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MUSLIM MONUMENTAL HERITAGE: A CASE FOR PRESERVATION

Monuments are apt to be taken for something that remains from the past. They have an appeal because of their antique character. As they are unique specimens of the by-gone dead civilisations, they create a sense of wonder. And it is this lust for unusual things that man of adventure went about to discover the old, study the surviving material and admire the achievements of the past as glories of mankind. This way traces of many lost civilisations were discovered and history enriched with new data, its scope extended to remote antiquity and the curiosity rose high to catch the early man. Antiquarian interest won a particular land of romance. In the new romantic age monuments gained a new meaning. They stood as mile-stones in the march of humanity to the modern world.

Such a concept of monument is usual in a society which has a different sense of history. Groups of men in search of new ventures pounce upon other groups, mix with them, share with them or take away from them the things which they need. One group replaces the other and the material belonging to the replaced group loses its cultural context in the new set up. The old survives as the relic of the past but they do not become monuments until we give that meaning them.

History of man advances only when we go beyond the concern of our present social group. In the words of the Holy Qur'an God created many a people and endowed them with bounties but in time their evil actions led to their downfall. We are enjoined to roam about the world, witness the fate of these doomed people, take lessons from these historical consequences, enrich our experience by building history. The remains of the by-gone peoples remind us of what they achieved and how they failed. It is only when we review them that we learn about them. These survivals of the past are vivid pictures of the lost civilisations and they are preserved to remind us of our own fate if we do not heed.

Such lost civilisations have been many, and many more may be discovered in future. Their relics, no doubt, appertain to the past but the moment we consider them as monuments they are lifted from the veil of the past into the new light of the present. They give a new message to us. They carry a new history for us. They become a part and parcel of our new concept of man. Man no longer remains confined to the bare necessities of the present. This horizon extends. This life expands. He realises that he is as much a part of history as the standing monument before him. He discovers a new link between himself and the monument. As he himself is a chain in human creation, a monument is a continuity in the productive activity of man. Monument is not dead. It is a living history.

When we study man of the past, not just to know about the dead man, but to know ourselves, we move beyond our immediate perception and build a vast canvas to see the actor man move on the world stage. The monuments provide the background, around which man has striven to achieve something that is represented by the monument itself. How much more is this true in the case of those living civilisations whose representatives are not yet dead and gone. Islamic civilisation is a case of this type, which has not just survived, but which has faced the various vicissitudes in history and still shows the vivacity to meet the challenges of the modern time. It is this vitality of Islam that finds new expression in the terminology of Renaissance. By reviving we do not mean to recreate the life of any past century. That is impossible. It is against history. Man is living now in a new world. There are new problems. But these problems must be solved in the experience of the past. The values of the experienced must come to our help. We look up to the noble ideas and ideals, noble practices and learn to act in the present. For us, they provide a continuous chain of living traditions. They are not dead for us. They stare us at home, in the school, in the street, in the offices, in the playground, in the gay gatherings and around *kahvekhana*s.

Who does not go for a *nan*, *pilau*, a glass of *sharbat* in the houses in Pakistan? Who would not like to move shoulder to shoulder in a company, gossip and laugh in a group, chat and talk about many experiences in life, or bend down his head before the Almighty for all the bounties that He has bestowed? Who does not like to wear an apparel of coloured beauty in the sun-shine of Pakistan? Where else can one find open bazars, busy streets, rushing humanity to pick up fruits, vegetables, eatables and what not from the nearby rows of shops? Early morn the

mosques give *azans*. Mid-day man returns to the cool shade of homes, hujras or even groves or gardens of trees. Early hours of the night are meeting hours for exchange of experience, relief of the day's fatigue by gossip or mutual intercourse, or return to the happy home of the family. Such is the social aspect of the urban life that has a long history in our country. While we move in the present, we forget that we are continuing a living tradition which our forefathers lived long ago in their own days. They built new cities, new streets, new houses but above all they created new way of living. We have not given up that living. Certainly we have forgotten their meaning.

One important example is the new urban setting that we created when the Muslims set their foot on the soil of Pakistan. When we read about the conquest of Muhammad bin Qasim, his taking possession of the cities of Debal, Nirun, Aror or Multan, we forget that he also laid the foundation of a new urban life in the Indus region. Only one excavation at Bhambor has opened up the new vista of understanding the remarkable change that the Muslims brought about when they started their new Islamic way of living here. In history we read about the seventeen expeditions of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni but we forget that he also built the new city of Lahore and the men that followed him into this new city laid the foundation of a new urban taste and decorum that is not yet dead today. While we have made a fetish of the tombs in places like Multan, we forget that the saints who lived in these cities created a new religious atmosphere, opened *langarkhanas* for the poor, gave *dars* to the people and built up new social traditions of amity and cordial living. When these saints chose Multan as their seat, the city was already an important trading depot between the western passes and the eastern plains. It is this rich business tradition of the past that has continued down till today. When we pass on to the city of Peshawar, it presents a different phenomenon where people of different surrounding tribes come to meet in the bazars for sale and purchase, stay in the caravanserais, gossip over a cup of *kahve* in the Qissakhani, tell the stories of Kabul, Balkh, Samarkand and Bokhara and show a spirit of adventure and dare-devil that is derived from the rugged hills of Khyber that gives a continuous knock from the West. Peshawar is a different urban setting from Lahore that still retains the Mughal glamour in many of the busy streets of the old city and many more surviving Mughal buildings. It is the Mughal royal relics that have alone so far attracted our attention as if these glorious buildings live above humanity. It is the Lahore of the Mughals that is much

more important because it is in the urban setting of Lahore that we discover a continuity in life that we have today in Pakistan. When we pass on to Haiderabad of the Mirs, we enter a different setting as it presents a meeting of the Sindhi and Baluchi traditions. These traditions survive, not just in the fort or the tombs of the Talpurs, but in the mosques, maktabas and madrassahs, the dress, ornaments and food, the handicrafts and decorations, the humble houses and in their architecture. It presents to us a city of local environment with all its traditions present today.

The examples can be multiplied to draw a picture of a new urban, and even rural setting, that began with the advent of Islam in the Indus region. That picture is not dead today. That urban life has a meaning for us. The relics of the past are living monuments. Can we say that a mosque of the past has no living value today? Can we say that a tomb of a saint has no inspiration for us today? Certainly not. What is necessary is to give a new meaning to the term 'Monument.' It is also essential to present a new picture of our urban life. Is it not possible for us to reconstruct our tradition? Can we not preserve the urban tradition in its original setting? If we can do that, will they not have a greater value for attraction to us as well as to the tourists? They have a meaning for us and they are a novelty to the foreigners.

Certainly monuments of by-gone civilisations have a charm of their own. But the monuments of the living civilisations have a different message to give to the modern man. They do not remain dead relics as they are a part and parcel of the living traditions of man. Hence their purpose is fully known. Remotivation of man is understood. Their intentions are grasped. The cultural mode is fully presented. The city lives in the true light of history. Every architectural piece finds its own place. Every building, street, or shop lies in a setting. The development of history unfolds itself.

We have a rich store of Muslim Monumental Heritage provided we are prepared to change our notions and ideas. Instead of looking for dead things, we will have to have a new sense of history and reconstruct the process of life as a continuous chain in the living traditions of man. The urban traditions of the Islamic world have a unity of purpose in them and they have a value and a meaning even to the modern man provided we have a sense of living history.