

The Evils of Westernization

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Preface

Mizan Press, Berkeley, Contemporary Islamic Thought Persian Series (1984), 5. 95. Occidentosis (Gharbzadegi)* is Jalal Ali Ahmad's tryst with the infinite world of ideas, for which the scene is set in twentieth-century Iran and the background is provided by the vast panorama of the East faced with the onslaughts of the Western civilization. The first draft of the book in Persian was presented at two of the many sessions of the Congress on the Aim of Iranian Education, on 29 November 1961 and 17 January 1962 in the form of a report, but it did not find a place in the proceedings of the Congress due to its critical nature.

The first one-third part of Gharbzadegi was published in the periodical Kitab-e Mah causing the suspension of the journal. The author published it as a separate work privately in 1341/1962. Since its publication the book has been discussed, criticized and analysed heatedly both in Iran and abroad. It is acknowledged by both admirers and critics as a work of unique significance because of its content as well as its approach.

R. Campbell has done a commendable service to contemporary Islamic thought by rendering the book into English.

Hamid Algar, a specialist in the field of recent Iranian thought and politics, has greatly enhanced the value of the translation by adding well-researched scholarly notes to it. The notes by Algar are both informative and corrective, for Jalal Ali Ahmad, being not a historian and a meticulous researcher, had committed certain errors that needed to be pointed out for the sake of providing readers with more accurate and definite information about the events referred to in the book.

Algar has done the editorial job with superb competence.

Jalal Ali Ahmad is one of the most eminent figures of contemporary Persian literature, basically a fiction writer, but nevertheless an equally important ideologue of modern Iran. In many respects he is a precursor of Dr. Ali Shari'ati, who, despite exercising far greater influence than Jalal on the youth, could not surpass Jalal Ali Ahmad in literary excellence.

Supplement 1

Jalal Ali Ahmad (b. 1923) belonged to a family of strong religious traditions. The famous revolutionary Ayatullah Mahm'd Taliqani (d. 1979) was his paternal uncle and Jalal Ali Ahmad had been always impressed by him, but particularly during his later religious phase came closer to him. Jalal's family was reasonably well-off. When the clerical class was deprived of its notarial function and the income they derived from it, his family was put to hardship and Jalal had to give up his education after primary school.

Instead he was sent to work to supplement the family's income. Jalal secretly enrolled in night classes and obtained his high school diploma in 1943. One year later he joined the T'deh party, and made a complete break with religion. There he founded a literary association of Marxist writers, and within three years was appointed director of the party's publishing house with the responsibility of launching a new monthly Mahanah-yi mardum.

He wrote prolifically for the party journals. In this period he was under the influence of the nationalist, anti-Shi'i writer Ahmad Kisrawi. In 1946, he graduated from the Teachers' Training College in Tehran, and started his career as a teacher and as a writer of fiction almost simultaneously.

His first collection of stories *Did wa Bazdid* (Visits exchanged) was published in 1945, and his anti-religion stance in those stories marked his complete break with Islam and his father.

His second collection of short stories *Az ranji ki mibarim*, an exercise in socialist realism, was published in 1947. The very same year he came out of the T'deh party along with a group of activists led by Khalil Maliki as an aftermath of the party's support to the Soviet Union's refusal to save the communist-dominated autonomous government of Azarbayjan. Now he devoted most of his time, except brief occasional sojourns in politics, to literary work. *Seh Tar*, his third collection of stories is product of this period.

He returned to political activity with Dr. Musaddiq's campaign joined an alliance for the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry and with Hizb-e Zahmat Kashan. In 1952, as a result of Maliki's rift with the Hizb-e Zahmat Kashan, a new party *Nir'-ye Sewwum* was formed and Jalal served it for a short time. In 1953, when the fugitive Shah was brought back by the U.S.A., Jalal left this party also.

Moreover, political activity was made virtually impossible due to severe repressive measures. Jalal turning again to literary pursuits translated Gide's *Re tour de l'URSS* and brought out *Zan-e ziyadi* (The superfluous woman). He dabbled in modernist poetry and painting also for some time. But more, significant for his intellectual development was his interest in anthropology. Within a period of four years he published three research monographs dealing with Iranian villages and their age-old customs, viz. *Aurazan*, *Tatneshinha-ye Bul'k-i Zahra*, and *Jazirah-ye Khark*.

During this research the contradictory nature of the Western and the Islamic Eastern traditions dawned upon him, a realization that paved the way for his return to Islam. The worth of his anthropological work was immediately recognized by both the Iranian academic circles and Western universities.

He undertook extensive foreign travels: to Europe in early 1963, to the Soviet Union in 1964, and to the United States in 1965. Of all these, the journey exercising the farthest reaching impact on his psyche was his hajj pilgrimage in 1964, which proved to be a great leap towards Islam. During this period of great creativity he realized the basic conflict between the traditional Iranian social structure and the new changes being imposed on the Iranian society in the name of modernization.

The interiorization of this awareness resulted in a unique kind of self-realization-broadening of the field of self-activity to the levels of national as well as religious collective-self-realization. The Iranian-Islamic archetypal patterns of conscious and unconscious psychical processes were revealed to him to be in opposition to those patterns of thought and practice which were being imported with technology from the West and transplanted on the Eastern soil.

Jalal's realization of the contradictory characters of the Western and Eastern cultures caused him to write *Gharbzadegi*, an analysis of the corrupting influence of the West on the East in the historical perspective with particular reference to the Iranian society and body politic. In the last years of his life he produced two major works: the novel, *Nafrin-e zamin* (The curse of the land), published in 1967, a damaging criticism of the so-called Land Reform; and a work of ideological importance, *Dar khidmat wa khiyanat-e rawshanfikran* (Concerning the service and disservice of the intellectuals), which was posthumously published during the peak hours of the Revolution.

Jalal died on September 9, 1969 in a village in Gilan, and was buried near the Fir'zabadi mosque at Shahri Ray. Thus came to end an intellectual career, apparently chequered with swift shifts in political and philosophical position, but in reality depicting the journey of a restless soul in search of its true identity, a quest for the roots. Jalal's psychological and intellectual biography is not different from those of many others who underwent similar radical upheavals and transformations in the post-Second-World-War period of disillusionment with almost all the modern ideologies causing a deep sense of rootlessness.

Jalal traced back the roots of his own existence along with the roots of Iranian culture and soul to Islam—a diagnosis of great relevance to the Muslim world in general. Hamid Algar's introduction to the translation of *Gharbzadegi* furnishes all necessary information about Jalal's literary and political life.

Algar's following observation provides the key to understanding the real nature of Occidentosis:

It is important to remember that its author was neither a historian nor an ideologue. He was a man who after two decades of thought and experimentation had discovered an important and fundamental truth concerning his society-disastrous subordination to the West in all areas—and was in a hurry to communicate this discovery to others. He had neither the time nor the patience to engage in careful historical research, and at some points in the book he even enjoins his readers to dig up the historical evidence for a given assertion. (p. 14).

A more important observation made by Algar concerns the nature of Jalal's rediscovery of the soul of Islam. In his view, Jalal's return to Islam is not straightforward, because, firstly, he could not completely free himself from the Orientalist influence, and secondly, there was an unmistakably nationalist colour to Ali Ahmad's proud claim that Islam became Islam when it reached the settled lands between the Tigris and the Euphrates, until then being the Arabs' primitiveness and Jahiliyyah" Jalal in Occiden tosis blames Orientalists for inflating the Iranian ego by causing them to believe that they are the people with a great past and consequently making them think that they did not need learn anything new from the West except the use of machine.

Then taking advantage of this false pride and complacency, in his view, Western scholars changed the moulds of Iranian thought substituting them by their own measures. It is strange that an intellectual of Jalal's calibre, who was aware of the Western scholars' conspiracy, fell so cheaply into their trap and explained the origin of Islam in terms of "a kind of delayed response to the call of Mani and Mazdak" or, using Marxist jargon, "a new call based on the needs of the urban populations of the Euphrates region and Syria".

These and many other false notions and criteria are fabrications of the Western mode of thinking imported to the East in the name of "scientific tools of socio-historical analysis".

And our intelligentsia is so allured by the temptation of being considered modern that a conscious writer like Jalal, fully aware of Western intellectual conspiracy, applies them to the realities of Islam and the Eastern culture unhesitatingly. Unfortunately all intellectuals who have been and are in the vanguard of political and intellectual movements in the third world have been using Western concepts and criteria to interpret and solve the complexities of their own traditions.

Modernism, liberalism, scientism, secularism, sociologism and many other 'isms' were evolved and developed in the West according to the changing conditions of the Western society and polity, which were confronted with a fundamental contradiction between new scientific modes of thinking and Christian-dominated medieval ways of life and thought that caused an unbridgeable breach between sacred and profane, spiritual and physical, worldly and otherworldly, religion and social existence, or the church and the state.

So-called Eastern intelligentsia in general, and Muslim intellectuals in particular, without applying their intellect to the fundamental opposition between Oriental and Occidental milieu, accepted Western notions as if they were universally true and applicable to various realities.

Nationalism is also such a category having little relevance to the realities and ideals of Islam. Iranian Islam, Indian Islam, Malaysian Islam, Pakistani Islam, Turkish Islam and Arab Islam as terms have become so current in contemporary writings that even the most cautious and meticulous of Muslim scholars brought up under the Western educational system use them as valid. Undoubtedly Islamic teachings due to their immense potential of

adaptability could fit in different environs without being altered basically, but it did not mean that Islam could be variously interpreted.

Since such a wrong conception of Islam became current, Muslim Ummah as a whole began to lose political and economic power and became stagnant intellectually and scientifically. Jalal's pride in an Islam which became Islam after settling in what is presently known as Iraq, Syria and Iran stems from a similar nationalist oriented misconception.

Surprisingly enough Jalal is critical of the Safawid Iran for playing into the hands of anti-Muslim Eastern and Western powers by stabbing the Ottoman Muslim empire in the back which proved to be the last stronghold of Muslim resistance against the world supremacy of the West. Granted that his criticism is not justified concerning all the points, nonetheless his analysis, though defective, reveals his keen desire for Muslim unity. He is also aware that the breaking up of the Ottoman empire into small states and principalities was engineered by Western imperialist designs. This awareness should have led him to understand the true nature of the movements of nationalism in the Muslim world.

The seeds of nationalism were sowed in the hearts of the Muslims by a well-planned conspiracy of Western imperialism, intellectually supported by Orientalists and Western educators with a view to break Muslim unity.

Supplement 2

The Arabs who are still serving their Western masters, with their overemphasis on Arab nationalism fail to realize that the differences within their own fold are due to themselves and are offshoots of the spirit of nationalism cultivated in their minds by the vested Western interests. The divisive role of nationalism does not stop at alienating Arab Muslims from the rest of the Muslim world, but it goes further and deeper by causing subdivisions among themselves making them even more dependent on the West.

Like many modern and so-called progressive writers of the past generation Jalal Ali Ahmad, in his diagnosis of the evil effects of Western influence, could not smell the danger of the West-inspired nationalism.

Thus he, whose messianic mission was to liberate Iranians from the clutches of Westernization, fell an easy prey to the Occidental trap not realizing the ideological pitfalls in Western thought. This is how Orientalists consciously coin certain notions with ulterior motives and our Eastern, or more precisely Muslim, intellectuals imitate them unconsciously subscribing to their views and serving their motives.

Algar, quoting Simin Danishwar, Jalal's wife, concludes that Jalal's "relative return to religion was a means to preserving national identity and a path leading to human dignity, mercy, reason, and virtue." All these terms are ambiguous, rather empty clichés, confusing "Islamic identity" with a particular kind of "national identity."

Jalal's return to Islam is dubbed as incomplete by Algar, for, even in *Khassi dar Miqat*, Jalal's travelogue of his hajj pilgrimage, despite his occasional emotional outbursts, he is more concerned with the human and material surroundings than with his own inner experience. On the one hand, it may be explained in terms of a hangover from his Marxist past, and on the other, it can be deciphered "as an attempt to flee from the mosque" The last phrase occurs in *Khassi dar Miqat* (Tehran: 1345/1966, p. 74) on the occasion of his visit to the tomb of the Prophet (S) in Medina.

In the morning when I said, 'peace be upon you, O Prophet,' I was suddenly moved. The railing surrounding the tomb was directly in front of me and I could see the people circumambulating the tomb ... I wept and fled from the mosque. (*Occidentosis*, p.18)

However, this incomplete return to Islam in itself is significant, because it paved the way for the coming of many an intellectual in the fold of the Islamic Revolution. Ayatullah Taliqani remarked of him: 'Jalal was very good toward the end of his 'life.' Had he lived till the victory of the Islamic Revolution, most probably he would have been on the side of the 'ulama'. This is not a shallow conjecture, but can be supported with ample evidence. He was the first member of the intelligentsia to lament the killing of Shaykh Fadl Allah N'ri, the chief opponent of Western-style constitutionalism. Jalal reevaluated his positive role in blocking the smooth sailing of the Western interests in Iran in the following words:

... The martyred Shaykh N'ri was forced to mount the gallows not as an opponent of constitutionalism, which he had defended early on, but as an advocate of rule by Islamic law (and as an advocate for Shi'i solidarity).

This is why they all sat waiting for the fatwa from Najaf to kill him-this in an age when the leaders among our occidentotic intellectuals were the Christian Malkum Khan and the Caucasian Social Democrat Talibov.

Now the brand of occidentosis was imprinted on our foreheads. I look on that great man's body on the gallows as a flag raised over our nation proclaiming the triumph of occidentosis after two hundred years of struggle. Under this flag we are like strangers to ourselves, in our food and dress, our homes, our manners, our publications, and, most dangerous, our culture (Occidentosis, pp. 5657)

Ali Ahmad was probably the lone litterateur who recognized the significance of the 15 Khurdad 1342 (6 June 1963) uprising, and could see how decisive a role the 'ulam a' were to play in shaping the destiny of Iran.

He also went to see Imam Khumayni, who was quoted as saying: I once saw Jalal Ali Ahmad for a quarter of an hour. It was in the early part of our movement. I saw someone sitting opposite me, and the book Gharbzadegi was lying near me. He asked, 'How did you come by this Nonsense?' and I realized it was Ali Ahmad. Unfortunately, I never saw him again. May he enjoy the mercy of God. (Commemorative supplement to Jamh'ri-ye Islami, p.10)

The first chapter of Occidentosis deals with the nature of the disease. It is said that the division of the world in two blocs, East and West, or communist and non-communist, has become redundant. In fact there exist two blocs, and they are: producers of the machine and buyers of the machine. It makes all the difference who exports and who imports machines. Economy, politics, sociology, psychology, and every other thing including prosperity, mortality and birth-rates, social welfare, nutrition, culture, and socio-political structure depend upon this single fact. The West or the exploiter owns the machine, and the East or the oppressed, or in more respectable terms the developing countries, need the machine. The boundaries of the East and the West are also floating and shifting. Sometime the East overlaps the West, and vice versa.

The East includes Asia, Africa, and Latin America, while the West comprises Europe, America, Japan, South Africa and Israel. In such a division ideological compartmentalization becomes superfluous. Jalal discovered this radically new reality in the early sixties. In the past the area from the Eastern Mediterranean to India (and China), presently called by the West 'the East' was the advanced and civilized part of the world, whereas the present West then led a semi-barbaric life.

Now the balance is tipped in favour of the other side. It was success in trade and advancement in machinery and technology that vested the West with superior authority in all respects. With the process of civilization, or rather Christianization, the worst forms of deprivation, exploitation and dehumanization encroached upon the lands of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Religion, culture, economy, social structure and the old value systems were destroyed by the colonizers. It was only Muslim unity that obstructed the onward march of imperialism. With the elimination of Islamic Andalusia

the last battle scene was set in the Ottoman empire, the last citadel of formal or real Islamic unity.

When the Ottoman empire was disintegrated as an aftermath of the first world war, its provinces, formed as independent states, but virtually Western satellites, fell an easy prey to the ever-increasing lust of the West. Iran was a part and parcel of this scheme, where a dictator of the West's choice was crowned emperor.

This entire process was facilitated by importing into Iran the machine and its Western experts along with all its paraphernalia. The post-war period witnessed the all-embracing tentacles of occidentosis rapidly taking into their deadly embrace the entire Iran and all the aspects of its religious, cultural, social and economic life. This was the end of a national identity.

The next three chapters describe the earliest signs of the illness, the wellsprings of the flood, and the first infections. In these chapters Jalal gives an account of the historical events leading to the ultimate surrender of the East to the West. The villain of this long drawn drama is the machine—a substitute for Fate, the villain in the classical Western play—as a tool of the demigods of money and political power in Iran.

The delayed reaction on the part of the East, like that of Shakespearian hero Hamlet, comes to the surface at the end of the nineteenth century, in the form of constitutionalism, which also proved to be inspired and manoeuvred by the Britishers. It is in this perspective that the martyrdom of Fadl Allah N'ri is assessed as a sacrifice of great significance by the author. Before that Jalal had analysed the vital role of Iran-Turkey conflict as an instrument of strengthening the forces of the West.

In the fourth chapter, "The First Infections", among other things, Jalal evaluates the nature and character of Western education. The first point he makes out is that the entire Western education is based upon and modelled according to Christianity. In the East it aims at alienating the Eastern people from their culture, religion, and social structure.

It is an irony of events that an educational system more advanced than that of the medieval Christian system was put aside as being obsolete and retrogressive in the name of modern science and technology. This type of education alienated the so-called elite from their people, soil, and their traditions, without bestowing upon them the slightest spark of expertise in modern science and technology. In the Iranian context, Jalal makes note of the following fact:

This estrangement came about because the two generations that have cropped up here since the Constitutional Era to become professors, writers, ministers, lawyers, general directors, and so on, only the doctors among them having any true specialized competence ... they all went astray in opting for "adoption of European civilization without Iranian adaptation".... (p. 58)

Westernization is not an isolated phenomenon confined to Iran.

Supplement 3

All colonies of the West in the East had to meet this challenge. For instance, the Indian subcontinent, which remained under the British colonial rule virtually for about two centuries, underwent a process of Westernization, but it could affect a minority of civil servants and upper ruling class only, and failed to engulf the vast majority of the Muslim and non-Muslim population.

The Western education system was thrust upon the subcontinent partly due to needs of the British rulers for efficient functionaries for their administration, and partly because a few far-sighted leaders considered the old Muslim and Hindu systems of education out-dated and felt that the Indians' acquaintance with modern sciences was the only means of rescuing them from total destruction. A section of orthodox Muslim 'ulama' and staunch champions of Hindu culture put up some resistance to the Western influence.

This resistance, though not lasting long, served as a warning as well as a safety measure and effective restraint in checking complete surrender of India to the West. Thus, the Indians were enabled to master modern scientific knowledge and its tools without being totally alienated from their own cultural traditions. Only a negligible minority of timeservers took pride in Anglicizing themselves, but the majority of the Muslims, Hindus, and other communities, including even new converts to Christianity, retained and preserved their traditional style of life.

As a consequence of firm adherence to their native traditions, Indians learnt modern sciences and proved themselves to be the equals, in specialized fields, of the Westerners, but at the same time they retained their "Indianness". Contrarily, in Iran, after the early resistance against Westernization by the clergy was repressed by force, there was no check against Westernization.

It is more tragic that instead of trying to specialize in modern sciences they remained content in imitating Western ways of dressing, living and eating, and they forcibly unveiled their women without initiating them into modern spirit. Another factor that accelerated superficial Westernization was affluence, which came in the wake of the oil money.

Jalal repeatedly uses the phrase "the ugly head of oil" for referring to the negative consequences of the oil. Though the lion's share of oil revenue was usurped by the Western powers and companies, yet the remnant of it was enough to ensure Iranians that they could buy all they needed from the West.

They became accustomed to the use of the machine without having technical know-how. Gradually they became more and more easygoing and comfort-loving, and surrendered their social, cultural, political, and economic freedom to the despotism of the machine. When Jalal curses the machine and holds it responsible for Iran's slavery to the machine-producing West, his criticism issues from a realization that the machine played the key role in subjecting Iran to occidentosis. The imported machine and technology required expertise, which was not available in the country, and hiring of foreign experts meant importing the necessary paraphernalia.

which was accompanied by all sorts of foreign cultural influence, including that of the Orientalists, sociologists, political analysts, functionaries of cultural exchange programmes, etc. With all this, Iran's subjection to occidentosis was complete. The same process took place in the Arab countries also with some minor differences. But probably the pre-Revolution Iran had become much more Western in its life-style than any other Muslim or Eastern country.

All diseases produce corresponding antibodies. Similarly the plague of occidentosis produced from within writers like Jalal and a combating resistance force in the form of the 'ulama', who untiringly fought against all forms of Western supremacy. This concerted struggle ultimately culminated in the movement led by Imam Khomeini. Jalal witnessed its beginning and anticipated correctly its far-reaching socio-political effects.

The fifth chapter "The War of Contradictions", brings out the main contradictions of the Iranian society caused by the machine transformation. The logic of machine consumption compelled premature urbanization, as a consequence of which villages were deserted and agriculture destroyed. This change forced Iranian consumers to be dependent on foreign food grains and frozen or tinned food products.

The entire Iranian economy collapsed. The figures which are supplied and analysed by Jalal concern the years 1331-1340 (1952-1961), which marked just the beginning of Iran's dependence on the West, and particularly the U.S.A. Desertion of the countryside and total collapse of agriculture in the coming years turned Iran into a country spoon-fed by the West. Oil reserves were drilled and exported with an alarmingly fast rate. No long-term planning was even conceived at any level. The White Revolution did nothing except darkening the conceivable future of the nation. Urbanization and occidentosis everywhere and always go hand in hand:

First, the new urban resident attends initially to the wants of his stomach and then to those of the region beneath his stomach, and for the sake of the latter, to his grooming. (p. 66)

In this period, as compared to the most advanced cities of the world, Tehran had 2200 licensed men's barbers and women's hairdressers and 2500 unlicensed ones. Comparing this with London's 4300 barbers and hairdressers, or Moscow's 3900, one can appreciate how much the people of Tehran devoted themselves to maintaining their appearance. Similarly the number of cinema houses and other places of refuge from urban anxiety, home and family, school, and sexual and other deprivations increased stupendously.

The bank accounts of the Hollywood film-makers were incessantly fed from the pockets of lower and middle class Third World citizens. The amounts spent and earned in this business were staggeringly high. Secondly, the problem of security grew serious day by day. Thirdly, traditional industries and handicrafts were ruined.

Fourthly, a whole course of time is needed to accustom people to the use of the machine. In the West, the people's consciousness and mode of living developed with the evolution of the machine, whereas in Iran its

introduction on a large scale was so sudden that people in general lost the sense of all proportion. A simple villager came to the city and was astounded to such a degree that he fell an easy prey to all sorts of temptations, which led him to a life of easy-money and crime.

In this process corruption was logically accepted as a way of life.

Fifthly, in a medieval social set-up that did not provide women with respectable work and valued their labour much cheaper than that of men, women were superficially emancipated. Without being trained in any trade of social significance, they had no other job but to freshen and exhibit themselves as objects of sex. Sixthly, ninety per cent of the people of Iran have deep-rooted faith in the return of the Twelfth Imam (A), "all awaiting him, each in his own way; because none of the Iranian governments ever lived up to the least of its promises; for oppression, injustice, repression, and discrimination had been always pandemic."

In such a climate of waiting for a just government, propagation of the idea of a national government with all its tools and institutions of oppression, the SAVAK and the torture, and an alien system of education could cause only a wider breach between faith and practice. Such a system could breed either cynics and rebels or timeservers and hypocrites. Another contradiction to which Jalal attracts attention is that in this age of shrinking international boundaries with all the affluence that provides every Iranian an opportunity for travel, Iranians remained usually ignorant of their immediate neighbours and their cultures :

But if the Afghan and I, united in our religion, language, and racial stock, know nothing of each other or if to travel to Iraq Or India is harder than to penetrate the iron Curtain, it is because we are within the sphere of influence of one corporation and the Afghan in that of another.

Jalal's conclusion is that the world is compartmentalized according to the interests of our masters who pull our strings from behind the scene and we submit like puppets to them. In Jalal's view, the most dangerous of all the contradictions arising from occidentosis is our ignorance of our own situation in that part of the world in which significant events are taking place.

The locus of threat has been transferred to the Middle East. The sixth chapter contains some positive suggestions as to how we can break the spell of occidentosis. Jalal says that the road Iran has so far followed is to remain only a consumer of the machine, to submit utterly to this twentieth-century juggernaut.

... First we need an economy consistent with the manufacture of machines, that is, an independent economy. Then we need an educational system, then a furnace to melt the metal and impress it with the human will. Then we need schools where these skills may be practically imparted. Then we need factories to convert the metal into machines and other industrial goods. And then we need markets to make them available to the people in the towns and villages.

Supplement 4

To achieve control of the machine, one must build it. Something built by another—even if it is a charm or a sort of talisman against envy—certainly carries something of the unknown, something of fearsome "unseen worlds" beyond human access. It harbors a mystery. The one who carries that talisman does not possess it but in a sense is possessed by it in living under its aegis, in taking refuge in it and living in constant dread of giving it offense. (pp. 79-80)

According to Jalal, the main reason for Iran's occidentosis is the mode of thinking which says: "Now that we are an oil-producing country and the European brings us everything from soap to nuts on a silver platter, why should we go to the trouble of building factories, heavy industry, with all the attendant problems...." (p. 81) It is due to this way of thinking that almost the entire oil income goes to the West:

The Westerners extract, refine, transport, and compute the cost of the oil themselves and figure our annual share at, say, forty million pounds sterling, given us as credits toward purchase of their manufactured goods and deposited in their own banks in our accounts. We are necessarily compelled to return these credits by buying from them. Who are they? Forty percent is America and its satellites, 40 percent England and its adherents, and the rest, France, the Netherlands, and other Western European nations. In return for the oil they take, we must import machines, and in the wake of the machines, specialists in the machines, dialectologists, ethnologists, musicologists, and art historians. (pp. 83-85)

In this context Jalal refers to the under-the-counter transactions, which sometimes involve estimable Orientalists like Peter Avery, a fellow of the reputed Cambridge. It came as a revelation to Jalal that people are similarly small around the world. In 1962 Iran had thirty thousand foreign experts, engineers and specialists. This number multiplied in the coming years under de facto American rule.

The seventh chapter entitled "Asses in Lions Skins, or Lions on the Flag" is a vivid description of occidentotics, and is relevant to all countries and nations under the spell of Westernization.

The term Gharbzadegi was actually coined by Ahmad Fardid, as Jalal himself acknowledged, but it would have lapsed into obscurity were it not for Jalal's book. This chapter forms the core of the book. I quote liberally from this chapter because of another reason also, that is, the passages quoted are the best examples of Jalal's powerful style, which is retained to a great extent by Campbell.

Campbell, in his foreword, explains the difficulties of translating Ali Ahmad's style which "has a certain rough and uneven quality, marked by great informality and a deliberate disregard for the syntax of conventional literary expression." The translator has made an attempt to convey not only the ideas of the original text but also something of the tone in which they were presented.

The following account of the Westoxicated Iranian is equally true of all Westernized people of different Eastern nations who are infected by the epidemic called rootlessness. They have been uprooted from their native

soil, alienated from their own culture, society, people, past, heritage and are even estranged from their present. They live in a vacuum, lead the life of parasites and feed their lust with exported luxuries. Ideas and fashionable trends in arts also form a part of their mental luxury. Here follows Jalal Ali Ahmad's portrayal of this class:

The occidentotic is a man totally without belief or conviction, to such an extent that he not only believes in nothing, but also does not actively disbelieve in anything-you might call him a syncretist. He is a timeserver. Once he gets across the bridge, he doesn't care if it stands or falls. He has no faith, no direction, no aim, no belief, neither in God nor in humanity. He cares neither whether society is transformed or not nor whether religion or irreligion prevails.

He is not even irreligious. He is indifferent. He even goes to the mosque at times, just as he goes to the club or the movies. But everywhere he is only a spectator. It is just as if he had gone to see a soccer game.

He is always to be seen off in the grandstands. He never invests anything of himself-even to the extent of moist eyes at the death of a friend, attentiveness at a shrine, or reflection in the hours of solitude. In fact he is not accustomed to solitude at all; he flees it. Because he is in terror of himself, he turns up everywhere. He offers opinions, if it is appropriate, and particularly if it is fashionable to offer opinions, but only to someone from whom he hopes to gain some further benefit.

Never do you hear from him any outcry or protest, any but or why or wherefore. He will explain everything with the utmost gravity and grandiloquence. He will feign optimism.

The occidentotic seeks ease. He lives in the moment, although not in the sense the philosophers intend. If his car is running and he looks debonair, nothing troubles him. If in some distant age, concern for offspring, bread, clothing, and provisions held Sa'di back from spiritual wayfaring, the occidentotic, with his head submerged in his own fodder, will do nothing for the sake of anyone else. He doesn't go looking for any headaches for himself, and he easily shrugs things off.

Because he has figured out just what his job is, because he doesn't take an unconsidered step, because he sees every action as the product of an equation, he doesn't stick his nose into others' affairs, let alone feel concern for their welfare. The occidentotic normally has no specialty. He is jack-of-all-trades and master of none- But because he is schooled, literate, and perhaps educated, he knows to use polysyllables and to bluff his way into every company.

Perhaps once he had a specialty, but he has seen that in this country one cannot, with a single specialty, grasp the horn of plenty. Therefore he necessarily has involved himself in other lines of work. He is just like the old women in a household who in the course of lifetimes of experience have learned a little about everything, although their knowledge is limited by the perspective of illiterate women. The occidentotic too knows a little about everything, and his knowledge is limited by the perspective of the occidentotic.

He has tabs on the topics of the day-what will be useful on television, what will be useful on the educational commission and at the seminar, what will be useful for the mass circulation newspapers, what will be useful for talks at the club.

The occidentotic has no character- He is a thing without authenticity. His person, his home, and his words convey nothing in particular, and everything in general. It is not that he is cosmopolitan, that the world is his home. He is at home nowhere rather than everywhere. He is an amalgam of singleness without character and character without singularity. Because he has no security, he dissembles.

In the very act of being so polite and sociable, he mistrusts whom he is speaking to. And because suspicion dominates our age, he must never open his heart to anyone. The only palpable characteristic he has is fear. In the West individuals' characters are sacrificed to their field of specialization, but the occidentotic has neither. He has only fear: fear of tomorrow, fear of dismissal, fear of anonymity ...

The occidentotic is effete. He is effeminate. He attends to his grooming a great deal. He spends much time sprucing himself up. Sometimes he even plucks his eyelashes. He attaches a great deal of importance to his shoes and his wardrobe, and to the furnishings of his home. It always seems he has been unwrapped from gold foil or come from some European "maison."

He buys the latest prodigy in automotive engineering every year. His house, which once had a porch and a cellar, a pool, awnings, and a vestibule, now looks like something different every day. One day it resembles a seaside villa with picture windows all around, and full of fluorescent lamps. Another day it resembles a cabaret, full of gaudy junk and bar stools.

The next day all the walls are painted one color and triangles of all colors cover every surface. In one corner there is a hi-fi, in another a television, in another a piano for the young lady, in others stereo loudspeakers. The kitchen and other nooks and crannies are packed with gas stoves, electric washers, and other odds and ends.

Thus the occidentotic is the most faithful consumer of the West's industrial goods. If he should rise one morning and find that the hairdresser, the tailor, the shoeshiner, and the repairman have all closed up shop, he would turn to the qibla in desperation (that is, he would do so if he knew where the qibla was).

All his preoccupations and Western products are more essential to him than any school, mosque, hospital, or factory. It is for his sake that we have an architecture with no roots in our culture....

The occidentotic hangs on the words and handouts of the West. He has nothing to do with what goes on in our little world, in this corner of the East. If perchance he is interested in politics, he is cognizant of the faintest right or left tendencies in the British Labour Party and is more familiar with the current U.S.

senators than with the ministers in his own government. And he knows more about the staff of Time or the News Chronicle than about some nephew way off in Khurasan. And he supposes them more veracious than a

prophet because all these have more influence on the affairs of his country than any domestic politician, commentator, or representative.

If he is interested in letters, his only concern is knowing who won this year's Nobel Prize or who was awarded the Goncourt or Pulitzer Prizes. And if he is interested in research, he folds his hands and closes his eyes to all the problems within the country that could be studied. He seeks to learn only what some orientalist has said and written about the questions within his field. If he is one of the ordinary people who read the weeklies and the pictorials, we have seen what a sorry lot they are.

If there used to be a time when one could silence opponents and end all arguments by citing one verse of the Qur'an or one tradition transmitted in Arabic, now one does so by relating one sentence by some European, whatever the subject under discussion. (pp. 94-98).

Supplement 5

As the five preceding chapters are a prelude to the main theme of occidentosis elaborated in the seventh chapter, the remaining four chapters, from the eighth to the eleventh, form a sequel to it. "A Society in Collapse" is again an account of the tyranny of the machine, in the wake of which the armed forces emerge as the final arbiters. Jalal has described various wings of the armed forces in terms of their utility for the oppressive regime and its subservience to its Western masters.

The ninth chapter gives an account of the pitfalls of the West-oriented educational system and its irrelevance to Iranian society and people. The educated class was a typical breed of occidentotics; all its activities and products lacked any sense of purpose and direction. Some passages from this chapter can be quoted to serve as an index for the study of the occidentotic elite of other similar countries:

With very few exceptions, the sole output of these colleges over the last twenty or thirty years has consisted of distinguished scholars, all of whom know the language, know some biography, are scrupulous workers, write marginalia in others' books, resolve tough problems in language or history, determine which graves lack tenants or which figures lack graves, explore the mysteries of Sura an-Nahl, know who is citing or plagiarizing from whom as much as a thousand years ago, and write treatises on the poets of the tenth century of the Hijra, whom one could count on the fingers of one's two hands.

Worst of all, most of them become teachers of literature, educational directors, or civil judges. Bless this last group, whose members have given some underpinnings to the Justice Ministry and some meaning to the idea of the independence of the judiciary and who well distinguish truth from falsity, if conditions allow. But what of the others? All in all, what benefit have we realized from them, besides a deeper plunge into occidentosis?

All these professors and their carefully trained pupils, with their ears stopped like Seven Sleepers', have retreated so far into the cave of texts, textual variants, and obscure expressions that even the roar of the machine cannot awaken them. Rather, they have plastered these texts to their ears to avoid hearing these most loathsome of sounds.

The encroachments of foreign tongues day by day are undermining the importance of the mother tongue and making a sound command of it less necessary. Defections to scientific and technical fields further thin the ranks of those pursuing these fields.

With things in such a state, the nation's centers for letters, legal studies, and leaning, the Colleges of Letters, Law, and the Religious and Philosophic Sciences have retreated into the cocoons of old texts, content to train pedants, just as the clergy have drawn into their cocoons of fanaticism and paralysis in the face of the West's onslaught.

These days, just as the clergy languishes in the toils of doubt between two and three and explication of ritual purity and impurity, such centers of Iranian, Eastern, and Islamic letters, law, and learning languish in the toils of whether the decorative be should be joined to the following word or whether the silent should be written.

Those exiled from the world of universals will clutch at minutiae. When the house has been carried off in the flood or has collapsed in an earthquake, you go looking for a door in the debris to bear the rotting corpse of a loved one to the graveyard.

As we speak of educational questions and questions of the university, we meet with another major question, that of the army of returnees from Europe and America, each of whom has returned at least a candidate for a position in a ministry and who collectively form the bulwark of the nation's organizations.

Each of these educated persons is a boon-something like finding one shoe in the desert. For look closely. See, after returning and finding a post in an organization and getting entrenched there, what each of these boons turns into. They haven't the authority or the competence to do the job. They are illiberal, apathetic, and for the most part lacking in concern, mostly because they see themselves and their opinions as amounting to nothing next to the Western advisors and consultants who dominate the scene.

Contrary to the widespread view, the greater the army of returnees from Europe, the less their power to act and the greater the distress of the institutions that absorb their impact- Because there has never been a plan for where to send these youths and what specialty, what trade, what technology they should study,

they have gone each to some part of the world to study or experience something completely different from others' experiences, on their own choice and initiative, to their own taste. As they return, each having to join some group in one of our country's organizations, it becomes obvious how dissonant they are and how at a loss to carry out anything. Consider the French-educated Iranian, or the English; German; or American-educated one :

each tunes up and plays in a distinct style.

If I have hope for the future of intellectuals in Iran, however, one reason is this very diversity of methods by which our European-educated have studied, of their fields of study and places of study. This is the wellspring of the wealth of Iran's intellectual environment. Look at the intellectual environment of India, at how English its majority of Oxford-educated intelligentsia have made it. Under present conditions in this country, these youths generally resemble the lovely tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths we import as bulbs from Holland and grow in the Tehran greenhouses. When they bloom, we put them in exorbitantly priced flowerpots and give them to friends or acquaintances to set in a hot room under the sun where they will survive a week at most.

These flowers at the top of society's basket also wither in this society's climate. Or if they don't, they generally fade to the color of the society. Notwithstanding all the propaganda cranked out to lure back students from abroad in Europe, I do not believe that their return promises to be a service to the country so long as no environment suited to their future work is provided. Who is to provide this environment? In this intense cold, those can prepare it who have been both baked in the furnace and acclimated to the icehouse....

Although many young men return with European or American wives, very few of the young women return with European or American husbands. This constitutes an additional problem. As we watch crumble the foundation of the Iranian family, an intimate relationship of husband and wife of the same stock, the responsibility of these incongruous households is obvious. The saying, "the pigeon of two towers" means these youths with their families-the firsthand human products of occidentosis. (pp. 117-119)

Under the heading "Mechanosis" the distinguishing factors of a transitional period of society are discussed, which are : advance of science; transformation of technique, technology, and machine, and some semblance to Western type of democracy. In all cases these factors cause crises, which are in proportion to the speed of transformation of a society.

Iran sought to make up for a two-hundred-year lag within two decades, which naturally gave rise to social aberrations and psychological disturbances. In the West, mechanization of socioeconomic structure produced gangsters, brigands, killers, adventurers, and deportees at the social level, and militarism and fascism at the political level.

Jalal holds that the Iranian society has its own rogues, who are sometimes exported to the West under imperial patronage. He regards African and Asian countries raped and transgressed, and put to pressures, humiliations, and killings as the victims of the same abnormal phenomena. In a democratic set-up, political parties also help technocracy and bureaucracy to iron out individual differences and to mould all individuals in one and the same shape. This is again a byproduct of the machine which demands total conformity to its dictates.

Conformity in the work place", in Jalal's words, "culminates in conformity in the party and union, which in turn culminates in conformity in the barracks-that is, before the war machine." The yardstick of standardization is not only applied to dress, form, and manners, but also to thought and inner make-up. Out of this come the Blackshirts, the Brownshirts and the Fascists of all sort. In such deterministic and standardized society, psychosis and neurosis, personality split and dissociation, schizophrenia and melancholia become the order of the day.

Jalal has enumerated three specific forms of melancholia common in Iranian society. the melancholia of grandiosity, the melancholia of glorifying the nation's remote past, and the melancholia of constant pursuit.

The last chapter, "The Hour Draws Nigh", gives a brief account of some Western thinkers and writers who predicted the end of the road taken by the pursuers of the machine. First of all he refers to Albert Camus and his masterwork *The Plague*, then to Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*, Sartre's *Erostratus* and other similar works and characters. After translating *The Plague* one-third, a realization came to him that "the plague" symbolized mechanism, murder of beauty and poetry, spirit and humanity.

And now I, not as an Easterner, but as one like the first Muslims, who expected to see the Resurrection on the Plain of Judgement in their lifetimes, see ... that all these fictional endings raise the threat of the final hour, when the machine demon (if we don't rein it in or put its spirit in the

bottle) will set the hydrogen bomb at the end of the road for humanity. On that note, I will rest my pen at the Quranic verse: "The hour draws nigh and the moon is split in two." (The Quran, 54:1) (p.137)

In Iran the occidentosis-demon has been reined and put in the bottle by the Islamic Revolution, and "Mechanosis" has been controlled to some extent. Watch out! The danger has not vanished, it still lingers on in some of the darkest corners of the society. The hour to relax has not arrived as yet. At the end, it can be pointed out that some of the translations of the titles of Jalal's books are not accurate, which are modified in this review. It is feared that such errors might have crept into the text of the book also.

*Gharbzadegi, a literary event in modern Persian literature, was published in 1962. The author Jalal Ali Ahmad is one of the most eminent writers of Iran, whose importance was not diminished by the Islamic Revolution but was rather enhanced. The English translation of Gharbzadegi by Campbell is reviewed by Dr. Wahid Akhtar, an eminent Urdu writer and poet. Dr. Akhtar is a professor of philosophy at Muslim University Aligarh, India- He is presently on the editorial board of al-Tawhid (English).

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