

The Journey of Civilisation

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Introduction

Yesterday a dark smog covered Delhi. It was so thick that it even disallowed the rays of the sun to penetrate through. Described as dense and visible air pollution, smog has become a common occurrence over the last few years. Smog actually is a combination of smoke and fog. Though fog occurs naturally; the 'smoke' is introduced into the atmosphere by the activities of man. A noxious mixture of gases, smog is a hazardous phenomenon. Here I would like to refer to a book entitled *Future Shock*. Authored by Alvin Toffler and published in 1971, this book became a best seller of its time. In his book, Toffler had predicted that our civilization is forging towards an industrial age, which would soon enter into a super-industrial age. But contrary to his prognosis, the civilization instead entered the pollution age. Air pollution became a phenomenon that had no precedence in history.

This is a very serious situation because these signs are indicative of the fact that the journey of human civilization has reached its end. A prediction in Hadith in this regard is as follows:

“A smoke (dukhaan) will appear before the Doomsday.” (Qurtubi)

Giving an advance warning about the coming of such time as would mark the doom for mankind, the Quran says:

“Watch out for the day when the sky brings forth plainly visible clouds of smoke.”(44:10)

While man thought that the industrial age is leading him to a better world and revelled in the ideas of a better tomorrow, the situation became quite otherwise. If he does not halt to think even now, he would put himself at great risk.

The Beginning

God created space and time. This grand event was followed by an explosion called the 'Big Bang' which brought the heavenly bodies into existence and consequently led to the formation of the universe as we see it today. This was followed by a 'Little Bang' that brought into existence our solar system and an exceptional planet – Earth. Then occurred a 'Water Bang', which filled water in most parts of this unique planet and proved to be a factor crucial to the origin and survival of living beings on it. When God created Earth, He gave its charge to the jinns but they failed and the charge was taken away. According to Hadith,

“Jinns fought and created a lot of corruption on Earth and hence proved incapable of being given the charge of this planet.” (Ibn Kathir)

Then God created Adam. According to a verse in the Quran,

“...I am putting a successor on earth.” (2:30)

It is crucial to understand that the word used in this verse is ‘Khalifa’ and NOT ‘Khalifatullah’ or ‘Khalifa of God’. In fact, the famous Muslim scholar, *Ibn Taymiyyah* wrote that **calling Adam a ‘Khalifa of God’ is *kufr*** (Fatawa-ibn Taimiyya). The word *khalifa* simply means a ‘successor’ and this was used in the context of man as he was to succeed jinns. At the time of man’s creation, when God ordained the angels and jinns to bow before Adam, it was not to worship him. But to signify that when God is giving the charge of Earth to man then angels and jinns must extend their full cooperation and support to man’s endeavours. God did this because He created Earth with immense potential and wanted its potential to be converted into actual. No jinn could do it. Therefore, this task was put upon man.

How could man develop a civilization?

God created Earth with immense potential. Man as he got the charge of Earth, gradually created an entire civilization by converting this potential into actual. God chose to guide man through the discovery method, that is, man was required to discover the hidden potential of Earth and convert it into actual. For example, man discovered steam power by observing the lid of a kettle move as the water in the pot boiled. He realized that when water boils, the lid of the kettle rises. This happened because one form of energy can convert itself into other forms. After reaching a particular temperature, the kinetic energy of water molecules converted itself into mechanical energy and lifted the lid. Water always had the steam power hidden. While the jinns could not discover it, man not only found it but also invented machines to do the work for him.

Similarly, Earth was a huge storehouse of natural ores. Jinns did nothing with these ores. Man saw that the ore melted in fire and upon being cooled became a strong metal, iron. Man processed this strong metal further and converted it into steel which had innumerable uses for him. In fact, today, steel is one of the most common materials in the world and is a major component in buildings, infrastructure, tools, ships, automobiles, machines, and appliances.

Both jinn and man were given a mind. But jinns (created from fire) could not use their mind to create a civilization on earth whereas man (created from mud – the ingredients of this Earth) could use his mind to discover the potential in earth and converted it into actual.

Origin of modern civilisation

What we now refer to as the modern civilization did not originate in Europe over the last 400-500 years; rather its history dates back to 4000 years when Prophet Abraham settled his wife and son in a desert in Arabia. Prophet Abraham did so because the generation at that time had become highly conditioned in *shirk* or nature-worship. At its acme then, nature-worship served as the chief hurdle in the discovery of nature because an object of worship could not become an object of exploration. In other words, since people worshipped nature (sun, moon, stars etc), they were not able to explore and discover the potential of earth. This was against the creation plan of God.

Through Prophet Abraham, God settled Hajra and Ishmael in a desert where such a generation was raised that was free from all forms of conditioning and untouched by the culture of nature-worship. The biggest contribution in this process was that of Hajra who agreed to stay in a desert with her infant son. The generation that came up as a result of her sacrifice is referred to as the '*nation of heroes*' by a European Orientalist. Hajra personified the adage, '*There is a woman at the beginning of all great things*'. Her unprecedented sacrifice held so much importance before God that the instance when she frantically ran between the two hillocks of *Safa* and *Marwah* (to find water for her wailing son) became a rite during Hajj. Called as '*Sai*', this rite is to remind us of the great role that Hajra played in the creation of a conditioning-free generation.

Obstacles in the creation of a modern civilisation

Despotism was a great evil which persisted in the ancient world. The Kings were totalitarian rulers who ceased to provide any freedom to those they ruled. This restriction on freedom curbed all revolution, research and intellectual activities. A large part of the known world was under the aegis of one of the two political pillars of early times - Iranian Empire and the Roman Empire. These immensely powerful regimes were brought down by the team of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad. Highlighting the contribution of this team, a French historian Henri Paine writes: "*Islam changed the face of the globe; the traditional order of history was overthrown.*" The revolution brought about by the Prophet and his Companions created a different world order – there came about freedom and free-thinking which paved way for future developments.

First, Hajra made personal sacrifices towards the creation of a deconditioned generation and then Prophet Muhammad and his team dethroned the despotic empires to make way for civilisational advancements. Starting from Arab, this wave culminated in Europe as *Renaissance* during 14th-16th centuries that marked the beginning of a period of intellectual transformation.

Scientific Revolution

The science of the late renaissance was significant in establishing a base for modern science. Brilliant minds started to question all manners of things and it was this questioning that led to the scientific revolution, which in turn formed the foundations of all modern sciences. The process of civilization continued. New discoveries and inventions gave a never-before-like boost to the ongoing process of advancements. The discoveries made by Galileo, Copernicus etc and understanding of mechanics, steam power are just some examples demonstrating the great progress that was underway. Gradually, the scientific revolution led to a knowledge explosion and man became aware of all kinds of disciplines.

The downfall

After achieving such feats and advances, man replicated the history of jinns. He became arrogant and started misusing these advancements. For example, the discovery of explosives was a constructive feat as it made paving ways inside the tunnels an easy task. But man misused it for killing people. Similarly, nuclear energy was a great source of power but man made nuclear bombs with it.

The case the phenomenon of air pollution is no different. It developed because man misused his freedom. In the wake of the impending danger of climate change, several conventions and summits are organised on a very regular basis. Unfortunately, all these efforts are in vain because the root cause of the problem is the present-day lifestyle. Nobody is ready to change his or her lifestyle. For example, we all know that cars emit carbon dioxide which contributes to global warming. Is man ready to leave behind the car and use bicycles? No. Then what is the use of holding 'talks' and 'conventions'?

The negative aspect of the civilization that man created has now come to pass. While it provided all the comfort to man, this civilization became the source of many problems. This was because despite all the advances, man could not have the technology to run a perfect industry like that of God. While his car moves and creates pollution, everything in nature such as planets, stars etc are on the constant move without a trace of imperfection. When Alvin Toffler predicted the coming of the next super industrial age, he failed to take into account these limitations of man.

The coming of the final hour

Predicting the approach of the doomsday, the Prophet said,

“There will be three periods of drought - in the first period, one-third water will get over and resources would start depleting, in the next period two-third water will be finished and in the third phase all the water from earth will get over.” (Musnad Ahmad)

The survival of human life depends upon water. Life cannot be imagined without water. It was for this reason that large reservoirs of water were created in the form of oceans and seas and salt was mixed as preservative. Then as a part of the universal desalination process, water of the oceans got evaporated by the sun's heat. This water formed clouds which then precipitated in the form of rain. This was fresh, desalinated and edible water. This fresh water was stored in the form of snow atop the mountains and as glaciers. But due to global warming, the glaciers started melting and the snow on the mountains started to melt and flow away into the sea.

Hence, fresh water reservoirs started getting mixed with the salty water of the seas. Many rivers like the Ganges are drying and there is great concern about water all over the world.

The prediction of the Prophet of the age in which one-third water of the earth will dry has already come to pass. **Now we are approaching the second age when two-third water of the world will get over.** This situation is similar to that of the sailor in the poem, *Ancient Mariner* written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The mariner is very thirsty and reaches the middle of an ocean, but because of the salty water he remarks, *Water, water everywhere, not a drop to drink!* Today again when all the fresh water is becoming salty, we are on the verge of the ‘water, water everywhere, not a drop to drink’.

The third phase

In the light of the Quran and the Hadith, there are therefore three phases of human history: First phase marked the era of the Jinns who could not make any civilization. Next, man made an imperfect civilization comprising both good and bad. The third and the last phase of civilization would be a perfect civilization - Paradise. It will be perfect because it would be managed by the angels. According to traditions of *Ibn Kathir*, the world of paradise would be inhabited on Earth itself. This time only selected individuals would inhabit it. This is corroborated by the following verses found in the Quran and the Bible, which indicate that the third phase would be managed by angels and men would be selected on the basis of their merit:

“We have already written in the Psalms (Solomon)....’My righteous servants shall inherit the Earth.”(Quran, 21:105)

“The righteous shall inherit the Earth.” (Bible)

Global Warning

God is cautioning man about the arrival of the final hour. The tenure of man on Earth has now come to an end and man must prepare himself for facing God. The Quran says,

“Therefore, hasten to God.” (51:50)

This means that since very little time is left and so we must devote ourselves to discharging the obligation towards our fellow human beings. Man was born so that he could live his life in accordance with the Creation Plan of God and prove himself worthy of being inducted in the perfect world of paradise. The irony is that not only those who are unaware of the Quran and Hadith but even those who have read them are not cognizant of this reality.

Muslims for instance, are still waiting for a *Dajjal* and *Mehdi* to appear. This is utterly absurd because **prevailing of the element of doubt is the law of nature**. Man has never been able to understand this fact. Even the communities of the previous prophets urged that an angel be sent to them as a Prophet. But the Quran says,

“If We (God) had sent an angel as messenger, We would have made him in the form of a man as well and would have thus added to their confusion.” (6:9)

This verse clearly proves that the element of doubt must always exist. If we are not able to recognise the truth amidst the jungle of chaos, it's blindness on our part. Any further wait will only take us closer to the doomsday. A verse in the Quran explains the occurrence of the doomsday in the following words:

“It (doomsday) will suddenly overtake you.” (7:187)

The Doomsday will come to pass suddenly, without any warning and will give no time to man to make further amends. Therefore, drawing conjectures about the day and date of its arrival is a futile exercise simply because if man were to know about the time of doom, it would go against the law of nature. Doomsday can strike any instant. A new world will then come into being where according to the Bible,

“Bad will be segregated from Good.”

In these final days, we therefore must strive to prepare ourselves so that we may find a place in the better world of hereafter. May God guide us!