

ARABS, ARABIC AND THE FUTURE

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I The General Arab Problems : — The Arab world extending from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, and containing a population of over 150 million, belongs to the ex-Colonial and under-developed part of the world and is facing various problems arising from these two situations. The first is the problem of economic and social (including educational, scientific and technological) development in the face of both the material and psychological pull exerted by their back-wardness since the late medieval ages, and the opposition and resistance by the developed and industrialized world. The second is the challenge of political development in terms of genuine democratic guidance and supervision of the increasingly differentiated and complex process of governance. While the above two challenges are common to most of the developing countries, the Arabs face some problems which are peculiar to their own situation. They are (a) the creation of powerful and expanding Israel in their midst, protected and strengthened by powerful nations of the world, resulting in four destructive and humiliating wars ; (b) Their peculiar geographical location which places them on the crossroads of the world, and in the vicinity of a vast landmass of the powerful Soviet Union. This calls for alertness ; (c) Their drive for unity — linguistic, cultural, economic and ultimately political — under the powerful and recurrent urge of Arab

nationalism, but at the same time confronted with formidable resistance and opposition from within and without. The Arabs have, however, been compensated, to some extent, for the scarcity of natural resources and climatic severity, by the Nature's gift of oil. The oil and the resulting oil revenues and the attendant political and economic influence which, if judiciously used, can be utilized for solving many of their problems. The Arabs of late have proved to some extent that they can use their oil, their oil revenues, and their oil-generated influence, despite manipulations and threats by the advanced nations, to their own benefit. But oil is an ephemeral affair. The Arabs have been given barely half a century not only to make amends, despite all the difficulties, for their backwardness of centuries, but also to create healthy and strong economic, political, social, cultural, and accelerate multi-dimensional development and progress on a sustained basis in a situation when oil is no more or when its value goes down due to the development of alternate sources of energy. Thus the Arabs are confronted with a challenge of advancing in right direction at a breakneck speed despite all the old handicaps and new obstacles, including the emotional stresses and strains created by the expanding Israel and the support to it by great world powers.

The question of the classical Arabic language and its modernization as an efficient medium of cultural and scientific regeneration forms a part of the multiple, involved and complicated processes leading to the birth of a new Arab civilization and strength to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century.

II. The Problems of the Arabic Language : —

There are many problems in the realm of Arabic language which the Arabs in the modern age and the fast-developing world are facing. First, their beloved and millennium-and-a-half old language is split in many dialects which are spoken in many regions, and which, in some cases, are so different from each other that the speakers of these dialects, are mutually unintelligible unless they use the standard modern Arabic which is mainly used for writing. As the latter is not a generally spoken language even some educated people find it difficult to speak it effortlessly and fluently. However, for the last few decades more and more people are able to speak it due to various factors : the spread of education, the development of the means of communication including the mass media, frequent Inter-Arab conferences, and other compulsions of modern life. The Arab nationalist consciousness is also preparing the ground for making the standard language the spoken language of the people. Some Arab governments are also adopting various measures to advance the cause of the standard language as a spoken language in place of the local dialects.

Secondly, the Arabic language, though extremely rich and long-established as a medium of literary and scientific exercise and sophisticated communication, suffers from deficiency in modern scientific terms. This is not, however, the specific defect of the Arabic language. This is a common defect shared by all the languages of the developing countries. The backwardness

of these countries in sciences (including social sciences) and technology reflects in their languages. In order to live with dignity and compete successfully in the modern world the Arabs have not only to imbibe scientific spirit and contribute towards the development of modern civilization but have also to translate into and otherwise adopt in their language the growing number of scientific terms and start developing new terms along with their original contribution to sciences.

Thirdly, when the Arabs in different countries began to adopt or translate modern terms into Arabic since the beginning of the nineteenth century (similar process had been put into operation in the Abbasid period but it had come to an end after a few centuries) new scientific Arabic « languages », and not one language, began to develop which were not only increasingly different from the old literate language i.e. the medieval classical Arabic but also from each other. This phenomenon began to create a great confusion in the literate communication as in the inter-Arab military, political, economic, academic and petroleum conferences. The confusion became worst confounded during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when for the first time there was some inter-Arab military coordination but they found to their dismay that there was no linguistic coordination. In other fields also words began to be coined or used in the written language which in some cases were different from country to country and thus began to create new walls separating written languages in addition to the existing walls of dialects (1). Recently the UNESCO prepared a text book of New Mathematics to replace the traditional Mathematics at the stage of secondary schools. The book was prepared in English. The New Mathematics at the secondary school stage contains some 300 terms which the Iraqi committee translated into Arabic. These Arabic terms were not enti-

(1) See Abdul Haque Fadil, « Ma Huwa al-Maktab al-Daim », *Al-Lisan al-Arabi* (Rabat), Vol. 10, part 3, January 1973, pp. 3-5.

rely acceptable to other Arab countries. Consequently each of the committees in Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria made separate translations from the original English book in their own « Arabic languages » (2). Despite the fact that most of the terms were uniform it created a strange and embarrassing situation, which was the result of the separate and uncoordinated processes of development of mathematical terms in the schools of these different countries. This situation calls for the unification of technical terms on the priority basis at the school level, so that the differential development at that level should stop forth with facilitating the unification of technical terms at the college and university level. This situation also calls for the unification of academic courses and standards at all levels, which, however, various inter-governmental committees under the Arab League and outside it are trying to bring about. But the work is large and calls for speed. While the Office of the Coordination of Arabization in the Arab World (Rabat) under the specialized agency of the Arab league called the Arab Organization for Education Culture and Science has taken up the stupendous task of coordinating technical terms in all fields and at all levels different Scientific Associations in Egypt, Syria and Iraq and academic institutions and individuals in all countries have been coining and translating terms into Arabic for many decades. While these two processes are simultaneously going on, there is also a consciousness that new terms should not only be coined, but should become acceptable and popular in the academic, administrative, commercial and industrial worlds. Thus calls for the adoption of Arabic language as the medium of instruction at all educational levels and as medium of work in all fields.

The development of sciences (including social sciences) and the consequent generation of terms and concepts are taking place at a dizzy speed in this century. Prof. Abdul Aziz Ben Abdullah, prolific writer and enthusiastic Director of the Office of Coordination of Arabization, has always been emphasizing that the wheel of life is moving with a terrific speed and is spewing scientific terms at the rate ranging between 50 and 100 terms a day. This phenomenon has created a problem even for such an advanced country as France (3). Various Arab academic bodies and individuals are coining, translating and coordinating thousands of terms a year, as for example, the Office of Coordination in 10 years has completed over 50 lexicons on various branches of science (4).

III. Language Problems for the Developing Nations : — But the question arises whether these bodies despite all the resources at their disposal, which are not of course super-abundant, will be able to keep pace with the development of technical terms in advanced languages especially English, or whether Arabic, along will just be running behind the advanced Western languages while the distance between the latter and their chasers will be increasing day by day and year by year unless the proverbial hare chooses to sleep and the tortoise continues to « plod his weary way » and not only overtakes the hare but also himself turns into a hare. But is the hare going to oblige the tortoise ? This prospect conjures up a dilemma. This can be put briefly and tentatively in the form of a question : Should not the developing nations adopt one of the advanced languages (preferably English) as the medium of instruction at the higher level as well as for research, enabling themselves to keep pace with the deve-

(2) See Mohammad Mohammad al-Khattabi, « An al-Tarib wa Qadayahu », *Al-Lisan al-Arabi* (Rabat) Vol. 10, Part I, January 1973, p. 284. See also Abdul Karim Khalifa, « Waasail Tatwir al-Lugath al-Arabiyyath al-Ilmiyya », *Al-Lisan al-Arabi* (Rabat) Vol. 12, Part I, 1975, p. 51.

(3) See Abdul Aziz Ben Abdullah, « Istratijiyyat al-Taareeb », *Al-Lisan al-Arabi*, Vol. 12, Part I, 1975, p. 5. See also his « Al-Lugath al-Arabiyya wa Tahaddiyath al-Asr », *ibid.* Vol. 13, 1976, p. 11. See also his « Thauriah al-Taareeb », *ibid.*, Vol. 9, Part I, January 1972, p. 12.

(4) Abdul Aziz Ben Abdullah, « Istratijayyat al-Taareeb », n. 3, p. 5.

lopments of the advanced world and to make their own contribution to the development of sciences, instead of getting engaged in the laborious and may be a futile process of translating the knowledge and its attendant terms generated by the advanced world, and consequently always remain behind because of the tiring and time-consuming intermediate process, in addition to their initial slow speed of progress. The question can be put in another way : Is it not feasible : (a) to internationalize the high academic culture of every developing country by adopting one of the advanced languages (preferably English) at the level of higher education and research to obviate the danger of remaining behind in the present highly competitive age ; and (b) to keep the medium and lower academic culture (i.e. at the levels of ordinarily educated people, bureaucracy, lower and middle education up to the first degree level, and journalism etc.), indigenous, by using and popularizing the national language or languages ? This will probably result in two academic cultures : a) higher ; and b) middle and lower. The first will keep the country abreast with new international developments in science and technology and on par with the advanced world ; and the second will save the nation from losing its national language or languages and the cultural and historical heritage. This question can perhaps be put in an expanded and more sophisticated form discussing the validity or otherwise of the assumptions behind it. Apart from the question of national pride, which is always an important element of this debate, it is equally possible that the present method, adopted by many developing nations, of translating from the advanced languages and making their own languages the medium of higher education and research, will prove ultimately more conducive to their own contribution of sciences and their overall national development. The question of national language as the medium of higher education and research for the developing countries in this century (when they have lagged behind the advanced nations by many centuries, while the latter are naturally advancing faster, due to the in-built facilities) is fraught with many serious

dilemmas. This question is comparable to that of the growing economic gap between the developing and the developed countries ; the reluctance of the advanced nations for the transfer of technology to the developing nations, and for the creation of better trade conditions for the latter — the questions on which the UNCTAD etc. and the Dialogue between the North and the South have almost failed. The advanced nations, whether the capitalist or the communist, have reached particular stages in the scale of economic, scientific and technological development, and the compulsions of international competition and domestic development prod them on to continue to go ahead and ignore the backward nations. In this situation some painful questions surface irrepressibly. Before these questions are raised one has to accept perhaps without question the axiom that backward nations cannot accept their lot as it is. They have to advance at any cost — save by adopting inhuman methods — and for that purpose they have not only to work hard and put in more hours, but also to invent and adopt most efficient methods of doing so. This is the pivotal problem round which other issues revolve, including the issue of the national language as the medium of higher education and research. The questions that arise now are : Do the developing nations possess so much energy, organization, will and time (or whatever may be the other progress-pre-requisites) as to engage themselves both in the development of science and technology etc. and the development of language as their efficient vehicle ? Can they continue to translate for decades to come more than 20,000 newly-coined terms a year, apart from hundreds of thousands of terms which have been coined previously ?) Even if it is possible to do so will simple translations of terms and filling of thousands of volumes be of any use unless they are assimilated and utilized at their relevant places, i.e. universities, research institutions, laboratories, factories, offices etc ? Do the developing countries have so abundant resources, both human and material, as to enable them to be engaged both in developing themselves in science, technology and higher aca-

democratic culture, and in developing their languages? Is it not feasible that 5 to 25 per cent of people are progressively engaged in developing what was called higher academic culture maintained in a foreign language, and 10 to 15 per cent of people (school and college teachers, popular writers, journalists etc.) are engaged in translating and popularizing a part of that higher culture through the national language or languages for the benefit of the rest of the people? This suggestion sounds elitist in the framework of populist and sentimental nationalism. But the question is equally nationalist when the dilemma presents itself in sharp and pointed questions: Do you like the progress of a nation in the context of acute and perilous international competition; or do you want the development of language at the cost of the development of a nation? If you can manage both, then engage in both the activities and come up, but if you cannot, then engage in the first and de-emphasize the second, and thus come up on to the level of the advanced nations.

The present writer is conscious that these questions might possibly turn out to be false and flawed. Perhaps both the processes can be activated and even accelerated profitably without damaging each other, particularly if the nation's resources are large. Perhaps the two processes may turn out, in some cases, to be mutually reinforcing. But he is also aware that adequate debate is not on. It is a multi-faceted and highly complicated debate and if carried out with sustained interest may lay bare many assumptions and lead to some solutions, or result in epistemological impossibility. There are many issues in this hurried world whose solutions have not been sought either due to lack of sustained energy and interest or due to emotionalism. But people continue to work on half or no solutions, and after a lot of damage turn to other non-solutions. It is, however, but definite that this dilemma has not been finally resolved dispassionately and scientifically. However, before it is done it can only be said that Arab education at the higher secondary and university levels should emphasize adequate teaching of English or French as the

second language, though this process also involves pitfalls and dilemmas. The difficulty of the situation lies in the advantage of the march which the West has stolen since Renaissance over the East, on the one hand, and its present stronger position, apart from the accumulation of historical benefit, in terms of material and intellectual resources. Even in the West the Anglo-Saxon nations have an edge over the Germans, the French, and the Russians. This advantage they will be maintaining and even increasing unless the total knowledge created and likely to be created by the latter nations, along with that of the developing nations, grows in overwhelming proportions compelling the Anglo-Saxon nations to cooperate in developing a common international language for science and technology. By that time the power politics, and international competition, to which the present international system is geared, and the massive resources and the attractive opportunities of the Anglo-Saxon nations (mainly the US) will be sucking in the higher talent not only from the developing countries but also from the advanced Germanic, Latin and Slavic nations, widening the already existing gap between the Anglo-Saxon nations and the rest of the advanced nations on the one hand, and between the developed and the developing worlds, on the other. However, it is not necessary for the non-English-speaking nations of the world to wait patiently for this situation to develop. They must intensify their efforts to develop an international language not only for trans-cultural communication but also as a language of higher teaching and research. While national languages will continue to develop, efforts should also be directed in all the nations towards the development of a truly international language. The developing nations, including the Arabs are condemned until such an international language develops, if at all it develops, or until the question of two cultures is decided and acted upon, if at all it is thought feasible to act upon it, to work in two channels: (a) developing their own languages and (b) mastering, on a wide scale and with an ever-increasing speed, one of the languages of the

West, preferably English. So far as the specific problems of Arabic are concerned, despite the valuable work being done by all the language academies and other institutions, including the Rabat Office of Coordination, the task is so big that efforts have to be raised manifold and accelerated, especially the regional academies and the Rabat Office have to be expanded considerably by enlisting the services of an army of full-time translators and coiners of terms, who will work in consultation with academicians actually working in the fields. This process should be strengthened by widening the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction at all possible levels, and as medium of work in all the possible walks of life.

IV. Characteristics and History of the Arabic Language : — There is a near unanimity among both the Arab and Western scholars of Arabic that many of the so-called laws of the development and decay of languages, which have been mistakenly taken to be scientific and universal, are not applicable to Arabic. If Arabic is not a unique language it is at least among those languages whose structures are more durable, firm and flexible than most of the modern ephemeral-looking languages which get transformed into new languages every half a millennium, and whose birth, growth, and adulthood, can be chartered and predicted. A modern Western philologist (5) has called Arabic a « privileged » language and observed that :

It has lived for one millennium and a half essentially unchanged, usually gaining, never completely losing. Venus-like it was born in a perfect state of beauty, and it has preserved that beauty in spite of all the hazards of history and all the corrosive forces of time... It has known austerity, holy ecstasy and voluptuousness, bloom and decadence. It exuberated in times of splendour and persisted through times of adversity in state of near-hibernation. But when it awoke again, it was the same language.

(5) Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language : Lexical and Stylistical Developments* (Chicago and London, 1970), p. 1.

The suddenness of the development of Arabic language and literature has surprised many, Professor Gibb being one among them. He observes : (6)

At one moment Arabia seems in a literary sense empty and dumb except for some votive and businesslike inscriptions in a variety of dialects. At the next, companies of poets spring up all over Northern Arabia, reciting complex odes, qasidas, in which a series of themes are elaborated with unsurpassed vigour, vividness of imagination, and precision of imagery, in an infinitely rich and highly articulated language, showing no traces of dialect and cast into complex and flexible metrical schemes that rhyme throughout the poem.

Ernest Renan observed : (7)

One of the strangest events in human history and whose mystery is difficult to unravel, is the spread of the Arabic language. This language was unknown at the beginning, then all of a sudden it reached the height of excellence... and there has occurred no important change in it until now. It has no childhood and no old age. It appeared for the first time complete and consolidated... One of the amazing things about this national language is that it was born and reached the degree of existence in the midst of deserts and in a nomadic nation, and excelled its sister languages in vocabulary, precision of meanings, and beauty of its structure.

Among the semitic languages of West Asia the classical Arabic which is the integrated Arabic of the *Jahiliyya* poetry, of the Quran, of the prophetic traditions and of other literary elements of the first Islamic century, is the youngest. This language got enriched with scientific and philosophical terms and expressions in the latter medieval period, especially the golden Abbasid age, and with modern concepts in the modern age beginning from the nineteenth cen-

(6) H.A.R. Gibb, *Arabic Literature : An Introduction* (Second Revised Edition), (Oxford, 1963) p. 13.

(7) Translated from Anwar al-Jundi. *Al Lugath al-Arabiyya Baina Humathiha and Khusumiha* (n.d., n.p.) p. 25.

ture. However there has hardly been any change in its grammar and basic vocabulary since it came into adult existence in the sixth and seventh centuries in the northern Arabian Peninsula. All the other Semitic languages, except for some remnants of Syriac and the revived Hebrew, are dead. The Semitic languages are generally divided by philologists into three main branches :

1. The Eastern Semitic Languages. They are the Babylonian and Assyrian languages and called Accadian by modern scholars. They were written in cuneiform.

2. The Northern or North-Western Semitic languages. They are sub-divided into Canaanite and Aramaic languages. The Canaanite languages are four : the Ancient Canaanite, the Muabite, the Phoenician, and the Ancient Hebrew. The Aramaic languages were divided into Eastern dialects Syriac is famous and among the Western dialects the Palestinian Aramaic is important. The Aramaic was the lingua franca of West Asia for many centuries before and after Christ, mainly from 300 B.C. to 650 D.A.

3. The South or South-Western Semitic Languages or Languages of Arabia. They are sub-divided into South Arabian or Yemeni and the North Arabian languages. The first are further divided into five dialects : the Maysaniya, the Sabiyya, the Himyariyya, the Qatbaniyya, and Hadramiyya. The North-Arabian languages are divided into the Extinct Arabic language and the Existing Arabic Languages. The first is also called the Arabic of Inscriptions. It was divided into Lahyaniyya, Thamudiyya, Safaviyya etc. The Existing Arabic language was earlier divided mainly into Hijaziyya and Tamimiyya (8).

There is a lot of speculation and controversy as to what dialect or a combination of dialect, and in what way, developed into classical Ara-

bic. It is generally accepted that the court of Al-Hira, the capital of an Arab dynasty in pre-Islamic days, on the borders of Iran, became the resort of Bedouin poets in the late Jahiliyya period, and helped in developing and unifying the language of poetry. Its written use in Al-Hira also furthered its standardization. About the origins of the poetical language also there is a controversy as to whether it was a Hijazi (particularly of the Quraish) dialect or a Najdi one, but it is widely accepted that in the late sixth century it was a purely literary dialect, distinct from all spoken dialects and super-tribal. It is now referred to as the « poetical koine ». Its continuity was assured by professional reciters (rawis). It was practically uniform throughout Arabia. It is asserted by Western scholarship that the language of the Quran stood somewhere between the poetical standard koine and the Hijazi dialect. The sources of classical Arabic have to be sought in (a) pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry ; (b) the Quran ; (c) the official correspondence of the Prophet and the first four Ayyam al-Arab. Classical Arabic had an extremely rich vocabulary due partly to the Bedouin's power of observation, and partly to poetic exuberance ; some of the wealth may be due to dialect mixture. It was not rich in forms and constructions, but sufficiently flexible to survive the adaptation to the needs of a highly urbanized and articulate culture without a disruption of its structure ». (9) An Arab scholar is of the view that the earlier classical Arabic, i.e. the language of the Muallaqat had begun to deteriorate just before Islam but the advent of Islam and the revelation of the Quran in that language not only stopped this deterioration but restored the language to its early purity and conciseness. (10) It is generally believed by Arab scholars that the Quraishi dialect, both because of its felicity (safa) and Quraish's prominent position in Arabia, ultimately became the standard lan-

(8) There are slight differences among scholars regarding the divisions and sub-divisions of the Semitic languages. For the above section two following sources have been consulted, Ali Abdul Wahid Wafi, *Fiqh al-Lughath* (Cairo, 1956), pp. 21-104 and Subhi al-Saleh, *Dirasath fi Fiqh al-Lughath* (Beirut, 1962) pp. 32-64.

(9) « Arabiyya », *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition) pp. 566.

(10) See Omar Farrookh, *Al-Qawamiyyath al-Fusha* (Beirut, 1961), p. 82.

guage of Arabia and the Quran was mainly revealed in it giving it a permanence (11).

The article « Arabiyya » of *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition) divides the later history of Arabic literary language into four periods : (a) the classical Arabic ; (b) the early middle Arabic ; (c) the middle Arabic ; and (d) the modern written Arabic. « The Arabic literary language was academically standardized since the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries. Its grammar, syntax, vocabulary and literary usages were clearly defined after systematic and laborious research. Since that time until now it has had a continuous and uninterrupted existence. « Although different colloquial languages were developed in all individual countries and regions for every day life, standard literary language was always used for purposes of writing. The Quran influenced the course of the literary language for its miraculous unsurpassable excellence. « The literary Arab celebrities admitted impotence before its challenge, and Muslims down the ages looked up to it as their literary guide and linguistic authority ». The Arab conquests of other areas of west Asia proved to be an important factor in the process of Arab linguistic unification. The translations and original scientific and philosophical works which started in the early Abbasid period enriched the Arabic vocabulary considerably by innumerable technical terms. The decline of Arab political power and cultural vitality affected the literary language and its standard deteriorated but it was never replaced for the purpose of writing by provincial dialects. The impact of the Western Culture since the end of the eighteenth century (the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt) in terms of adoption of unnumerable elements of Western civilization had far reaching effect on the written language, but written Arabic remains basically a uniform language in all Arab countries. It is the symbol of cultural unity. There is no reason to anticipate that written language will anywhere be replaced by a local dialect and forced out of practical use (12).

(11) See al-Saleh n. 8 pp. 57-63. See also Wafi n. 8, pp. 104-114.

(12) The contents of this paragraph were derived from « Arabiyya » in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition),

V. Arabic and Its Detractors :

Arabic in its classical form has lived for fifteen centuries, and despite its stagnation and even decadence for many centuries its internal structure and vitality is intact. It has in fact shown that it can serve the needs of the modern age in an extremely satisfactory way. Many ancient languages died out or disintegrated into vernaculars, which, in due course of time, developed into advanced languages. Latin is cited as the best example of such ancient and dead languages. However, classical Arabic is not an ancient language. It is a medieval language in the strict sense of the term, as there has not yet been provided any proof of its being used as a developed language in ancient times. It is generally accepted that it emerged as an adult language just before Islam in the desert conditions and tribal society of Arabia — an extraordinary but not unexplicable phenomenon. Those who believe in primitive rationalism wonder why, after such a long life, it is not already dead ; and insist, on the basis of primitive prejudice, that it should die now or at least should be taken as dead. They are like children who have just discovered the digits of their fingers for counting and cannot comprehend that there can be more and more complicated computers. Arabic is one of the most logically developed languages, which, rising from a poetical dialect, became a medium of revealed religion, then of a vast and expanding administration, and then of an international culture. It has shown the capacity of absorbing new concepts of the modern complicated world culture, without getting disrupted. Stetkevych described Arabic language in these words : (13)

The perfect system of the three radical consonants, the derived verbal forms with their basic meanings the precise formation of the verbal noun, of the participles — every thing is clarity, logic, system, and abstraction.

pp. 564-73.

(13) Stetkevych, n. 5, p. 12.
ces have been consulted. Ali Abdul Wahid Wafi, Fiqh

The language is like a mathematical formula. This is, of course a first notion but it is also the ultimate truth. In between there lies the great body of the language : rich and various, with its pitfalls and puzzles, but what impresses itself upon the mind is the abstract idea.

The fascinating notion that languages and other social entities are living organisms — they are born, grow, mature, age and die — has led many a philosopher and philologist in the last four centuries into blind alleys. The world does not lack prophets of doom but prophecies may not honour them. However, there have also been some « well-wishers » of Arabic who prescribed death for it. They were not also destined to gain success.

Various attempts were made to destroy or distort Arabic, under varied pleas and pretexts. They are still being made, though the intentions have become clear now. Some of the attempts go beyond the language into the core of cultural heritage and national foundations of the Arabs. Under the Ottoman Empire Arabic was relegated to the back-ground in the Arab territories as the official language was Turkish. In the later Turkish era the process of Turkification was intensified. However with the onslaught of the Western imperialism attacks on Arabic became more sophisticated, but Arabic proved to be equally resilient.

With the French occupation of Algeria in 1830 and British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Western imperialism was not only ruling the Arab territories and exploiting their economies it was also trying to destroy the Arab culture and enslave the Arab mind. This process was extended to other Arab territories when the French brought under their control Tunisia and Morocco in Arab West and Syria and Lebanon in the Arab East, the British occupied Iraq and Palestine, and the Italians seized Libya. In this respect both the « civilized French » and the

« barbarious Italians » proved equal and were more ruthless than the British. One of the ways of destroying the Arab culture and deprive the Arabs of their heritage was to attack the language and literature. For this purpose three methods were adopted.

- (a) to impose a foreign language in place of Arabic,
- (b) to attempt to replace the standard Arabic language by regional colloquial languages ;
- (c) to attempt to replace the original script of Arabic by Latin script.

To be fair to the Western advocates and their local supporters it may be said that there were some advantages in all the three plans. The very fact of their having an element of merit made them attractive to some sections and individuals. But at the same time it cannot be denied that ultimately these attempts were going to destroy the Arabic language and culture, and the motives behind these attempts were imperialistic. It may also be conceded that some of the Arab advocates of these measures, and even some scholars from the Western countries, might have been advocating these measures out of good intentions or simple-mindedness, but in most of the cases it was the hatred and animosity for the Arabs generated by various factors, historical, psychological and imperialistic, which prompted them to advocate these « reformist » measures.

How the imperialists attempted to obliterate Arabic culture in the countries they ruled can be seen from the French actions in Algeria. In this they were supported by a large number of researchers, thinkers and orientalists. They foreclosed all the opportunities to the Algerians of maintaining their language and culture. First, administration, economic activities and education were frenchified, then they fought Islam by turning mosques into churches. (14) They also

(14) Allal al-Fassi, *Al-Maghreb al-Arabi* (Cairo) p. 70 cited in Mahmud Abdul Maule, « Maarakath al-Arabiyya fi al-Jazair », *Al-Lisan al-Arabi* (Rabat) Vol. 9, Part I, January 1972, p. 13.

turned some mosques into barracks and stables. They attempted to achieve two aims through this action. By closing the mosques they were closing the schools, libraries, lecture-halls, people's gathering places etc. which were managed by these mosques (15). They also closed Arabic schools situated within the radius of three kilometers of a French school. They adopted many methods to assimilate the Algerians into French culture by obliterating the Arab culture, Arab history and Arabic language from their minds and daily lives. Thus they continued to do for decades through coercion, temptation and by creating inferiority complex in the minds of the Algerians. However, the reaction of the Algerians was strong and violent when it came, culminating in the armed liberation struggle in the late 1950's and early 1960s in which they lost 1/5 of the Algerian population. The cultural and linguistic imperialism was fought at different levels. At the beginning the reaction showed itself in the movements of religious, social and educational reform which established schools, mosques and cultural associations to keep the language and culture alive. These reformist movements got intensified after the establishment of the Association of the Muslim Ulama of Algeria (*Jamiat-al-Ulama al-Muslemin al-Jazairin*) whose motto was, « Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language and Algeria is our homeland ». This Association was naturally opposed by the French Administration and also by the French Communist Party. It was maligned as a reactionary organization working for the Arab kings (16). The French imperialism had destroyed the national spirit in the French-educated section so much so that it was prepared under the leadership of Dr. Ben Jallul to become the part of France politically. This Francophile section was prevented from achieving its end only by the *Jamiat al-Ulama* who warned : « Algeria is not French, it is not possible for it to become French, nor does it want to become so, and the language (Arabic) is an integral part of the national entity and its soul » (17). In Tunisia,

Algeria, Syria and Lebanon also the French attempted to destroy Arabic and Arab culture, though not on the scale, and with the intensity, as in Algeria. In Libya the Italians were as ruthless as the French were in Algeria. However, now when both the French and the Italians are out, the countries once ruled and exploited by them are still recuperating from the shocks and damages inflicted on them.

The second field in which the Western imperialists supported by some Arab scholars and writers, attempted to damage Arabic was to run the campaign that classical Arabic should be replaced by colloquial dialects in each country. The main argument of these champions of dialects was that standard Arabic was unicultural and far from the daily lives of peoples. There is an element of truth in this argument. But one cannot ignore that these difficulties are exaggerated and represent the situation of the times of decay. This argument, consciously or unconsciously, pre-supposes that the Arabs are living in decadent conditions and their energies are sapped as if they were living in the later Abbasid and Mongol periods. They do not take into consideration that a new age of renaissance has begun. A pathological reality e.g. disease, defeat or decay has to be taken note of, so that treatment must start, but cannot be reconciled with, nor can it be idealized. The disease has to be arrested and health restored. As a matter of fact now with increased education, greater communications and contact, on the one hand, and better methods of teaching, on the other, modern standard Arabic is spoken and understood on a much larger scale and has become easier to learn than 50 or 100 years ago. One can very realistically expect that it will become more and more common and popular with the passage of time especially when more positive and systematic methods are adopted to teach and popularize the standard language. While nations in a complex situation, when energy and time have to be expended in many fields simultaneously, cannot attempt to hit an impossible or

(15) Ammar. Azlghen. *Al-Jihad al-Afdal*, p. 29, cited in *ibid.*

(16) *ibid.*, p. 14.

(17) *Abdul Maula n. 14 p. 14.*

highly difficult target ; but they cannot also afford to choose, like water, the downward and easiest path. Standard Arabic is neither too difficult nor an artificial language nor a dead or dying tongue as the Shuubis of the twentieth century attempt to make it out. Apart from the mischievous misrepresentation of the fact these so-called well-wishers of Arabic want to hit at two more important targets beyond the language. They want both to block the present process of unification and to foreclose the future opportunities of emotional, cultural and political unity among the Arabs. They want also to cut off the Arab present and future with its past. These attacks are well-thought out. They are both vertical and horizontal both temporal and spatial, involving deep psychological and cultural dimensions. The Araba personality with a depth of 1600 years and a width from Indian Ocean to Atlantic, is attempted to be cut off from its past and cut into small pieces and decimated. The objectives are too transparent for any person to ignore. The other side of the coin is that dialects are so poor and disorganized that they cannot serve as vehicles or media of expression and communication in modern times. It is also a fact that dialects are too numerous to serve any purpose and even in one country there are various dialects. They create more serious and numerous problems than they can solve. Since the mid-eighteenth century when the orientalist began to study Arabic dialects, their studies had academic objectives as well as imperialistic. The expansion of European Imperialism in the Arab World was followed, preceded and then followed by these studies. The encouragement of local and undeveloped dialects as against the sophisticated standard historically alive Arabic of the whole Arab World was a prescription for Arab fragmentation, atomization and vulgarization.

Towards the end of the last century when some voices were raised in support of the co-

loquial, Abdullah Fikri argued in the Orientalists Conference in Stockholm held in 1889 against its use, in place of the standard language (18). During this period many Christian scholars in Syria and many Muslim scholars in Egypt began to work seriously for the promotion of standard Arabic (19). William Wilcox, the famous British engineer who worked in Egypt chose to run the campaign for colloquial as against the standard language. His argument was interesting and appealing. He said the Egyptians had four good qualities i.e. stability, boldness, thinking power and truthfulness, but they lacked originality, but when they began to write in English, a living language, they developed originality. He asserted that standard Arabic was too difficult for Egyptians, and suggested that they should adopt their dialect as the written language (20). One can clearly see the fallacy in this argument if not something worse. To equate Latin for the British with classical Arabic for the Egyptians is preposterous if not outrightly wicked. It would be sufficient to mention the reply of Jurji Zaidan to Wilcox. Zaidan opposed Wilcox saying that what was true for English was not true for Arabic for the following reasons :

1. By replacing Latin by English, the English replaced a foreign language by a national language, but for the Egyptians it was completely a different affair. The difference between the standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect was minor.
2. By replacing the standard Arabic by the dialect the Egyptians might be saved from an evil but would be the victims of a greater evil, because the dialects in different Arab countries were different and consequently Arabs in different countries would not be able to communicate with each other.
3. The dialects are poor and backward and cannot be compared with the standard

(18) For his argument, see Jundl, n. 7, pp. 49-51.

(19) See Jundl n. 7, pp. 52-58. For the specific Christian Arab role towards reviving standard Arabic see George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (Lebanon), pp. 35-80.

(20) See Jundl, n. 7 pp. 54-58.

Arabic which is one of the most advanced languages of the world.

4. The Arab unity (in cultural and linguistic fields) was based on standard language. If there had been no Quran, the community would not have preserved it from the early days of Islam, and had not returned to it for keeping the language sound when Nature tended to spoil it, Arab unity would have been destroyed and Arabs in different countries would not have been able to communicate with each other.

5. The disregard of the standard language would lead to the disregard of the sciences developed during thirteen hundred years ; and this would be an irreparable loss (21).

Perhaps Zaidan did not know that the very soundness of his argument was the reason that impelled the enemies of Arabs to destroy their language.

Another Britisher in Egypt Justice Wilmore went a step further and gave a call in 1901 to adopt the « language of Cairo » as the language of the teacher and literature, and to use Latin script for writing this « language » (22). These attempts were opposed among others by Jurji Zaidan, Farah Antun, Ali Yusuf, Abdul Aziz Shawish and Mohammad Hussain. These attempts were not limited to the foreigners only, they were joined by Arabs as Lutfi al-Sayyid, Qasim Amin, Marun Ghusun, Salama Musa and Abdul Aziz Fahmi (23). The Mahjar (emigrant) writers and poets especially Jibran Khalil Jibran, Mikhail Nualma and Amin al-Rahani gave a call to free the language from restriction which interfere with free expression. In this connection Jibran's article "To you your language and to me my language" is famous (24). However, these writers did not advocate for

nor did they write in a dialect. One cannot but sympathise with the idea that the dead wood of the later medieval Arabic style should be cut down but one cannot go beyond it to a stage where the language is loosened leading to distortion. Taha Hussain described the Mahjar poets as « people endowed with a fertile nature, strong talents, wide-ranging imagination, naturally qualified to be good poets, but they have not perfected the means of poetry ; they are either ignorant of the language or they have ignored it and proceeded to adopt their ignorance as a method or system" (25). Badawi is of the opinion that this description is truer of Jibran than of many others (26). Among other advocates of Arabic dialects are George Kafuri, Jabur abd al-Noor, and Said Aql. (27)

The third category of attempts to destroy the historicity, authenticity and unifying capacity of the Arabic language was the campaign to replace the present script by Latin. The idea of using Latin script for many languages is an old one and Latin is actually being used for Turkish since the days of Ataturk. Among the earliest advocates of Latin script for Arabic, as referred to earlier, was Justice Wilmore, one of the judges of Court of Appeal in Cairo. Two French orientalist Massignon and Banyar and some other orientalist also took up the advocacy of Latin script, though the Italian orientalist Carl Nalino was, along with some others among the opponents of this movement. Among the greatest Egyptian advocates of Latin script was Abdul Aziz Fahmi (28). Among others are Anis Furaiha and Said Aql who advocate both the use of colloquial and the Latin script (29).

The movements for the use of colloquial and Latin script have died down in all the Arab countries except Lebanon with the termination of imperialism. Lebanon has peculiar conditions of its own which make it vulnerable to all sort

(21) Cited in Jundi n. 7, pp. 58-59.

(22) Egyptian Gazette, 9 November 1901 cited in Jundi n. 7, pp. 60-61.

(23) See Jundi n. 7, pp. 77-82. For details on Marun Ghusun see Omar Farrukh, n. 10 (Beirut 1961), pp. 120-127. For the views of Qasim Amin see Stetkevych no. 5, pp. 55-88.

(24) Jundi, n. 7, pp. 84-85.

(25) Cited in M.M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge, 1975) p. 185.

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 185.

(27) See Farrukh, n. 10, pp. 98-119.

(28) For the views of the above orientalist, and Abdul Aziz Fahmi, See Jundi, n. 7, pp. 123-129.

(29) For a discussion of the motives and activities of Anis Furaiha and Said Aql see Farrukh n. 10 pp. 127-150.

of movements and conspiracies. Lebanon is a centre of banks, newspapers, publishing houses, entertainment centres, political movements, and organizations. It is a "free" country based on extreme commercialism. It is a country where religious and sectarian animosities strengthened by material advantages or deprivations have reached the level of the civil war in 1975-76. It is also a country where all the big powers and many small powers have their agent, and newspapers to serve their interests. It is also a country in which Israel has developed special interest. In this country both the movements of replacing the standard Arabic with dialect and of replacing Arabic script with Latin script are kept alive. Although the language of administration, the language of thousands of Arabic books published from here, and the language of the Arabic newspapers published from Beirut — the greatest number in any Arab capital — is standard Arabic, efforts are being made by an assortment of interests to promote in the Lebanese dialect as written language and to use Latin as the script of that dialect.

Books in that dialect and in Latin script are published in attractive colours in Beirut and distributed free or at token price. Prizes amounting to \$ 400 are awarded every month to a writer who comes out with such a book. One wonders where this money comes from (30).

VI. Inadequacy of Efforts for the Development of Arabic :

The dialect which the poets of the Jahiliyya developed as a vehicle of their thoughts and emotions and the dialect of the urban-commercial and religious Quraish were combinedly used with a slight mixture of other dialect, by the Quran. Then with the intense activity — religious, political, military, administrative and diplomatic — which started especially after the Prophet's migration to Madina, and the imper-

ceptible emergence of the state centred in that city, the language began to develop and get consolidated quickly and on a large scale. Now the use of this integrated language was markedly shifted from the fields of poetry and the Quraishite activities to a much higher levels — organized and revealed religion and a society based on that religion. But Islamic had not created only a religious community as early Christianity had done. It created a total community, if this term is allowed — religious, economic, political, social, military, diplomatic etc. The impact of this new life was so massive and pervasive that poetry and commercial activities got de-emphasized for the time being. But language began to grow tremendously and it was imparted a religious sanctity because of the Quran — the word of God in Arabic. The secular aspect of the language was raised to a higher level in the Umayyid period in an extended Islamic empire much bigger, more populous and with more complex problems. On the religious level, the concentrated materials given by the Quran, the life and sayings of the Prophet and his companions and the intense activities during the time of the Prophet and the first four Caliphs began to unfold and get explained, commented and consolidated in the form of Islamic sciences — the Quranic commentaries, the collection of Hadith, the codification of the jurisprudence, the biographies of the Prophet and his companions, the narration and description of wars, the discussions about the fundamentals and subsidiaries of religion etc. This process was completed only after three centuries or so straddling the Omayyid-Abbasid periods and thousands of books were written in Arabic. The language itself developed its own sciences — morphology, syntax, prosody etc. — and produced a vast literature. The social sciences emerging from the ideology and practices of the Muslims began to create their own literatures. With the establishment of the « House of Wisdom » under Mamun, philosophy — in its widest medieval sense encompassing almost every branch of

(30) Abdul Aziz Ben Abdullah, « Thawriath al-Taareeb », n. 3, p. 8.

social, physical and biological sciences — began to develop, again creating a plethora of literature in Arabic. Arabic language with its peculiar structure and capacity of absorbing words, ideas and concepts without getting distorted or bursting at its aims, came handy. It is one of the still unsolved mysteries of philology as to how Arabic got to acquire that capacity. Now towards the end of the Abbasid period Arab was a greatly expanded language and yet many of its folds had remained unfolded and many of the cells of its tissues had remained unfitted. Then it went into hibernation or semi-hibernation for more than seven centuries. And now when it is getting awakened since the nineteenth century the linguists, the writers, the poets, the scientists, the philosophers and the journalists are still discovering its folds and cells. It has a tremendous capacity to face the complex challenges of the present and the future. It is not the weakness of language but the weakness of its speakers and users — the paucity of experts, and the dearth of organized institutions both for coining and using words and perhaps financial resources — which has kept the language behind the advanced languages of the world.

There appears to be an integral relation between the development of knowledge and the development of language. If the people using a particular language do not develop or create knowledge, their language can grow only from the second and rather inferior channel of translation. The Arabs developed sciences and philosophy. In the medieval ages and enriched Arabic through the first channel of directly developing forms to pour the contents in. Now the Arabs like many other developing nations, are generally at the receiving end in knowledge and technology. They are manufacturing linguistic containers to pour in the foreign contents. The ideal advice that can be preferred is that they must lift themselves up with the straps of their boots, — as they had been in the medieval ages — to the level of knowledge-creators from the level of know-

ledge receivers. Ultimately, along with many other developing nations, they have to join this privileged club, but meanwhile they have to be at the receiving end and that too effectively and enthusiastically. They must not only translate the advanced and fast advancing knowledge created by the advanced nations by developing linguistic containers (terms) but must also absorb the new knowledge mentally directly and through translations by means of vast educational activities. These three tasks of (a) absorbing new knowledge through education; (b) translating new knowledge into Arabic; and (c) creating new knowledge through Arabic; have to be carried on simultaneously. These efforts require imagination and planning in the first stage, which the Arabs have shown that are capable of. But their execution requires not only will and organization, but perseverance and resources — human and material. The work, at present, in the Arab world does not provide sufficient proof that the scholars and administrators are really alive to this problem.

The Nahda which began with the Napoleonic Invasion of Egypt towards the end of the eighteenth century and with Mohammad Ali's vision and activities was frustrated by the West and rendered into a false dawn. The literary and linguistic activities started mainly by the Arabs of Lebanon, however, proved more enduring. But activities on a large and institutional basis did not start until the beginning of the twentieth century. Arab nationalism in its political sense was also born this time and the great Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire during the World war I was the symbolic declaration of Arab independence psychologically, culturally and linguistically. This was also frustrated by European imperialism in the form of mandatory system imposed on all the Fertile Crescent by Britain and France after the War. Egypt had already been occupied by Britain in 1882. The first half of the twentieth century was the worst period in the modern times for the Arabs politically which culminated in the usurpation of Palestine in 1948 by Israel. Linguistically and in

terms of literature, (31) however, this was a very productive period. Several encyclopaedias were written, hundreds of thousands of terms were coined and the many linguistic and scientific academies were founded in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, and important linguistic problems were debated and solved (32). In the light of all the linguistic debates and activities during the last one hundred years or so it appears that many of the central problems of Arabic language — classical versus colloquial, Arabic script versus Latin script, reform of the Arabic script, simplification of Arabic grammar, the modes and methods of development of language and coining of terms through derivation, formation of compound words, assimilation of foreign words, borrowing of unchanged foreign words, semantic development of words and assimilation of foreign modes of expression etc. — have been solved. On the general academic level, with the multiplication of schools, colleges and universities, the percentage of literacy and the depth of knowledge, in terms of the number of graduates, have increased. On the political level all the Arab countries, except Palestine, are independent. The economic conditions have largely improved thanks to the discovery, production and control of oil and natural gas resources. But the Arab world, by and large, even among the developing countries, is considerably backward in the fields of science and technology, administration and diplomacy, economic productivity and political development. While it is carrying on its back the burden of several centuries of backwards, like many other developing countries of the world, it is also carrying the burden of geography and greater pressure of international forces. Abdul Aziz Ben Abdullah is not alone in making an appeal to the Arabs that they have to bring about an intellectual revolution, and the first revolution they have to bring about is against themselves, and that they have to change their methods, their behaviour, and their tactics. Then they

have to lay down their plan, fix their aims and start with a faith and continue to work in such a way that they are never turned away from their path whatever the difficulties and obstacles (33).

In the medieval ages especially during the Abbasid period the Arabs gave the world original knowledge after a short period of translation from Greek, Latin, Persian and Sanskrit. Europe learnt from them for centuries. But it was a period when there was a general decadence among the peoples of early civilizations while other nations had not started their march. Now in modern times Europe and its extensions in the New World have the advantage of many centuries since the Renaissance over Asian and African nations. Their upward march continues. The Afro-Asian countries, which are late starters, have to increase their speed to catch up with the West by neutralizing their own weaknesses, circumventing the hurdles placed by the advanced nations, and surpassing the advantages of the latter. This means not only vision and planning on the part of leaders but also psychological and sociological overhauling and escalation of individual and communal personalities of nations so that they can work with greater energy and higher motivation. The Arabs who carry on their back greater burdens of history, geography and international pressure than many other developing nations, have to get transformed and lift themselves with greater alacrity and thoroughness.

The question of the development of Arabic to enable it to accommodate all the concepts of modern sciences (including social sciences) humanities and technology, cannot obviously wait till the Arabs bring themselves up to the level of knowledge creators in these fields — which they nevertheless will be striving to be — but they have to expand and organize their linguistic activities at a higher level and on a large

(31) For a history of general literature during this period see John A. Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature 1800-1970* (London 1971), and for a history of poetry see Badawi, n. 25.

(32) For a survey of these activities see Jundi n. 7, pp. 237-84; for a more recent and critical study see Stelkevych n. 5.

(33) Abdul Aziz Ben Abdullah, « *Thawriath al-Taareeb* » n. 3, p. 8.

scale. All the existing academies, universities, research institutes, government organization, the mass media and the Office for the Coordination of Arabization, put together, despite their valuable and large work, are not equal to the task the Arabs are confronted with. More academies preferably one in each country, with good number of fulltime members and with greater financial resources should be established. There should be subject committees consisting of scholars of that subject in each country with which linguists from general academies will be attached. These committees should submit their work to the higher committees of the enlarged Office of Coordination for final approval. In this respect the oil-rich

Arab countries should play more important role. They are at present playing no role except for Iraq. There should be higher targets. On the educational, mass media, government, commercial and industrial levels these terms and concepts should be used and popularized. As these activities suck in more people from other equally useful activities, the Arabs must be prepared to work for more hours, more methodically and with greater enthusiasm and speed. There appears to be a scope that productivity can easily be doubled, if the people are ready and trained to work even at a rate lower than that of the West, though it will be far below the ideal.