

Elites and Obstruction of Truth

Spahic Omer

The Qur'an repeatedly refers to the concept of *al-mala'*, which could be translated as "elites", "chiefs" and "eminent ones". Most of the time, the Qur'an depicts those people as the biggest impediment to truth, justice, and everything else the holy prophets were sent with.

The Qur'an mentions the concept 30 times. It is only in a few contexts that the concept is not brought up with objectionable connotations. Those contexts are the Prophet Sulayman (Solomon) and his elites deliberating the task of bringing the mighty throne of the Queen of Sheba (al-Naml, 38); the elites of the Children of Israel after the time of Musa (Moses) requesting their prophet to send to them a king so that they could fight in the way of Allah (al-Baqarah, 246); and a double reference to the "supernal company" or the "highest and elitist assembly" of angels (al-Saffat, 8; Sad, 69).

Whenever a prophet was sent to his people, most of their social, political, intellectual and business elites were at the forefront of not only rejecting, but also obstructing truth and their prophet's mission. This was so because unprincipled elites in every time and place feel that they need to rule, dominate, be in a blaze of glory, and be served. They need to use and manipulate others to obtain advantages without doing much in exchange. To do all that, they need to become self-perpetuating, and to run the show without interference and with a veneer of legitimacy.

Elites are so self-deluded and blinded that they think what they do and possess is their privilege and birth right. There is no other way

of doing things. They were born to lead and rule, and others were born but to follow and serve them. Not only people, but also the whole world, they believe, exist only for them. Most elites are their societies' parasites.

Accordingly, deceitful elites are repulsed by reforms and changes. They loathe revolutions. They are averse to genuine freedom and democracy. They occupy top command posts of society. Despite their superficial disagreements and squabbles, elites share the same most essential values, beliefs and attitudes. That is, they share the same worldview. They despise opponents and challengers that may undermine their privileged status and position. They despise the "others". They fashion national - now increasingly global - political, educational and business systems in their own image. What they do is never about the masses and their socio-economic and educational wellbeing. It is always about them and the future of their personal wellbeing and interests.

It is no wonder that the prophets were the biggest enemy of elites. The prophets were their biggest rivals. They signified the source of all dangers to them personally and to the current status quo. Nor is it wonder that today those who earnestly follow and walk in the footsteps of the prophets are the greatest enemy of elites and their prevalent systems anchored in the crimes of falsehood, corruption, manipulation and exploitation. Elites and truth were hardly ever compatible. They could barely see eye to eye.

Three modi operandi

As per the Qur'anic narrative, the *modi operandi* of elites were tripartite.

First, elites confronted the prophets on the conceptual plane. They tried their best to rival them in the realm of concepts and ideas. They knew that above all, people were thinking beings. Everything they did outwardly stemmed from an inner world of beliefs and perceptions. Hence, to successfully challenge the prophets in palpable matters, which were dearest and most precious to them, elites knew that they had to challenge them in those immaterial and imperceptible matters that in fact constituted the essence of the former. In other words, they had to launch and orchestrate ideological wars as well.

Second, elites targeted ordinary people, trying to keep them away from the influences of the prophets. By hook or by crook, elites tried to retain them within the confines of their own operational sway and authority. Since they needed ordinary people to legitimize and sustain their self-appointed status, elites at the same time scrambled to project themselves as indispensable and needed by people. Without elites ordinary people were supposed to believe that their wellbeing and even sheer existence would have been risked. Elites were friends, the prophets were enemies. Time and again, elites resorted to illegitimate means to execute their plans, which was fine as long as people were steered clear of the prophets and their preaching. People were blackmailed and manipulated. Various benefits and incentives were also at work.

Describing elites as "arrogant and proud leaders who gloried in their arrogance" and ordinary as well as weak individuals who followed them as "lowly followers who had been despised", the Qur'an presents a heated conversation between the two sides on the Day of Judgment when both of them will finally see and attest to truth.

The Qur'an says: "If you could only see when these wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord, tossing accusing words on one another! Those who had been despised as weaklings will say to the

arrogant: "If it were not for you, we would certainly have been believers." The arrogant will say to those despised weaklings: "Did we block you off from guidance when it came to you? Nay! Rather you yourselves were guilty." Those despised weaklings will say to the arrogant: "No! It was you who plotted day and night, bidding us to disbelieve in Allah and to set up equals with Him" (Saba', 31-33).

Third, elites threatened and yet tried to physically hurt the prophets and their followers, and to expel them from their homes, property and country. This was the climax of elites' wrongdoings. As if it was not enough that the proponents and followers of truth had been stripped of all their rights, they furthermore had to be banished and physically abused. In most instances, even the right to life as a moral principle did not belong to them.

Elites in *surah al-A'raf*

The concept of elites (*al-mala'*) is most frequently mentioned in *surah al-A'raf*. Out of 30 times in the whole Qur'an, it is mentioned eight times in this *surah* alone. The idea is articulated in the contexts of six prophets and their respective peoples: Nuh (Noah), Hud, Salih, Lut (Lot), Shu'ayb (Jethro) and Musa (Moses).

It is interesting to note that in all cases, except the case of the Prophet Lut (Lot) and his people, the prophets had to encounter the wickedness of their people in general and that of their elites in particular. There is no mention of elites in the story of the Prophet Lut because - and Almighty Allah knows best - his people *en masse* were suffocating in the despicable immoral practices pertaining to same-sex relations, and all the other vices directly and indirectly related thereto. The wickedness was ubiquitous. It was the scourge of the entire community.

Therefore, there was no need to highlight the role of elites in such a universal and morally corrupt state. Everyone's role in spreading and maintaining it was equally important. Indeed, when it comes to moral and ethical decadence on a massive scale, causes are as important as their effects. Similarly, the presence and functioning of ideological fathers are as important as the presence and functioning of executors and doers. Simply put, given that moral degradation is rather action-oriented, underlining its operational scope and impact takes precedence over everything else.

Hence, in the case of the Prophet Lut and his people, the Qur'an always speaks about the total state of affairs. Lut, likewise, always talks to and deals with his entire people. As if the lines demarcating the world of elites and that of ordinary people in cases of total moral debacles become blurred. Their teamwork and collaboration become truly reciprocal and most compelling. They become one.

What's more, in the case of the Prophet Musa (Moses) and his mission, the Qur'an points out that he was sent to Pharaoh and also his elites. With this, it becomes evident how much more difficult Musa's challenges were in comparison with the challenges of most previous prophets, certainly those mentioned in *surah al-A'raf*. That was so because apart from elites, Musa likewise had to face Pharaoh, who in all the negative senses denoted an independent phenomenon in addition to an institution that deified itself. Pharaoh was the super elite and the cream of the crop. The rest were his general or sub-elites, although they depended on and were stronger because of each other. When they teamed up, Pharaoh and his elites seemed overwhelming adversaries. Initially, to Musa, too, they appeared as though undefeatable.

This Qur'anic verse sums up the sentiment that surrounded the prophethood tasks of Musa: "None but a few youth from his own

people believed in Musa, because of the fear of Pharaoh and his elites (*al-mala'*), lest they should persecute them; and certainly Pharaoh was mighty (tyrant) in the land and the one who did not hesitate to transgress any limit" (Yunus, 83).

Satan as a pretentious elite

It goes without saying that elites throughout history derived their logic and techniques from nobody but Satan as the source of all evil and dishonesty. Satan himself realized that elitism, coupled with persistent threats and false promises, was an excellent way to seek to inhibit and, if possible, extinguish truth. He knew that smartly pretending to be exclusive and acting accordingly, generating thereby a deceitful impression and aura, often might have a psychological advantage.

Satan's relentless assaults against Adam and Hawwa' (Eve) centred exactly on that aspect. Firstly, he refused to prostrate before Adam, declaring on the basis of his flawed standards that he was better than him. Then once in Jannah (Paradise), Satan still playacted as someone better than Adam. He professed that he knew that which Adam and Eve did not know, and based on his existential seniority and experience, he was in a position to guide them to a station higher than that at which they had resided. However, it was only when Satan swore (by Allah) to them that he was their sincere advisor (*al-A'raf*, 21) that Adam and Hawwa' succumbed. Satan told them: "I was created before you, and I have better knowledge than you. Therefore, follow me and I will direct you" (Ibn Kathir).

On account of their heavenly innocence and purity, Adam and Hawwa' could not imagine that someone - whoever that person and whatever the level of his spirituality may be - could falsely swear by Almighty Allah the Creator and Lord of the worlds. Hence, what caused the

provisional fall of man was Satan's unrestrained elitism in deception and lying, on the one hand, and man's unpreparedness for that abnormality, while in Jannah gradually coming to terms with all the dimensions and permutations of his humanness, on the other.

The mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him)

The Prophet Muhammad's mission was a microcosm of all the prophethood missions before him. That applies to the subject of elites as well and how the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had to deal with it, especially in Makkah where disbelieving elites with respect to politics, economy and international relations had the upper hand. Accordingly, elites ceaselessly confronted the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) on the ideological level; they tried to manipulate and control ordinary people by all sorts of doubtful means, including indoctrination and violence; they in the end resolved to yet kill the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) with the aim of getting rid of him and his ideas and so, eliminating the threat he was posing.

Once the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) migrated to Madinah and under the aegis of the revelation established a community as well as a life system of his own, a new era of human cultural and civilizational consciousness and growth began. In the process, the notion of elites also changed, thus shaking and revolutionizing the world of conventional norms and patterns.

In Islam, elites are established and measured only in spiritual terms and in terms of how a person is good, productive and useful to others. How much a person is an agent of constructive change, collective improvement, and shared wellbeing and happiness, is what matters most. That's why in Islam such values as equality, justice

(egalitarianism), brotherhood, compassion, generosity, cooperation in righteousness and piety, and exhorting one another to truth, are most important and most fulfilling. Conversely, such vices as injustice, discrimination, oppression, corruption, manipulation, cruelty, selfishness, greed, haughtiness and double-dealing, are most repulsive and most punishable.

So critical was the novel Islamic understanding of elites that the wellbeing of Islamic civilization always depended on it. The more it was recognized and implemented as such, the more prosperous and dynamic Islamic civilization was, and *vice versa*. As if a heavenly blueprint was at play. It could yet be asserted that there was a causal relationship between the two, the Islamic perception of elites being the cause and the civilizational prosperity being the effect.

The case of today's Muslims

Today when Islam with its worldview, teachings and values does not top the agenda of most Muslim elites, the same elites face a serious dilemma. Forsaking completely Islam is not an option because that will infuriate the masses, which they have to continue brainwashing and controlling in order to thrive. That furthermore will furnish their many opponents with an opportunity to intensify condemnation and attacks against them, for they have been disloyal to theirs and their ancestors' religion, culture, history and identity. As much as they have an aversion to it, Islam is still the only way forward for the Muslim secular elites. Islam is a necessary inconvenience.

Islam *per se* is obviously against such elites and their life paradigms. The solution therefore will always be in manipulating, misinterpreting, misrepresenting and regulating the ways Islam is comprehended, taught and applied. Historically, this led to the creation of another sub-elite: the bogus religious elite, which aligned itself with the rest

of the political, social, intellectual and business elites. In many Muslim countries, this bogus religious elite is perhaps most important and most influential. At the same time, though, it is most dangerous and most destructive for Islam and Muslims.

Consequently, there are myriads of ministers of religious affairs, muftis, chief imams, directors of various religious departments, rectors of Islamic universities, deans and principals of Islamic faculties and colleges, heads of Islamic departments, imams in mosques, university professors and teachers in schools. They all in the name of Islam and Muslims have been mandated to undermine the authentic Islam or to keep it static and inert. They have been asked - sometimes explicitly and at other times implicitly - to articulate and ritualize that which was "suitable" and to side-line and tone down that which was "unsuitable".

For that very purpose a corpus of dubious fatwas, books, articles, university and school programs and curricula, have been generated. No matter what it takes, the interests of elites must remain supreme. Everything else must be subservient to them. Indeed, ideological and ethical hypocrisy, dishonesty and pretence, on the one hand, and cultural as well as civilizational superficiality, tastelessness and mediocrity, on the other, became thus customary and prevalent in the Muslim world.

Armies of students, workers and ordinary people - who were subjected to years of meticulous brainwashing and training through scores of incompetent and one-dimensional systems, programs, procedures and agendas - regularly join and maintain the setup. Without those carefully managed supply lines, elites would not be able to sustain themselves and their unscrupulous work.

For example, universities, which are perhaps most painstakingly guarded and controlled by elites, are not aimed to produce truly capable, enlightened, visionary and creative capacities, because such capacities in themselves will instantaneously become a source of peril to those fraudulent elites. Rather, universities are aimed to produce average, myopic and submissive servants of the defective systems put in place and regulated by elites. A vicious circle is thus created whose chain is nigh on impossible to break.

Universities produce blind servants instead of inventive and visionary leaders, and dumb soldiers instead of ambitious generals characterized by integrity, self-confidence, drive and tenacity. It is not surprising why elites never stop interfering in the ways universities and other educational institutions function. They never stop imposing what should be taught, and how, and what should not. Nor do they stop changing the key personnel in those institutions.

Lastly, Allah says: "The unbelievers are protectors one of another; unless you (believers) do this (protect each other) there would be tumult and oppression on earth and great mischief" (al-Anfal, 73).

"Evil consorts with evil. The good have all the more reason for drawing together and not only living in mutual harmony, but being ready at all times to protect each other. Otherwise the world will be given over to aggressions by unscrupulous people, and the good will fail in their duty to establish Allah's peace and to strengthen all the forces of truth and righteousness" (Yusuf Ali).