we can continue to observe the agony of the dispossessed, the misery of the social injustice, the plight of ignorance, the ugly face of poverty, and the wrath of the unjust rulers. The Muslim predicament, no matter how deep and complex, nonetheless, is not a burden of the West. When Muslims decry over Western hypocrisy in Bosnia, they ought to see what they themselves have done to help the victims of Serbo-Croatian genocide. The future of Muslim civilization is not in the hands of the West, it lies with the Muslim resolve to put their house in order.

On the West, the deterioration of social conditions, the moral homelessness and the loss of foundational ethic will compel gravitation towards a reexamination of several philosophical assumptions. Religion has been a part of the Western ethos and will continue to be so. In this context, the major difference between Islam and the West is the religious symbolism and how it generates social consequences. There is a growing awareness that the loss of Western domination is partly a function of competing traditional values in the South, be they Islamic, Confucian, or Buddhist. A critical Western self-assessment would not consist of a postmodernist monologue but an attempt to understand the inherent goodness in universal values.

fundamentalist move of Mr. Hussein? True, regimes in the Muslim world have used--or continue to use--Islam as an instrument of legitimacy but that hardly is an excuse for fundamentalist terrorism. In the post-colonial Muslim world, neither Pan-Arabism, liberalism nor secularism nor any other variation on the theme has served to bring the Muslim identity crisis to an end. The proliferation of Islamic movements carries the message that if self-assertion and self-identity come to symbolize a living tradition then there is nothing fundamentalist about these attitudes. A search for Muslim "moderates" and "extremists" must, therefore, begin with a scrutiny of the perceived failures of Western models in the Muslim world.

Notwithstanding the Western complicity in antagonizing Muslims, the rise of conservative, rightist, and fundamentalist elements within the Western society has led to Muslim skepticism about Western assumptions--human rights, justice, and democracy included.

In the expression of Western values to the Muslim world, there is a perception of condescending style. With the real-life hypocrisy in international affairs, a deep sense of humiliation, and the scars of colonialism, this attitude adds insult to Muslim injury. However, contrary to the dictates of modernity, Muslim resilience remains unfailing, but not without a diatribe against Western lifestyle.

We must remind ourselves that, beyond the ominous rise of neo- Nazism and political fundamentalism, modernity and liberalism are under siege in the West itself, albeit under different premises. Modernity as a societal value lost its luster with the two major wars, fought principally on the European soil. At the same time, science and technology, hitherto the prized siblings of the Enlightenment faced internal criticism turning the dream of inevitable progress into an unattainable goal. Neither have they shown any prowess in serving as a moral paradigm.

Umar (r. 13-23/634-644), the second Rightly-Guided Caliph and close companion of the Prophet, returned the poll tax to an Arab Christian tribe that he was incapable of protecting from Byzantine aggression.

Aside from the juristic theory justifying the poll tax, the Quran does not, however, pronounce an absolute and unwavering rule in favor of such an institution. Once more, attention to historical circumstance is essential. The Quran endorsed a poll tax as a response to particular groups in Arabia who were persistently hostile to the early Muslims. Importantly, the Prophet did not collect a poll tax from every non- Muslim tribe that submitted to Muslim sovereignty, and in fact, in the case of a large number of non-Muslim but non-hostile tribes, he paid them a periodic sum of money or goods. These tribes were known as "those whose hearts have been reconciled." Furthermore, Umar entered into a peace settlement with Arab Christian tribes pursuant to which these tribes were obligated to pay the Islamic annual tax known as the zakah (almsgiving), and not the poll tax. Reportedly, although they refused to convert to Islam, the Christian tribes contended that paying the jizyah (poll tax) was degrading, and instead, asked to pay the zakah, and Umar accommodated their request."

Through the "New World Order" and its stalwarts-- disguised as the "end of history" and "the clash of civilizations"-- is the West waging a preemptive war against the Muslim world? Is this conflict over values, or over vital resources? Does the Muslim world really aspire for the Western model?

There can be no doubt that secularism is under attack in the Muslim world. Similarly, Pan-Arabism has lost its vigor because it was built around secularism. Even the staunchly Baathist regime of President Saddam Hussein, in the aftermath of the Arabian Gulf crisis, was compelled to don Islamic color. Shall we label it as a

a chronically violent faith persists, and surfaces at the most inappropriate moments.

As one of the received ideas of the west, it seems well-nigh impossible to eradicate. Indeed, we may even be strengthening it by falling back into our old habits of projection. As we see the violence - in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon - for which we bear a measure of responsibility, there is a temptation, perhaps, to blame it all on "Islam". But if we are feeding our prejudice in this way, we do so at our peril."

"The constitution of Medina and other covenants of the Prophet SAW with Jews and Christians laid down the principles for building a multi-cultural and multi-religious community. These fundamental rules that the Prophet SAW established have been practiced throughout Islamic history. Islam has given dhimmies of the Islamic community equal religious and cultural rights alongside Muslims. In other words, their autonomy, internal affairs and freedom to practice their religion were guaranteed by Muslim authority." (Aslan)

In the wake of rising Islamophobia in the West, the issue of ahl adh-dhimma has been played out of proportion to portray Islamic culture to be intolerant of other faith communities. Khaled Abou el Fadl offers a befitting response by saying that "The other major issue on the point of tolerance in Islam is that of the poll tax (jizyah) imposed on the People of Book (Christians and Jews) who live in Muslim territory. When the Quran was revealed, it was common inside and outside of Arabia to levy poll taxes against alien groups. Building upon the historical practice, classical Muslim jurists argued that the poll tax is money collected by the Islamic polity from non-Muslims in return for the protection of the Muslim state. If the Muslim state was incapable of extending such protection to non-Muslims, it was not supposed to levy a poll tax. In fact,

049.012 O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it...But fear Allah: For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

No one is to be persecuted for his religious beliefs

085.004 Woe to the makers of the pit (of fire),

085.005 Fire supplied (abundantly) with fuel:

085.006 Behold! They sat over against the (fire),

085.007 And they witnessed (all) that they were doing against the Believers.

085.008 And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, Exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise!-

Moderation is the best way

002.143 Thus, have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves.

Karen Armstrong is of the opinion that "The early conquests in Persia and Byzantium after the Prophet's death were inspired by political rather than religious aspirations. Until the Middle of the eighth century, Jews and Christians in the Muslim empire were actively discouraged from conversion to Islam, as, according to Quranic teaching, they had received authentic revelations of their own. The extremism and intolerance that have surfaced in the Muslim world in our own day are a response to intractable political problems - oil, Palestine, the occupation of Muslim lands, the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, and the west's perceived "double standards" - and not to an ingrained religious imperative. But the old myth of Islam as