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Islamic Concept of Human Nature: A Critique of the concept in Born Criminality (PART 1)

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ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE

**(A CRITIQUE ON THE CONCEPT OF)
IN BORN CRIMINALITY**

By

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مَوْلَايَ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ دَائِمًا أَبَدًا

عَلَى حَبِيبِكَ خَيْرِ الْخَلْقِ كُلِّهِمْ

مُحَمَّدُ سَيِّدُ الْكَوْنَيْنِ وَالْثَّقَلَيْنِ

وَالْفَرِيقَيْنِ مِنْ عَرَبٍ وَمِنْ عَجَمٍ

صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى نَبِيِّهِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ وَسَلَّمَ

ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE

Islam and Christianity, the two religious systems with massive following, project polarized conceptions of human nature. The attitude of Christianity towards the creation of man is essentially negative, while the Islamic attitude is essentially positive. Christianity believes that man is the product of sin: he is genetically tainted, he is congenitally flawed. But Islam rejects this attitude. It believes that the creation of man is positive achievement; he is created in the divine image. His birth is immaculate and untainted. He is an accomplishment, not an aberration; he is the realization of divine will, not a deviation from it; he is the materialization of a purpose, not a refraction from it. This basic polarity in the two religious attitudes is reflected in the attitudes of the practitioners of these religions. In Islamic phraseology, 'al-fitrah' (**الفطرة**) means creation (**الخلق**).¹ But it is not creation in the generic sense: it is reduced to its essentially human parameters. Thus it relates to the specifically human creation and excludes from its orbit other forms of creation. We are, therefore, primarily concerned with human nature, and not with other varieties that may stake out their claims as natural products, apparently with a matching degree of aggression and inflexibility. An eminent Muslim scholar, Imam Raghīb Asfahani observes: **الفطرة او فطر وهو ايجاد الشئ وابداعه على هيئة مترشحة لفعل من الاعمال**

“Nature is the creation and origination of thing

vested with the apparent capacity to perform any act.”¹

Thus human nature is fundamentally the capability to opt for any particular conduct, positive or negative, that is vested in a person at the time of his creation.

The term ‘fitrah’ literally derives from ‘fitr’ (فطر): it means ‘to open’. Qur’an declares:

السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا

“The heavens shall rend thereby; his promise is ever brought to fulfilment.”²

‘Fitir’ (فطر) and ‘Iftar’ (افطار) share the same etymological origin: They signify the act of eating and drinking at the end of the fast. The action of Iftar is a two-pronged phenomenon: at one level it suggests the termination of an existing situation and the initiation of a new one. The period of time extending upto the sun-set represents the existing order, the order of restraint and prohibition, while the act of Iftar represents the resumption of eating and drinking: it is in fact a legally and morally permissible dissolution of the prohibitory checks and controls imposed by the existing order. More clearly, it is a replacement or substitution of a previous condition by a new condition. At the second level, it is fulfilment of Allah’s will, the performance of an obligatory act as He has ordered the Muslims to conclude the fast by sundown. Therefore, the term ‘fatara’ (فَطَرَ) or ‘fitrah’ (فِطْرَة) fleshes out a non-existing entity with the reality and corporeality of a form or a shape and is an obvious fulfilment of the divine will. That is why the creation of human beings is known as

1. Asfahani: *Al-Mufradat*, p.382

2. Qur’an, 73:18

‘fitrah’

Qur'an has elaborated the concept of creation of mankind at many places. For instance:

”فَاقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا

تَبْدِيلَ لِمَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ“

“Then set your face steadily and truly to the faith: (establish) God's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind. There is no change in Allah's creation. That is the standard religion (the right path), but most among mankind do not understand.”¹

The Qur'anic statement is supplemented by a Prophetic remark reported by Aswad bin Saree :

”كل نسمة تولد على الفطرة“

“Every child is born with the right nature.”²

It is further reinforced by the words of Jaber bin Abdullah:

”كل مولود يولد على الفطرة“

“Every child that is born conforms to the true path.”³

It means that every child is vested with ‘fitrat-e-Saleema’

1. Qur'an, 30:30

2. Musnad Imam Ahmad: quoted in Tafseer Ibn Katheer, Vol.III, p 432

3. Ibid.

(فطرت سليمه) at the time of his birth; he is born with the potential capacity to think and act fairly. It is immaterial whether his birth takes place in the house of a Muslim or that of a non-Muslim. What really matters is the configuration of his nature at the juncture of his birth. And this nature is potentially patterned on the right path. This is, in fact, the birth-right of a child, irrespective of his racial, tribal and ethnic affiliations. And there is no possibility of modification or alteration in this design because it is divinely ordained and no human being has the power to upset the divine apple-cart. Human beings possess the latent force to damage human schemes and projects but divine purposes and intentions are beyond human scrutiny and access, affirming the utter helplessness of human beings.

Abu Hurairah has also narrated a Prophetic declaration which lends further conceptual strength to the statement and clearly endorses the divine articulation:

”كل مولود يولد على الفطرة فابواه يهودانه او ينصرانه او يمجسانه
كمثل البهيمة (جمعاء) هل ترى فيها جدهاء“

“No child is born, but follows the right nature; then his parents make him a Jew, or a Christian or a Magian, as a beast is born with all its limbs intact (or without a defect); do you see one born maimed and mutilated?”¹

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) repeatedly stressed the point that human nature is patterned on the right path and no human being has the power to alter or modify the course sanctioned by Allah.

1. Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 1, p.185

Islam has introduced the doctrine of unity and equality of mankind which imparts further credibility to the idea of positive human creation:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ (الآية)

“O people! Don't neglect (your duty) to your Lord, who created you from a single being.”¹

It finds added support in another statement:

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنْذِرِينَ (الآية)

“All people are (basically) a single nation, so Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners.”²

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) addressed the people on hijjat-ul-wida in these words:

“أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَقُولُ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ فليس لعربي على عجمي ولا لعجمي على عربي ولا لاسود على ابيض ولا لابيض على اسود فضل الا بالتقوى الناس من آدم و آدم من تراب الا كل مائرة او دم او مال يدعى به فهو تحت قدمي هاتين“

“O people! Allah says: O mankind! We created you from a male and female couple and split you into tribes and nations to distinguish you from one another. Truly, in the eyes of God, the most righteous among you is the most honoured of you.”³

1. Qur'an, 4:1

2. Qur'an, 2:213

3. Qur'an, 49:13

The Prophet (peace be upon him) continued that in the light of this Qur'anic verse no Arab had any superiority over a non-Arab, nor was a white in any way better than a black. The only criterion of superiority and respectability is the element of piety.

He said :

“Adam is the root of All created beings and he sprang out of dust. Therefore, I have trampled under my feet all claims of superiority based on blood and racial discrimination.”

These Prophetic words clearly reveal the equal, un-exceptional and indiscriminatory attitude of Islam towards human beings and their creation. In the light of this statement it is absolutely baseless to suggest that some of the human beings are created with bad nature or are born with inherent criminal tendencies. This suggestion is in obvious clash with the universally accepted idea of unity and equality of mankind. If human beings are vested with different inherent natures, the very idea of a consistent and honourable system of social life dis-appears into thin air.

These verses and traditions have clarified the situation by expressing the Islamic concept of human nature. The Qur'an and the Hadith make it abundantly clear that human nature is absolutely purged of all evil potential and aberrant tendencies. They also categorically discard the notion of congenital evil: it simply means that no human being is intrinsically criminal. Qur'an has clearly enunciated this view in Surah Tin:

”لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ . ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ . إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ .“

“Surely We have created man in the best make. Then We render him the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good so that they shall have self-perpetuating reward.”¹

The obvious conclusion one can draw from the Qur’anic and Prophetic evidence is that man has been created in the best of moulds i.e., with enormous capacity for good and for achieving the highest degree of excellence and perfection, both internally and externally. This is an eternal principle, immune to all forms of exemption and discrimination. It is part of man’s destiny to realize the moral ideal which consists in the encouragement and prevalence of moral good and the discouragement and rejection of moral evil. But man is free to choose. No restraint is imposed on his choice. God openly acknowledges the freedom and independence of human choice. If he opts for the path of evil and immorality, he is reduced to the lowest of the low, and if he opts for the path of righteousness and morality, his reward is simply infinite. He arrives at the stage of highest human perfection.

Man’s achievement is neither dictated by any genetic characteristic nor by predetermination: it is the exclusive upshot of his own choice and action. Its positive or negative orientation is motivated by purely human considerations, and not by any inherent tendencies.

This Qur’anic verdict establishes the essential goodness of human nature. The Qur’anic view contrasts with the view propagated by the ideational culture which associates the birth of man with the stigma of sin; it also contrasts

with the positivistic view which presupposes man to have atavistic regression towards animalistic behaviour; and it further contrasts with the psychological view which presumes man to have inherited some bad instincts and drives.

Lambrosians and Freudians make nature the scapegoat for human criminality. But Islam declares that nature is perfectly good and seeds of criminality are not genetically induced but cultivated during the life of an individual by a series of irreversible choices and options. The theory of in-born criminality advanced by the biological school of criminologists is absolutely incompatible with the Islamic philosophy of crime. While the former is based on the imperfection of human nature, the latter presumes its perfection and innate goodness.

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has strongly asserted:

“لا تقولوا خيبة الدهر فان الدهر هو الله”

“Don't blame time (nature or fate); indeed nature itself is God (i.e., it has been rightly created by Allah”¹

This tradition underscores a fundamental Islamic belief: if a person is victimized as a consequence of his mischief or malice, he should not hoist the burden and responsibility on nature. The creation of nature is marked by an exceptional degree of perfection and flawlessness. The evil that man faces on this earth is not a reflection of natural perversity: it is in fact the consequence of his own conduct. No external or internal predetermined compulsion is imposed on him and he has the freedom to accept

1. *Sahih Bukhari, Vol. II, p. 913*

or reject the various choices and alternatives he faces during his brief span of life. He makes these choices independently without the interference or intercession of nature.

Thus the criminal behaviour of a delinquent is neither inherited nor ingrained in his nature. The concept of in-born criminality is inconsistent with the basic philosophy and purpose of creation of man and universe, as expounded by Qur'an.¹ From Islamic point of view, the creation of man and universe is neither accidental nor purposeless. The idea of existence by chance is an express negation of the fundamentals of Islam. The existence of Allah as the sole creator of the universe, the missionary role of the prophets, the guidance of mankind through divine revelation, distinction between good and evil, the notion of the day of judgment and the concept of awards and rewards, all these basic Islamic postulates and beliefs are nullified by accepting the concocted explication, the self-engineered perversion and a wilful misinterpretation of the concept.

Man is a purposive being and the ultimate goal of his life is to accomplish the ideal of moral perfection through a continuous struggle against the vicious and malicious forces of life. Qur'an affirms the purposive basis of human creation:

“أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ”

“What did you then think that We had created you in vain, and that you shall not be returned to us.”¹

Two facts are clearly established by this verse:

(1) Man's creation is not an exercise in vanity and futility. The creation of all human beings, without any exception, is geared to a specific purpose which is to be accomplished during their lives.

(2) Each individual shall be returned to his Lord to face the fall-out of his deeds. Therefore, every person is responsible and accountable for his worldly actions.

Thus the purpose of the creation of man is the pursuit of moral ends to achieve the highest stage of perfection. Qur'an explains this view in the following words:

”وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ“

“And I have not created the Jinn and the men except that they should serve Me.”¹

”الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا
وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ“

“Who created death and life so that He may check which of you is best in deeds; and He is the mighty, the forgiving.”²

The same point is emphasized again in the context of creation of the universe:

”وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ
عَلَى الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا“

“And He is (the one) Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods (days) and His dominion extends

1. Qur'an, 51:56

2. Qur'an, 67:2

over the water that He might try which of you is best in action.”¹

The object of the creation of man and of the supporting infrastructure that exists for the realization of this object is to provide human beings with incentives to perform good deeds because it is goodness that Allah loves.

If, as some of the western criminologists claim, some people inherit bad nature and criminal proclivities which contribute to their delinquency and immorality, then the specific purpose of human creation which is exclusively focussed on the performance of noble and virtuous deeds, is reduced only to a rhetorical indulgence and a divine irrelevance. God Himself has repeatedly declared that the very purpose of the creation of the world is the pursuit of moral good by man. The universe itself is created for the same purpose. Qur'an states:

«أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا

بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى»

“Do they not reflect within themselves! Allah did not create the heavens, the earth and what is between the two but with truth, and for a specific reason.”²

The term **اجل مسمى** is usually translated as ‘an appointed term or stipulated period’, but in my opinion, it stands for ‘a specific reason and purpose’. My opinion is reinforced by Qur'anic evidence as Qur'an clamps a similar interpretation on the term:

1. Qur'an, 11:7

2. Qur'an, 30:8

وَمِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَن قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ
أَوْ فسادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

“For this reason (purpose) did We prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it is intended for man-slaughter or for mischief in the land, it is though he slew all men.”¹

The words **اجل** (ajal) and **اجل** (ajl) possess the same etymological derivation and the same semantic significance.

A discussion of the unity of the purpose of human creation and the design of the universe naturally leads to a discussion of the relationship between mankind and all other objects of the universe.

Qur'an declares that every thing on the earth and all the objects of the universe are not only created for man, but they are also made subservient to him. A direct link is established between human struggle and the objects of the universe to create cosmic harmony. The purpose of man's struggle is to attain the highest moral ideal, and these objects help him in the achievement of this ideal. They dance to his tunes and facilitate the accomplishment of his ideal. They do not serve as barriers or road blocks to check human aspirations; they rather act as boosters to accelerate the pace of man's efforts towards the attainment of the ideal which is the sole purpose of his creation. Qur'an says:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا

“He it is Who created for you (for your service)

O mankind all that is in the earth.”¹

At another place it is said:

«وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مِنْهُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ»

“O mankind! He has made subservient to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Surely in this there are signs for those who reflect.”²

This accounts for the exceptional honour and dignity of man and this is the reason that man has been granted superiority over all the creatures of the universe. Qur'an states :

«وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا»

“And surely We have dignified the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have given them of the good things and We have made them excel by a high degree of excellence most of those whom We have created.”³

God has made man His vicegerent to establish his uniqueness and superiority over all the creatures. Qur'an states :

«وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً»

“And when you said to the angels: Surely, I am

1. Qur'an, 2:29
2. Qur'an, 45:13
3. Qur'an, 17:70

going to place a vicegerent on the earth.”¹

God has accorded man the highest status among His creatures. His extraordinary status is established through Qur’anic evidence which is absolutely incontrovertible. The verse is an allegorical description of the preference and supremacy of man over the entire creation.

Some of the Muslim scholars believe that the word ‘Khalifa’ here refers to the children of Adam i.e., the whole of mankind. The correctness of this view is also corroborated by the Qur’an itself which repeatedly stresses the superiority of human beings:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

“And He it is Who has made you successors (vicegerents) in the land and raised some of you above others by various grades, that He might try you by what He has given you.”²

Similarly Qur’an declares:

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لِنَنْظُرَ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ

“Then We made you (their) successors in the land after them so that we may see how you act.”³

The same concept of ‘khilafat-i-arzi’ (vicegerency on the earth) is articulated in various contexts in the Qur’an (see Surah Yunus, V.73; Fatir, V.39; ‘Araf, V.69 and 73;

1. Qur’an, 2:30
2. Qur’an, 6:166
3. Qur’an, 10:14

Namal, V.62 etc.). The submission of angels to Adam is a further proof of man's superiority over other creatures. Qur'an has reported the fact in these words:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّیْ خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّنْ صَلٰصَالٍ مِّنْ حَمَآءٍ مَّسْنُوْنٍ ۝
فَاِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيْهِ مِنْ رُّوْحِیْ فَقَعُوْا اِلَیْهِ سٰجِدِيْنَ . فَسَجَدَ
الْمَلٰٓئِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ اٰجَمَعُوْنَ ۝

"Call to mind when your Lord said to the angels: I am about to bring into being a man from dry ringing clay moulded from black mud; so when I have perfected him and have infused my breath into him, you should all fall down in prostration along with him. In obedience to this command the angels all fell down in prostration together."¹

We can draw a number of conclusions from the whole discussion conducted in the light of Qur'an and Hadith:

- (1) All human beings are created on an egalitarian basis and are vested with an identical nature at the time of birth.
- (2) Human nature is perfectly good. Its genesis is positive and it is basically free of evil and malice.
- (3) There is no variation, exception or discrimination at all to this principle of creation. This signifies the eternal consistency, homogeneity and equality of human creatures.
- (4) The creation of man is not an exercise in futility or absurdity. He has, in fact, been created for the realization and fulfilment of a definite purpose in this world.

- (5) The primary human ideal is to acquire the highest level of moral perfection by conducting a persistent and unflagging battle against the forces of immorality.
- (6) The purpose of creating life and death is the evaluation and assessment of human beings on the basis of their actual performance and not on the basis of any abstract speculation. It is a clear proof of the practical and goal-oriented approach of Islamic faith.
- (7) The purpose of creation of universe and the objects which comprise it is to furnish irrefutable guarantees of harmony and compatibility in the struggle for the realization of the human ideal of moral perfection.
- (8) Mankind has been accorded a preferential and exceptional treatment over all creatures of the universe: it is blessed with honour, glory, dignity and superiority over them on account of the comprehensive and positive character of its nature.
- (9) On account of the supremacy and excellence of human nature, man has been categorically declared the successor and vicegerant of God on earth.
- (10) Therefore, any intrinsically evil or inherently criminalistic proclivities or tendencies are incongruent with the creation of human nature because it is framed by God on absolutely positive lines.

The biological theory of criminality which aggressively refuses to acknowledge the honour and dignity of mankind, derives its credentials from the over-stretched, perverse and highly distorted theory of human evolution. The fact is that the exponents and practitioners of this theory are

themselves the victims of unresolvable contradictions and inconsistencies. Consequently, they have failed to evolve a coherent and well-coordinated perspective which can harmonize their fundamentally clashing views. One is prepared to ignore adventitious differences, but when the split borders on basics, it is the height of stupidity and gullibility to swallow the views without placing them under the lens of microscopic analysis. Besides their conclusions are quite tentative and are not supported by the inescapable ballast of conclusive evidence. Right from Lamarck and Charles Darwin and Deveries upto the latest evolutionist Adriaan Kor Klandt, the Dutch Zoologist of the University of Amsterdam, the founder of 'thorny theory', none of them has proved the validity or authenticity of their conceptual hunch which remains essentially an imaginary blob and a clumsy fiction of their colourful fancy.

The approach of these scientists is hopelessly experimental. Though they like to flaunt their scientific detachment, one sometimes gathers the impression that they are motivated by unscientific factors. It is as if they bear an irrational grudge against divine authority and are hell-bent to prove God's irrationality.

But their uncertain and directionless approach takes the wind out of their pompous sails and the bludgeon of knowledge they use against God returns to them like a boomerang. Their uncertainty contrasts unfavourably with the certainty of revealed divine guidance. Its perfection elbows out the imperfection of human knowledge. Therefore, we should repose our faith in the authority that possesses perfect knowledge and not in the authority that possesses only a semblance of knowledge and is notorious for its wobbly convictions. Thus it is the proclamation made by this perfect authority that human nature is essentially good and all evil that is super-imposed on this essential

layer of goodness is accidental and accretional. God Himself denies the idea of in-born criminality or atavistic reversion of man towards animalistic propensities.

The question of the nature of man's instinctual urges and drives and the contexts or situations in which he is supposed to comply with them is in fact concerned with the analysis of human personality. Since man is created to launch moral struggle against the imposing forces of evil, he is capable of riding on the crest of perfection or sinking down to the trough of imperfection; he is capable of achieving the highest honours in his moral quest as well as of falling victim to the lowest ebb of dastardly dishonour. God has declared: "Certainly We created man in the best make. Then in consequence of wrong use of his opportunities and free will We render him the lowest of the low he himself having destroyed the original purity and goodness, except those who believe and practice good, so they shall have a reward never to be cut off."¹ This dual capacity for moral success and for moral failure is grounded in human nature which is absolutely free to choose either. While God has dictated his creation, He does not dictate his choice. God has created him intrinsically good but He has left it to man to choose among alternatives offered him during his practical existence. The divine responsibility is confined mainly to the formation of human nature and He has formed it on inherently good lines, genetically eliminating the possibility of any flaw in its composition. But what a human being does with his intrinsically immaculate nature is entirely his own responsibility. He is free to choose between good and evil and this freedom is not divinely interfered with.

Therefore, in order to understand the various urges and drives ingrained in the nature of man, it is imperative

1. *Qur'an*, 95:4-6

to come to grips with the two aspects of human personality. These aspects correspond to two phases of human nature:

(1) Potential nature فطرت بالفعل

(2) Actual nature فطرت بالقوه

(1) Potential nature:

It is a harmonized complex of human conscience and a plurality of other drives which are essentially directed towards the pursuit and achievement of highest ideals. They are ingrained in the human soul and it is on the basis of their positive orchestration that man is known as 'Ahsan-i-Taqweem' (احسن تقويم).

(a) Distinction between vice and virtue:

Every human being possesses an innate drive to distinguish between virtue and vice, between good and bad, between moral and immoral and between noble and ignoble. Therefore, man has recognized, even in morally indifferent or neutral societies, some of the noble ideals which formed the motive drives of their effective functioning. Moreover, the distinction between right and wrong is universally acknowledged as the foundation stone for the pursuit of moral perfection. This phenomenon is mainly governed by the inherent constitution of the nature of human beings.

A number of Qur'anic references substantiate this thesis. One of them is adduced here to establish the validity of the concept. Qur'an states:

«وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا . فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا»

“And the (human) mind and its perfection. So He intimated to it by inspiration its vice and its virtue.”¹

Vice is the way of evil; it is deviation from good. Virtue is the way of good; it is guaranteed resistance to evil. Moral perfection can be attained only by patronizing good and discarding evil.

(b) Acknowledgement of God's existence:

The highest of the noble ideals ingrained in the potential nature of man is the attainment of proximity to God and the acquisition of His pleasure and blessings. Qur'an says:

«وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ»

“And best of all is Allah's good by pleasure and that is the grand achievement.”²

«تَرَهُمْ رُكْعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا»

“You will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace and pleasure from Allah.”³

This ideal can be achieved only if the sense of God's existence is grounded in human mind. Therefore, every child who is born into the universe, possesses the sense and acknowledgement of the existence of the creator as part of his instinctual make-up.

1. Qur'an, 91:7-8

2. Qur'an, 9:72

3. Qur'an, 48:29

This potential awareness of God's existence is a universal phenomenon. Each human society, in one form or the other, has posited the notion of divinity. Even in various un-Islamic and atheistic societies, people are inclined to acknowledge the presence and relevance of super-natural and supra-rational forces which they are helpless to explain by perceptual standards. Although some obstinate individuals would like to disagree with this contention, yet it is common observation that a large number of instances and happenings, which form an undeniable part of their own experience, cannot be interpreted logically and scientifically.

Therefore, they are forced to rationalize them only as embodiments of chance or as supernatural occurrences. This acknowledgement or rationalization sometimes leads them to the conclusion that there is a super-power that functions independently and operates outside the scope of our perceptual and intellectual range.

This admission is also inherent in human nature and is supported by Qur'anic evidence:

وَإِذَا أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ
عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا

“And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, we bear witness.”¹

The people who do not normally realize that God exists, or who possess only a vague and fleeting realization

of His existence, are sometimes unexpectedly and involuntarily led to acknowledge His presence, especially when they face an unusually problematic situation and cannot resolve it within the spectrum of their rational and intellectual resources. In these circumstances they not only realize their own helplessness but are also forced to posit the existence of an authority whose range of power is not circumscribed by human limitation. And they suddenly implore God to help them out of their apparently impossible predicament. Their desire to seek divine assistance is an instinctual call of their nature. Qur'an makes an explicit reference to man's fundamental urge when he is driven into a tight corner and cannot rely on the fragile and uncertain props of his reason and intellect.

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ الضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنبِهِ أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَائِمًا

"And when affliction touches a man, he calls on us, whether lying on his side, or sitting or standing."¹

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ

"And when distress affects a man he calls upon his Lord, turning to Him frequently."²

This is an expression of man's potential nature and he cannot muffle or suppress it no matter how hard he tries. Any attempt to muzzle it will increase his conflict and tension; his relief and remedy lies in its spontaneous expression and not in its unnatural suppression.

These Qur'anic verses clearly reveal that the confession

1. Qur'an, 10:12

2. Qur'an, 39:8

of the existence of God is ingrained in the nature of man. It exists as a potential urge unless it is transformed into an actual drive through education and training.

(c) Insight into the processes of mind:

Man is perfectly aware of the processes of his mind. This is a logical consequence of the operative distinction between vice and virtue. This insight is in fact self-consciousness which is the primary basis of discrimination between man and animal. Qur'an declares:

«بَلِ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ»

“Nay! Man is witness against himself.”¹

It means man is quite conscious of his desires, thoughts and actions and he is conditioned to retain a consciousness of these phenomena till the day of judgment. Qur'an says:

«عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ»

“Every soul shall know what it has sent before and held back.”²

It is further stated:

«يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَآ سَعَىٰ»

“The day on which man shall recollect what he strove after.”³

1. Qur'an, 75:14

2. Qur'an, 82:5

3. Qur'an, 79:35

These verses categorically establish the fact that man possesses insight into the entire gamut of his mental processes and he will carry over this insight into the life hereafter. Therefore, every man has in his mind the power to evaluate his personal conduct and the ability to discriminate between good and evil; and on the basis of his own assessment, whose reliability is divinely endorsed, he can mend and reform his behaviour. Nothing can restrain him in his quest for self-improvement and moral reformation. This quality of self-consciousness makes him superior to all other creatures.

(d) Sense of human responsibility:

Man is conscious of his moral responsibility that is conferred on him during the struggle of his life. That is why no one can deny accountability for his voluntary acts. Everyone is bound by his own nature to own the consequences of his deeds and cannot shuffle this responsibility over to others. The votaries of the philosophy of determinism are reluctant to accept the responsibility of their undesirable behaviour, but their reluctance is more apparent than real and they know that by disowning responsibility they are only deceiving themselves: they are actually never satisfied with this self-created concept of immunity. The conscience of every person unexceptionally recognizes man as a moral agent and he accepts this responsibility as a sacred trust. On the basis of this deep-rooted awareness, man is naturally inclined to accept responsibility for his acts, both in his earthly and ethereal existence.

This sense is ingrained in man's potential nature and it is endorsed by the Qur'anic verdict:

وَأَنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ
يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا ۝

“Surely We offered the trust (responsibility) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, because (they) were afraid of it; but man undertook it, he is certainly unjust (to himself, if he does not fulfil his responsibility) and ignorant (if he does not realize the evil consequences of not fulfilling it).”¹

Here trust (**الامانة**) stands for moral responsibility: it also means human sense of accountability for all acts of thought and conduct.

This aspect of human responsibility functions as a natural urge to nourish and sustain man's struggle against the negative forces of evil.

The combination of these four drives constitutes the potential human nature. This is known as (**فطرت خلقى**), the created nature of man which is acknowledged by a clear Qur'anic injunction:

«فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ
ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ»

“The nature, created by Allah, in which He has made men, there is no altering of Allah's creation that is the right path (i.e., religion of Islam).”²

The same is 'Fitrati-Saleema (**فطرت سليمه**) which every child possesses at the time of his creation as his birth right and this is supported by the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as well:

1. *Qur'an, 33:72*

2. *Qur'an, 30:30*

“Every child that is born conforms to the true path that is his nature.”¹ ما من مولود الا يولد على الفطرة

The conclusion of the whole discussion is that the four drives are ingrained in man's potential nature at the time of his birth. They are not acquired as a result of his organic evolution or his interaction with environment or other external factors: they are internally grafted, not externally imposed. Man is, therefore, naturally programmed to follow positive and noble aspirations and to cultivate a moral attitude during his existence on this earth. These drives can collectively be termed as 'the sense of reality' existing as a potential force in the mind of every person. It is this force which discriminates between good and evil, right and wrong.

The sub-conscious mind of man is directly influenced by this force. That is why at the level of the sub-conscious, they possess greater latitude to exert their healthy influence and are not easily moulded by the negative and ignoble forces, and man's saintly aspirations at this stage are a clear reflection of his congenital nobility which is subsequently tainted by man's erroneous options for which he alone is to blame.

(2) Actual nature:

The second aspect of human nature, which manifests itself through the emergence and satisfaction of various desires, is the actual nature. It corresponds to some materialistic instincts and ambitions in the opinion of Western scholars who advocate the psycho-analytical theory of criminality. Their emphasis on the criminal aspect excludes

1. *Sahih Bukhari, Vol. II, p. 704*

or undermines the positive aspect of human nature. This unnatural tilt towards one aspect clearly betrays their bias and indicates the distortion of their approach to human nature. Qur'an states:

هَٰؤُلَاءِ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ
مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ
ذَٰلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَبَٰثِ

“Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence), and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to God is the best of the goals.”¹

God affirms man's weakness for the satisfaction of his instinctual cravings but this weakness distances him from God. Therefore, the best goal for human beings is to seek divine proximity which is achieved through the cultivation of nobler tendencies. These instinctive urges or propensities may be split into four categories.

- (i) Urge for sexual satisfaction
- (ii) Urge for racial preservation
- (iii) Urge for monetary gains
- (iv) Urge for power and status

Man's actual nature, which is determined by his desires, results in self-regarding conduct; but his potential nature, which is determined by his innate drives, results in his social

1. Qur'an, 3:14

conduct. The self-regarding conduct demonstrates the temptation of desire; but the social conduct demonstrates the compulsion of duty. This conflict between desire and duty exists in human mind on account of the fundamental duality of human nature. But this duality does not restrict man's freedom to choose. He is free to choose between the promptings of instinct and the constraints of responsibility. A regular human conduct presumes the exercise of choice either in the direction of desire or in the direction of duty. Choice terminates conflict while its absence or postponement unnecessarily prolongs it and contributes to human tension. The conflict can be resolved in five ways:

- (a) to follow the urges of potential nature by neglecting the other nature completely;
- (b) to follow the dictates of actual nature by neglecting the potential nature completely;
- (c) to develop the potential nature to a level that it can easily overshadow the actual nature;
- (d) to develop the actual nature to a level that it can easily overshadow the potential nature;
- (e) to balance their demands.

The first option is not encouraged by Islam because it leads to 'rahbaniyyat' (رهبانية), a form of asceticism which in fact amounts to a denial of life and a negation of the purpose of human existence.

The second option is also disapproved by Islam because it leads to a complete perversion and distortion of human personality.

The fourth option is also unacceptable because it stresses the negative perspective of human personality and accelerates the moral collapse of human beings.

The fifth option does not provide a sound and viable basis for the development of noble values because balance means equal opportunities for both. Superficially it may commend itself but comprehensively it does not help in the achievement of moral perfection which is the coveted goal of human existence.

The third option is the only comprehensive option that can resolve the conflict. It can transform the potential nature into a living force which can in turn dominate and control the actual nature. This will strengthen the noble urges and moral propensities of potential nature and vitiate the self-regarding instincts and ambitions of actual nature. The former, in its more developed and strengthened state, manages to cater for the needs and requirements of the latter in a more effective manner. Thus the conflict between the sense of duty and the temptation of desire is positively resolved without creating any residue of frustration or repression. In this way man is neither robbed of his urge to attain the goal of moral perfection nor is he deprived of the fulfilment of his valid desires and ambitions.

This process of purification of human mind is known as 'tazkiyyah' (تزكية). Qur'an states:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا . فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا . قَدْ أَفْلَحَ
مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا .

“By the soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right. Truly he succeeds that purifies it; and he fails

that corrupts it.”¹

Human nature is riven by two opposing demands. On the one hand there is excessive love of desires; on the other hand there is the equally irrepressible urge to pursue noble ideals. This conflict between the two aspects of human nature is necessary because no moral situation will crop up without a conflicting set of circumstances as the absence of conflict will automatically imply the absence of choice. Man's superiority lies exactly in his positive resolution of the conflict because in this way he can effectively and properly attain the goal of moral perfection which is the ultimate purpose of human struggle and which is the primary object of human creation.

God declared Adam, the first man on the surface of the earth, to be His vicegerant. Qur'an narrates the declaration in these words:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِیْفَةً ۚ

“And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place in the earth one who shall rule (it being My vicegerant).”²

At this juncture, the angels objected to the divine preference of human beings over other creatures in the words:

۞ قَالُوْا اَتَجْعَلُ فِیْهَا مَنْ یُّفْسِدُ فِیْهَا وَیَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۗ قَالَ اِنِّىْۤ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۚ

1. Qur'an, 91:7-10

2. Qur'an, 2:30

“They said: What! Will You place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood and we celebrate Your praise and extol Your holiness? He said: Surely you do not know what I know.”¹

The angels had seen only the dark side of the picture. Their observation was confined only to the actual nature of man as, on account of their limited knowledge, they were unaware of his potential nature. They concentrated exclusively on man's mischief-making and blood-shedding tendencies and could not appreciate the more positive aspects of his nature. The angels were not perfectly aware of this reality. Man's evil inclinations were of course not to be challenged but the good in him could not only neutralize his evil propensities but utilize them more effectively for nobler purposes.

Since Allah knew the eventual prevalence of good over evil, He said to the angels, “Surely I know what you do not know.” Man was expected to achieve his moral superiority over other creatures not only by confronting the conflict between desire and duty but also by putting it to his advantage. This struggle and its positive consequences are the basis of human superiority. If there was no struggle, as it was in the case of angels who possessed only the noble instincts, no moral situation would have popped up to test man's excellence and he would not have emerged as a superior being to justify his vicegerancy on earth. Thus the main purpose of the struggle was to establish man's moral ascendancy over all other creatures.

Therefore, man being a moral agent, is free to accept and develop the influence of either of these instincts. But whatever course of action he opts for, he alone is responsible

for the consequences that follow from it. And if he is stripped of his free choice on account of some physical or mental disability, his criminal liability is proportionately attenuated or totally suspended. Hence it does not make sense to accept criminality as an ingrained characteristic of human nature.