

## The Censors in Quandary

It is one of those universal realities of our society that people do not find fit to discuss, not to speak or deplore. The cinema houses have long ceased to be the haunts of the truly cultured and decent people, a place to go lovingly with one's whole family. These have been reduced to places catering very cheap and distasteful entertainment. There are many factors responsible for this. The biggest of them is government policy — specially the policy of condemning our people's culture to the straitjacket of a hyperprotected market at a time when all trade is being liberalized. The plunge into the bottomless abyss has at last reached a point that is hurting the government. Censor-certified films are shown all over the country with insertions of lewdest cuts from blue films. The Censor Board has the other day warned of punitive steps to stop this.

Cinema houses of the nation display their motley and often weird fare to full house three times a day, round the year. It is a safe guess that cinema draws a million viewers every day or conservatively some three crore people frequent the cinema over a whole year. This is by far the most widespread exposure people willingly subject themselves to, far wider than political meetings and other congregations. The significance of this fact has never been lost on either the society or the government. But their responses to that have always been queer and at times regularly harmful. The elders in the family as well as in the society tried their most to taboo cinema going — the height of it struck by Rabindranath himself interdicting young Santidev Ghose not to ever in his life have any track with films.

The government's response has from the beginning been in the form of controlling the fare to be shown. While the better part of the government's cares centred on ensuring a healthful condition of the show house, its preoccupation with the guarding of the morals of the citizens and their loyalty to state has always been subject to serious questioning by the more thoughtful among the nation's advanced people.

The Film Censor Board is one of our governmental appendages retained to keep the moving pictures within a regimented bound. The censor board — any censor board — has never helped film culture in even a very small way. But it has assiduously been at thwarting any forward lunge, social, artistic, philosophical or political, which, according to Lenin, was cinema's main business and worth.

The satellite television has made the censor board guardianship of morals into a futile exercise. The video-cassette libraries are there to augment the onslaught on the official ideal of morals. And in a very backward third world country like ours it is rather a very economic and progressive step that domestic colour TV be used to cater to crowds whatever the mob likes and however lewd they be.

Our people are not all sold out to bad taste. It is only that they so little see something of ethics and value come across angelic acts. Open the society to all the good films of the world, fund all the talents in the land to make meaningful films — the tide will turn — it shall turn.

## Message of Ashura

We are today saddened beyond measure by reminiscing the Karbala tragedy. Ashura, the tenth of Muharram in the lunar Islamic calendar, sends us on an emotional pilgrimage — back to fourteen hundred years ago on the banks of the river Euphrates. There it was enacted: the tragic martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain(R), Ali Asghar, Sakina and some of his followers by Yazid's forces. Literary lores including Mir Mosharraf Hossain's epic portrayal of the tragedy have added poignance to its historicity.

What we reap out of the commemoration of this landmark event are not just pathos and tears but a great natural reverence for the exemplary sacrifice and dedication shown to a cause held so dear. So very cruel was the way in which they were done to death that it came to be eventually bemoaned by the Shiites.

It no doubt represented a political watershed in Islamic history, one of far-reaching consequences at that; yet, it is the human appeal of the tragedy that has proved to be of timeless value. While the empathy has been pronounced on such an occasion among the Muslims recalling those moments of pain and anguish suffered by the progeny of Ali and Fatima, the spirit owing its origin to that focal-point of a tested dedication to a cause, may be of use in the contemporary world.

When it comes to the issue of humanity, divides and conflicts cannot be stretched too far without imperilling the very fabric upon which the progress of human civilization hinges. So, rather than emphasising discordance we have to consciously work for harmony, peaceful reconciliation and rational adjustment between differing forces.

Yemen has turned out to be a flash-point of a fratricidal war. The Middle East problem has shown some signs of improvement more by virtue of an intercession by the USA rather than because the Arab countries in the region have put in any combined efforts for the same. The tangle in Bosnia-Herzegovina, following a genocide on the Muslims by the Serbs in that area, would not have been so intractable if the Muslim leaders, at the beginning, had taken a unified stance on the issue — globally. They need to repair the damages wrought to their image by the persistent differences between particular countries within the Islamic community and between factions in some Muslim countries themselves. Solidarity for good causes is the need of the hour. Better human understanding and harmonious existence of communities are what a world religion has to work for drawing from positive traditions in it.

Inherently, Ashura holds the message of keeping at bay from any form of dehumanization in human affairs.

**O**n the Tenth of Muharram, 61 Anno Hegira, or the tenth of October 680 Anno Domini, Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), the illustrious grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was blessed with the coveted *Shahadat* on the historic battlefield of Kerbala, and with him reached the shore, from which no traveller returns, all the male members of his family, old and young — with the solitary exception of a sickly child, whom Zainab, Hazrat Hussain's sister, saved from a cruel and heinous massacre.

Death is inevitable for every mortal on this clay of a cold star. But the *Shahadat* of Hazrat Imam Hussain was no ordinary demise. Allama Iqbal rightly claims: "Although all deaths are sweet for the Momin, the Death of Ali's son is unique, indeed, for it passes beyond the death that is contained with the grave." The great *Shahadat* of Kerbala, inspired by the most divine love — love for Allah — indeed showed superhuman courage and conviction and endurance, enabling the beloved grandson of the holy Prophet (PBUH) to overcome so easily the well-nigh insuperable forces of contemporary evil and untruth. It is this dying nobly in the cause of Truth and Justice that confers immortality on man, the immortality which the great son of Hazrat Ali (RA) won on the banks of the Furat (Euphrates).

The name of Hazrat Imam Hussain has passed into a legend. His deeds are sung by minstrels throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic World. He reigns supreme in the hearts of thousands and millions of persons, both Muslims and non-Muslims. He has need into history; he has become a name!

With the rise of Mu'awiya, the Oligarchical rule of the heathen times displaced the democratic rule of Islam. Paganism, with all its attendant depravity, revived and vice and immorality followed everywhere in the wake of Omeyyad governors and the Syrian soldiery. The wealth

which he pitilessly exacted from his subjects, he lavished on his mercenaries, who in turn helped him to repress murmurings. Before his death, Mu'awiya convened the chief officers of his army and made them take the oath of fealty to his son Yezid, whom he had designated as his successor to the throne — a gross and treacherous violation of the terms of peace signed between Mu'awiya and Hazrat Imam Hassan, the eldest son of Hazrat Ali (RA).

On Mu'awiya's death, Yezid ascended the throne founded by his father on fraud and treachery. As cruel and treacherous as his father, Yezid however lacked the cunning capacity of his father to clothe his cruelties in the guise of policy. An out and out sadist as he was, he killed and tortured just for the sake of pleasure. Addicted to the grossest of vices, his close companions were the most abandoned of both sexes. Imam Hussain, on the other hand, had inherited the chivalric nature and all the virtues of his great and illustrious father. He united in his person the right of descent from Ali (RA) with the holy character of the grandson of the Apostle of Allah (PBUH). Great as a patriot, great as an idealist, great as a devout Muslim, great as a valiant warrior, great as a man of action, a dreamer of dreams, he was a man daring and adventurous, reckless of consequences and yet intensely practical, one who embodied the highest qualities that giants among men might desire.

Hazrat Hussain never deigned to acknowledge the title of the tyrant Yezid, whose

vices he despised, and whose character he regarded with abhorrence. Naturally therefore, when the Muslims of Kufa besought his help to release them from the curse and cruelty of Omeyyad rule, he felt it his duty to respond to the Iranians' appeal for deliverance, and with the assurance that the whole of Iraq was ready to rise to the occasion to hurl the despot from his throne, he set out for Kufa with his family. He traversed the deserts of Arabia unmolested, accompanied by his brother Abbas, a few devoted followers, and a timorous retinue of women and children. But as he approached the confines of Iraq, he was alarmed by the solitary and hostile face of the country. Suspecting treachery, he encamped his small band at a place called Kerbala near the western bank of the Euphrates. The great Imam's apprehensions of betrayal proved to be only too true and he was overtaken by an Omeyyad army under the command of the brutal and ferocious Obaidullah, the butcher.

For days their tents were surrounded. The cowardly hounds dared not come within the reach of the sword of Ali's son but they cut the victims off from the waters of the Euphrates. The sufferings of the poor, entrapped band were terrible and, as a last resource, Imam Hussain besought the cruel monsters not to wage war upon the helpless women and children, but to kill him and be done with it. But the brutes knew no pity. He pressed his friends to ensure their safety by a timely fight but none would desert their beloved master. The sacrifice

"And driven by hand alone wherever it smashed  
There out a gushing pool of blood had splashed:  
And changing a hundred colours it flew:  
And drinking blood, it vomiting rubies flashed."

of warring against the grandson of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) struck one of the enemy's chiefs with horror and he deserted with thirty followers to "claim the partnership of inevitable death."

The valour and indomitable spirit of the Fatimides were invincible and every single combat and close fight was readily won by them. But the enemy's archers treacherously picked them off from a safe distance. One by one the defenders fell, until at last there remained but the grandson of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Severely wounded and dying he dragged himself to the riverside for a last drink; they turned him off with arrows. As he returned to his tent he took his infant child in his arms but they transfixed him with a dart. Alone and weary, he seated himself at the door of his tent. One of the women handed him a cup of water to assuage his burning thirst: as he raised it to his lips he was pierced in the mouth with a dart; and his son and nephew were killed in his arms. He lifted his hands to heaven — they were full of blood — and uttered a funeral prayer for the living and the dead. Raising himself for the last desperate charge, the great fighter threw himself among the Omeyyad brutes, who fell back on every side. The beautiful lines from the great poet Anis gives a graphic description of the sword and its strokes:

"And driven by hand alone wherever it smashed  
There out a gushing pool of blood had splashed:  
And changing a hundred colours it flew:  
And drinking blood, it vomiting rubies flashed."

But the loss of blood was too much even for the indomitable Hussain, and faint with the loss of blood he sank to the ground. The murderous cowards rushed upon the dying hero like vultures: they trampled on the holy body and subjected it to every ignominy they knew. The poet Qu'ani has given a dramatic expression to the thoughts and feelings of the admirers of Hazrat Hussain.

"What rains down? Blood!  
Who? The Eye!  
How? Day and Night!  
Why? From grief!  
What grief? The grief of the  
Monarch of Kufra!

• • • • •

Was he slain unthirsting?  
No!

Did none give him to drink?  
They did!

Who? Shimar!

From what source? From  
the source of Death!"

So ended the noble and thrilling career of the great Imam Hussain (RA). His last days have made him immortal. When the stories of the great battle reached his country, people realised how great were his human qualities, how deeply he loved his comrade, how passionately he loved truth and justice, how ready he was to sacrifice every thing in the cause of Islam. In the words of Gibbon, "In a distant age and climate, the tragic scene of the death of Hussain will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader." In cruelty in criminality, in brutality, in barbarous savagery," says Syed Badruddua, "the tragic records of the Kerbala surpasses any other record in the history of human conflict. "Hussain indeed did not die in the ordinary sense of the term.

He simply shuffled off the mortal coil and set sail towards the Great Unknown through the glorious gates of *Shahadat*. In the words of Nazrul, "Death itself was immortalised at the touch of his life." His precious life indeed was sacrificed for the salvation of the suffering humanity, testifying so eloquently to the fact that the brows of the martyrs shall eternally reflect the brilliance of the elect of Allah. In the memorable words of the poet:

*Kushtegan-e Khanjar-e Taslima*

*Har Zaman Az Ghazeb Jame-e-gar Ast*

(Those who submit to God and suffer and bleed unto death for the cause of righteousness, truth and justice, for the unfortunate millions that knock about the straits, for the sustenance and durability of their rights and privileges, never decay, never die, never perish; they live a newer life, a fresher life, a higher life, a sublimer life in the recurrent ethos of community and country).

The great *Shahadat* at Kerbala indeed occupies a unique position in the annals of history. It convinces not only the Muslims but also the non-believers all over the world of the sincerity, dedication and resolution of the devout followers of Allah and testifies to their readiness to undergo any hardship and any loss rather than abjure the faith of Mohammed (SA). That is not all. *Ashura* comes back every year to rejuvenate and boost the dormant vigour, stagnated spirit and depressed morale of the misguided and oppressed Muslims all over the world. In the words of Maulana Mohammed Ali Jauhar:

*Katie Hussain Asal Me Margajye Yezid Tha:  
Islam Zinda Hota Hai Har Karbala Ke Baad.*

(The Martyrdom of Hussain was indeed the "death" of Yezid; Islam is rejuvenated after each and every Karbala).

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# The Great *Shahadat*

by Syed Ashraf Ali

And say not of those who are slain in the way of Allah: "They are dead".  
Nay, they are living, though ye perceive (it) not.

— *The Holy Quran*

But the founding 1987 in London and New York of the Edhi International Foundation and the Bilquis Edhi Foundation, set up in his wife's name, have opened up ways for the Maulana to channel aid to India.

More recently, the Edhi Centre dispatched 34 tonnes for rice to Somalia, the first non-governmental organisation to arrive there after the United Nations.

Hospitals in Calcutta recently received five ambulances from the International Foundation and Edhi is trying to liaise with hospitals in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Surat to provide aid.

Edhi wants to expand operations in India and Southeast Asia. After all, he points out, suffering is a human and not territorial condition.

## OPINION

### Why Not a Government of National Unity?

**Maulana Abdul Sattar Edhi has devoted his life to providing quick and reliable charity service to the most needy. Rahul Bhati reports for Inter Press Service from Karachi**

para-medics and ambulances at all major intersections in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore and Multan.

Edhi's posts are the only ones active round the clock, admit officials in Islamabad. The adjoining somnolent ones belong to the police. Most people — including army personnel — involved in road accidents tend to inform Edhi's operations first that they need help.

All Edhi's activities are supported by private donations which reach a daily average around 500,000 rupees (US\$16,000).

Government financial aid, though offered, is politely refused. The only state help accepted is the purchase of land at subsidised rates.

There is no shortage of money for charity," says Edhi, adding that the only need is for someone, divorced from religion and government to run.

"*Bhalbandhi* (brotherhood) knows no boundaries," Edhi says. Thus, his charitable operations are now spread across 17 countries including the United States, Canada, Britain, Dubai, Moscow, Kabul and Sri Lanka.

His activities in the West, however, are confined to pro-

viding free medical care and burial for needy Third World immigrants.

A Muslim himself, Edhi's charity also cuts across religious barriers. During the anti-Hindu riots across Sindh, following the destruction of the Babri mosque in north India in

Constitution, then the law (namely President Election Act) for open voting is subject to this provision.

Article 119 States: "The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for elections to the office of President and to Parliament and the conduct of such elections shall vest in the election commission which shall in accordance with this Constitution and any other law — a) hold elections to the office of President; b) hold elections of members of Parliament....."

My point is that provisions which are in the Constitution must be followed and not tinkered with.

I believe that no constitutional provision for a caretaker government will do unless we are honest and sincere about fair and impartial elections.

A brief backgrounder may not be out of place. Constitution is our guiding star in running the country. The architect of the constitution is Dr Kamal Hossain. Those who saw the midnight lamp burning in his office as he worked on it cannot forget the labour that went into making of that constitution. But unfortunately its original form has been dented right from 1975 by various amendments — mostly to suit the requirements of the parties in power at difficult times. Various amendments came not only directly but also indirectly making the constitution a spider's web where the weak are caught and the strong get through because of their majority, at times by fiction. A severe blow was dealt to the constitution, democracy and Election Commission during the last President's Election when articles 152, 7 (2) and 119 of the Constitution were circumvented by passing the President's Election Act providing "Open Voting" for election of the President.

I am quoting these articles for ready reference.

Article 152: The President "means the President of Bangladesh elected under this Constitution".

Article 7 (2): "This Constitution is, as the solemn expression of the will of the people, the supreme law of the Republic, and if any other law is inconsistent with this Constitution that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void."

Therefore if the President is to be elected under this

ideal idea. Some one can come up with a much better idea and have it accepted. But the marvellous idea of a caretaking government for holding general election and the equally marvellous idea of opposing the same provide no solution to the problem.

Extremes should be avoided, lest there is a collapse of the socio-political order.

The writer, a regular reader of The Daily Star, is an ex-judge and a lawyer, and has requested for anonymity.

## To the Editor...

### Bill on caretaker government

Sir, I would like to express my own opinion on the present political situation concerning the formation of government.

The people demand free, fair, and neutral election. They also demand casting of vote in a peaceful environment. As citizens of an independent country it is our fundamental right. But how it can be possible? In recent days we have read arguments for and against holding the next parliamentary election under a caretaker government, although there is no provision for a caretaker government in our Constitution.

The last parliamentary elections were held under a caretaker government in 1991. The present parliament is undoubtedly democratically elected. Meanwhile BNP government has lost its credibility to a certain extent the reported rigging and violence in the Magura and Mirpur by-elections. This situation already has proved that no election could be accepted as free, fair, and neutral under the government of a contending party.

Under this circumstance, we demand that future election should be held under a caretaker government. In this connection, we also request the ruling party to kindly bring a bill on the caretaker gov-

ernment issue in the Parliament and bravely face the challenge of the opposition allies.

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### Jahana Imam