

The Failure To Revive Muslims

Since the middle of the Twelfth Century after Hijra (Eighteenth Century AD) the Islamic World has declined from its rightful status'. It has now reached its all time low. This decline now so evident has occurred in the individual and society. The individual Muslim has declined in his Islamic personality; the once great Islamic state has been demolished and Muslim society has deteriorated. It has now reached a level where it is difficult to characterise Muslim countries by Islam.

Although this decline was noticeable prior to the Eighteenth Century AD it was the great boost given to the Western World by the Industrial Revolution that brought home to the Muslims their real decline. Naturally Muslims sought to halt this decline and revive Islam.

Many attempts were made, and are still being made, to revive Islam and to prevent its continued decline, unfortunately none of these attempts have succeeded. Accordingly the Islamic World continues to act haphazardly in the depths of this disarray. Muslims are still suffering the effects of this decline and the agony of confusion and backwardness.

The reason for this decline, is but one. The reason is the tremendous lack of importance which befell the minds of Muslims in understanding Islam. Muslims simply began to loose their understanding of Islam. This lack of understanding was not confined to the ordinary folk, indeed, whilst it may have commenced with them it soon embraced those people in authority such as the judges, scholars, Walis (governors) and Khalifahs.

This lack of understanding arose as a result of detaching the vitality of the Arabic language from the energy of Islam. The vitality of the Arabic language is essential for understanding the Miracle of Quran. Although many scholars debate exactly what constitutes the Miracle of Quran, i.e. science, laws and rules, even the prophecies, there can be no doubt that whilst the Quran contains all these phenomenon its Miracle is its linguistic style - the Arabic language.

To account for the linguistic energy in Quran Muslims must have an equal linguistic vitality to understand the verses of Quran, Allah's orders and prohibitions, and the explanations of paradise and hell etc. In addition to this it was through the Arabic language that the messengers of Allah (s.a.w.) conveyed his message. The result of these two factors is that Arabic language cannot be divorced from the energy of Islam. However despite this fact by the Seventh Century A.H the Arabic language began to be ignored and absent in the ruling system i.e. the Government. This was of course a gradual process taking many years. The Khalifahs and their assistants began to talk in their own languages and give orders in their own language. Sheikh of Islam only knew enough Arabic to understand and issue the various Islamic opinions 'fatwas' that they were asked to issue. Naturally Arabic became neglected.

Compare for example those countries introduced to Islam together with the vitality of Arabic, for example, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia etc., with those countries where the vitality of Arabic was neglected such as the Balkan states. The latter group in the main have only the remains of history to remind them of Islam.

On the other hand the first group of countries despite the absence of the system of Islam still adheres to Islam. This is because of the tie of the Arabic Language and Islam and the correct delivery of Islam by those who conveyed it. This point is not missed by those westernised secularists who led by people such as Nasser in the 50s tried very hard to introduce dialects and colloquialism into the Arabic language so as to drive further the wedge between the Muslims understanding of Islam.

Without Arabic, Ijtihad (exertion) cannot be performed. For Arabic language is essential to the Mujtahid (the person performing exertion) in understanding directly the sources i.e. Quran and Hadiths. Ijtihad is essential for the Ummah without it Muslims cannot progress because it allows Muslims to understand the Islamic opinion on new issues. The decision to close the gates of Ijtihad meant Muslims could not respond to the continual developments being made in terms of science and technology, accordingly the State missed out. However it should be remembered that the gates

of Ijtihad were closed for a reason i.e. to prevent non Islamic opinions from entering Islam. The point which must be made is that the nation without Ijtihad will lag behind the rest of the world and that Arabic language is a prerequisite for Ijtihad to take place.

It is against this background, the poor understanding of Islam through the neglect of the Arabic language, that we analyse the many attempts that have been made to revive Muslims by Islam.

Most, if not all the attempts to revive Islam have failed for the following reasons:

1. Misunderstanding of the Islamic thought by those who endeavoured to revive Islam.
2. Vagueness in understanding the method of implementing the Islamic thought.
3. The failure to connect the Islamic thought with the Islamic method of implementing Islam.
4. Reliance upon people with simply enthusiasm and sincerity who have failed to correctly define the problem and its solution.
5. Incorrect relationship between leader and members and lack of structure within the movement.

It is vital for the Ummah that all movements address themselves to these reasons for we should not learn by our mistakes, instead we should avoid making them in the first place and learn from the mistakes of those movements that have started out on their path before us.

1. Misunderstanding of the Islamic thought

Various Movements were established on a general, undefined thought. This thought itself was vague, missing definition, identity, purity and clarity. The Islamic thought had been subjected to concealing factors that obscured its true identity. These concealing factors obscured a lot of details for Muslims. These factors commenced from the second century A.H. onwards up to the advent of Capitalism. The spread of Islam into Persia, India and Europe brought Islam into contact with the respective philosophies. This had an affect on some Muslims who tried to reconcile the differences between Islam and these philosophies, despite the explicit contrast between them. The Scholars of Islam began to interpret Islam in the light of these philosophies. They observed concepts in these philosophies and sought to see if they were present in Islam.

The result of these efforts of conciliation between Islam and these alien concepts was to obscure the clarity and true identity of the Islamic thought in the minds of the Muslims. That is, it led to interpretations and explanations that alienated some Islamic notions from their minds as well as weakening their comprehension.

In addition to this process, which in many ways is still going on, the entering hypocritically into Islam of people who hated Islam had the effect of inserting some concepts not only strange to Islam but contradicting it. These hypocrites endeavoured to harm Islam.

Added to these factors in the Eleventh century Hijra (seventeenth century AD) and still very much in existence is the cultural, missionary and political invasion of the West. This was really a compounding factor making what was already a complex problem further complicated.

Without elaborating on the nature of these three factors it is sufficient to say that they resulted in Muslims losing the real distinctiveness of the Islamic thought. A current example of this is the way many Muslims have attempted to reconcile such concepts as democracy, Marxism, nationalism with Islam despite the clear contradiction between Islam and them.

2. Vagueness in understanding the Islamic method of implementing the Islamic thought

Islam is both a creed (Aqeeda) and a method, i.e. Islam comprises of a thought and a method (Tariqa) of implementing the thought. This characteristic of thought and method is evident in all aspects. The method is an integral part of Islam and has to be taken care of.

The Movements, however, did not select or even possess knowledge of a definite method of executing their thought. Thus the thought was performed in an off hand, adhoc, undefined and ambiguous manner. Muslims generally lost the clear conception of the method of implementing Islam.

Originally, Muslims had a clear comprehension that their whole existence in life was purely for the sake of Allah, The Supreme, The Glorified. That the duty of the individual Muslim was to implement Islam and that the duty of the Islamic state was to implement Islam. This meant executing the law of Islam within the State and conveying this call (dawa) outside the State. Muslims were also clear in their understanding that the means by which this invitation was to be achieved was through Jihad performed by the State. Later on however Muslims began to consider that their first duty and primary aim in life was to gain worldly possessions. Their secondary duty to deliver the most boring, mundane, and uninspiring sermons, and the giving of guidance. But even this was only done when circumstances permitted. Thus the work for Islam came second to their work for this life.

This neglect was accompanied by the State relaxing in its execution of Islamic law to the point where they saw no sin or negligence in doing so . The State sunk to the level where it saw no shame in disregarding Jihad for the sake of Allah and the spread of Islam.

When Muslims eventually lost their State, what ever its conditions, they began to perceive the return of Islam through the building of new mosques, publishing books and a stricter observance of morals. However they at the same time turned a blind eye and deaf ear to the authority and mastership of Kufr over them.

3. Failure to connect the Islamic thought with the Islamic method

Whilst Muslims studied sharia (legal) rules related to the Islamic thought and accordingly the treatment of the problems, they stopped paying attention to the rules that demonstrate the manner of treatment, i.e. the method. Thus, Muslims studied sharia but not how to implement it. This led them to focus their field of concern on the study of the rules of prayer, fasting, marriage and divorce, but at the same time to neglect the rules of Jihad, booties, land tax (kharaj), head tax (Jizya), and the rules of Judiciary and Khilafah. In sum, they detached the Islamic thought from the method of implementation. This led to a natural conclusion, that is, they found it impossible to implement the Islamic thought.

As for the Islamic movements they too were subjected to the same deficiency of detaching the method from the thought. Consequently they rarely addressed themselves to the question of the method of Islam. Instead they resorted to reforming the society in order to revive the Ummah, and because of the failure to connect the thought with the method they followed any way (minhaj) that appealed to them. As a result they copied and imitated the secular movements. The saddening thing being, they saw no wrong in this. The way of making the call to Islam, of reviving the Ummah and establishing the rules of Allah must be taken from Islamic sources. The movements neglected this basic principle and as a result failed to connect thought with method.

4. Reliance on leaders unaware of the Problem, endowed merely with enthusiasm and sincerity

Islamic Movements were full of sincerity enthusiasm and a desire to change the society but lacked leaders with a knowledge of the problem and an awareness of the issues identified above.

Many of the leaders whilst having the desire to change the society had been educated in the West. Their minds were corrupted with western concepts and thought patterns. Thus they were not aware of how they were supposed to think in respect of changing the society. They were foreigners in their societies, unaware of their environment and the rights and needs of their communities.

Any change they brought about was aimed only at limited objectives, they never sought to establish their ideology i.e. - Islam. They never tried to establish the Islamic thought because they were unaware of it.

After completing their trials these leaders were often appeased with individual rewards, such as good positions and salaries. Thus they turned rebellions and protests to their own advantage, and if change was not to their advantage they stopped these actives.

5. Absence of the correct relationship in the Movement

Individual members of the movements were not chosen on the basis of their belief and suitability to the group instead, they were chosen according to their status in society. Thus a charismatic person would be given membership of the movement inspite of the fact that he may disagree with key ideas and lack the true characteristic of the hamala dawa (caller to Islam). Accordingly members were chosen from professionals, intellectuals, businessmen and those with any kind of influence. The result of this was disillusionment amongst the members and a general feeling of superiority.

If members do not have a general culture with agreement on key issues relating to things such as the thought and method then with time they will come into conflict with each other. If the members are selected because of their influence rather than their belief and dedication, then frustration and disillusionment will occur. If members are selected because of their social status then a feeling of superiority will arise. These features were reflected in the movements. Thus of these movements lacked the backing of the people and were considered among other things as elitist.

Conclusion

Due to the above reasons all the reformist movements that were established to revive Muslims and to restore the Glory of Islam failed. This failure was inevitable because although they were Islamic movements their misunderstanding of Islam caused them to increase the complexity of the problem facing Muslims and helped isolate the society from Islam instead of assisting the implementation of Islam upon it.

It has to be understood that real revival cannot be accomplished save with an Ideology, which includes both thought and method. This ideology is Islam, because it has a doctrine (Aqeeda) from which systems emanate. Systems for all the affairs of the Ummah and State, and for all problems of life.

Accordingly it is necessary to have an Islamic movement that really understands Islam as a thought and a method, that successfully connects them and proceeds to resume the Islamic way of life in any of the states of the Islamic World. In such a way that this state becomes a starting point from which the Islamic call will spring forth and in turn become a point of departure for the call to Islam for the whole world.

Al-Fajr Magazine, December 1985