

The Church should never forgive Galileo for he set the earth moving around the sun in a way other than the one prescribed earlier. Priesthood took a knock from that and since then it has never fully recovered.

Shatter

The order of the universe took a different course than the one set by Aristotle. The belief that the earth was the centre of everything, was shattered: all pedestalled philosophical concepts of humanity were swept away. 'Humanism' and 'Renaissance', Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Raphael and others broke away from the established order and brought in creative changes with exciting discoveries. Reactions, resistance, inquisitions and papal wrath followed.

Botticelli was influenced to burn all his paintings under the reformist wind of Savonarola. Interestingly, Leonardo, who was reluctant to paint the details of Christ's face for want of a model possessing such a noble character as that of the Christ, was quick to paint Judas's face with that of Savonarola in 'Last Supper'.

The inherent human character of artists, scientists, politicians and poets, gave birth to new ideas which replaced medieval thinking. The process of change has never looked back since, in Art and in life.

Trumpet

A lot of hulla-gulla is being trumpeted by the so-called 'National' institutions, in the name of preservation of culture, arts and crafts. Millions of rupees are spent on myopic preservatives invented in the Margalla Hills: The grooming of adolescent exclusively male, dancers, at the PNCA (Idara Saqafat) and presented at airport ceremonies and craft melas or itineraries for taking troops of sycophants abroad and other such half-witted schemes of 'national' bluff are nothing

A change for the worse

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by A.R. Nagori

but merciless crimes against our poor and innocent people who take every sugar-coated bitter pill in the name of patriotism. First of all there is no culture ministry devoted to its job or true to its nomenclature. As regards a definite policy, adhocism is preferred. No accountability exists. Slogans such as we are 'the greatest' with a 'glorious past' (the Mughals having no parallel etc) are coined to fool the masses.

The past may be a catalyst or a provider of lessons from history but it is not the repeating of history that advances civilisations. Great human civilisations were created by progressive thought and culture built on the fundamental principles of progress, enlightenment and an urge for the new. There is no going back in art or life.

Suggestions that the so called 'glorious' past be revived in art or in life are retrogressive in nature. None of the revivalist Bengal School of painters could match the contribution of Amrita Sher Gil, the mother of modern art, in our region. Nor can recent painters riding the bandwagon of calligraphy lead us anywhere. The charm of life is in living it out in all its different phases from the cradle to the grave. If a re-processing plant could turn an adult human into a child or an old man into a youth, to live a life already lived, the repetition would be boring to say the least. Nature brings change in all things around us. It is a paradox that new ideas for the betterment of humankind are always resisted.

Perception

The often euphoric judgments pronounced against the Arts by our high priests seeking moral justification make no difference, as long as black

warrant is with-held. These detention periods and extensions are a temporary phase for history of art in our region. It is a well known fact that obscurantists are always hostile to arts. They cannot stop the clock on the wall; nor can they reverse time and life which undergo change every second.

Prof. James Burke quotes a question posed to philosopher Wittgenstein, "... What a bunch of no-knows we medieval Europeans must have, been back in the days of Copernicus, to have looked up at the sky and thought that what we saw up there was the sun going round the Earth, when, as everyone knows the earth goes round the sun, and it does not take too many brains to understand that."

Wittgenstein replied, "Yes, but I wonder what it would have looked like if the sun had been going round the earth". The point is that it would of course, have looked exactly the same. What he was saying according to James Burke was "that you see what you want to see". Dutch artist Echer is a master at creating such shifting perceptions. In his painting 'Returning Birds' the painter makes very clever use of optical illusions for his viewers. Apart from optical tricks adopted by painters in their works the taboos and prejudices of critics also change the objective and intended vision of the work.

A Karachi 'critic', once wrote a 3 column review on my 'nude couple', which was

singled out of the 25 I had displayed at Karachi Arts Council. The exhibition was condemned as erotic and Romantic, lacking in uniform style. Saadat Hasan Manto rightly observed, during his trial on 'Khol-Dao', a short story written by him that, "... even locomotives could be interpreted as arousing sexual desire and thus presenting an erotic sight". My exhibits at Islamabad were misinterpreted as 'political'. The Zionist uniforms and some other symbols of brutality were mis-interpreted as being aimed at a local situation. This is how individuals perceive differently from what is desired by the artists.

Anything which is different from established norms is frowned upon. At one time the

concept of having one's own transport was a laughable idea in the west and wise men there wrote, "... you only know where you are going if you know where you have been, and that ... those who are not prepared to learn the lesson from history are condemned to repeat it." The change man creates is to make tomorrow better than today.

Appreciate

One should be prepared to appreciate change. The sense of appreciation for change is rather difficult but it is not unconquerable either. In the 12th century people looked at the sun going round the earth because Aristotle and the Church said that that was the way to look at it. They thought the universe to be perfect and unchanged ever since it had been created. So there was no change to see up there, thus people in the west did not look up that much. At the same time the Chinese were busy getting cricks in the neck from doing just that, observing what was happening up there, keeping data, and logging every thing that moved. They became expert astronomers centuries before the west did. Not because they were clever and the westerners were dummies but because there was nothing that served as an established norm, as there was in west, to stop them from seeing changes up there. The west saw no change in the sky because there was none to see. Phenomena such as comets were thought of as warnings from God. James Burke says, "... if you believe the cosmos is made up of omelette, you can build instruments specifically designed to find traces of intergalactic yolk.... in that paradigm you reject phenomena like pulsars and

black holes as paranormal garbage." Most of the papers read at the Islamic science conference at Islamabad deliberated on just that. Dr. Parvez Hoodbhoj witnessed this in his excellent paper the 'Quiet death of science' published in 'Dawn' (our great modernist, Sir Syed, also wrote that the earth is not round nor does it revolve, however he did not say it was like an omelette either) In an omelette cosmos, the beginning of the universe becomes a chicken and egg problem too. The conservative resistance to change was understandable. The idea of earth moving round the sun was unacceptable because it would have had philosophical and theological implications that were too hot to handle. Like one witnessed in the 'Monkey Trial' in US, which condemned Darwin for his theory of evolution.

A new loom came to Europe through Arab-Spain. It had foot-pedals, which left the weavers hands free to weave faster and make more cloth available cheaply. The Dutch smashed the thing up because it would have put people out of work. That was a new idea in 12th century Europe.

A generation later, when the dust settled, in came the spinning wheel, a total surprise from China. There were more riots, because the cloth was linen, which was made from a plant and was cheaper than feeding sheep and making wool. The rioters were sheep farmers.

Technology manufacture's not only gadgets but social change as well. Once the first tool was picked up and used that was the end of anything cyclicle. The tools changed the world. "Today we are in fact the last of the world, living with institutions that are already creaking, facing twenty first century problems with nineteenth century attitudes." ('Legacy of Science' NASA). These were NASA's worries, faced as they are with space age problems, but in our case, it is the 10th century solving the problems of the 8th century. May God prove nuclear winter to be less dreadful.

