41 CULTURE DEMOCRACY AND PEACE

[**Issue Number 41 - July 2002**](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/41-d)

**Culture, democracy and Peace**   
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"I must oppose corruption among the people. I want to live hating no one, envying no one loving everyone. " (Rihaniyyat p.33)

For hundred years, Turkish oppression, cultural death and fear ruled the Middle East.  
Freedom was a gift and luxury only afforded by those who emigrated in search of it in distant lands. The Napoleonic conquest of Egypt and Mohammad Ali's rebellion against the sultanate were the first sparks to trigger Arab Renaissance and nationalism. European Christian missionaries' schools opened in Lebanon and Egypt to feed souls hungry for knowledge and freedom. As a result, democratic principles began to bloom in a somewhat shy cultural outburst at home and abroad.  
Thousands of Arabs, and more specifically Lebanese and Syrians, took up the search of a new life that would offer them recognition, selfrespect, freedom and success; hence there was the birth of groups of scholars, painters, philosophers, poets and journalists such as Gibran Khalil Gibran, Mikhael Neaime, Ameen Rihani and many others.  
These scholars wasted no time and spared no effort in their search for knowledge, self actualisation and fame. Their souls displayed loyalty to their new homeland, but their hearts remained deeply rooted in their ancestral countries. They experienced in their new home freedom, liberty, justice, respect, culture and peace as they were exposed to the writings and thoughts of great Western scholars such as J.J. Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, John Locke, Thomas Carlisle and many others. This research focuses upon the thoughts and writings of one of these internationally known scholars: Ameen Rihani. The Author aims at highlighting Rihani's views, definition and perception of the modern socio-economic system as he based it on a triangular concept beginning with education and culture, leading to the formation of democratic institutions and practices, and culminating in human development and peace.  
Ameen Rihani, a man of many cultures, thoughts and visions, researched, read and travelled, and actually lived the principles he believed in, proclaimed and fought for. Rihani admired the writings of John Locke, Thomas Carlisle, and the philosophers of the French revolution who proclaimed and fought for human rights, basic human freedoms and the sovereignty of the people. He shared the thoughts of Edmond Burke, Charles Edion and Herbert Spencer as well as of other Arnerican, Russian and English scholars such as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Tolstoi, and Huxely, and some of Arab scholars such as Abi-Alaa- Al-Muarri, Ibn-AI-Roumi, Al-Hallaj and others. He viewed the Arnerican constitution as the most humanly perfect political document known in man's history. These convictions turned Rihani into a defender and fervent disciple of democratic principles and a resolute promoter of culture and peace.  
He compared the Middle Eastern political systems with those of Western Europe and the United States. His findings were disheartening and disappointing. He consequently devoted his time, energy and life to educating and leading the Arab people into the path of socio - economic - political modernisation.  
Rihani admired the technological development of the western art and legal system although he strongly criticised and rejected its materialistic and capitalistic drives and practices.  
While the Middle East was torn by illiteracy, oppression and conflicts of all kinds ranging from foreign occupation to inter Arab, Arab - Jewish, social, cultural and bloody religious conflicts. In his book "Path of Vision", Rihani studies both worlds, East and West. He sees the basic weaknesses of eastern life whereby the Easterner continues to live in slavery unwilling to seek freedom. For Rihani, if the Easterner does not free himself from religious fear and stupid wilted traditions that destroy his mind and soul, he will be living in the world but not part of it. He can see what goes beyond the mountain, but is unable to see what goes on before his eyes. This is what makes him blindly submissive to authority because submissiveness and mutiny both originate from religion and fundamentalism. As a result he often opposes oppressors but very seldom opposes tyranny itself. (Path of Vision, The Oriental Heritage VI. Pp 117118). Rihani believed that the solution to these conflicts could only be achieved in a state of economic-cultural and political development, since prosperity and ultimate peace have two major, equally important and inseparable prerequisites to be achieved. First to promote culture and to educate the people; second to apply the principles of real democracy. These two prerequisites form the basic angles of the equilateral pyramid culminating with its third angle, namely development and ultimate peace, co-operation and happiness for mankind.  
What Rihani promoted and called for almost a century ago, the Arab world of today is in greater need of attaining. Rihani's writings desperately apply to our present Middle Eastern societies and cause him to stay alive through his thoughts as he diagnosed the problems and prescribed the solutions.

**Culture**

For Rihani the one who is governed must understand his rights and his duties toward his country and the fellow citizens; it is consequently imperative that every citizen must be cultured, educated and knowledgeable of the truth. To apply the social contract concept declared by J. Rocker and J.J. Rousseau, the citizen must light his candle and search for the truth.  
To begin such a search, however, Rihani clearly distinguishes in most of his writings between the cultured man and the man who has been given an academic degree. He declared "I prefer the honest and truthful ignorant person to the corrupt scientist. I prefer the simple transparent soul to the learned one who only knows what is muddy and dark. An honest shoemaker is preferable to a wicked prince... Today, we are in greater need of true science that will educate the souls, elevate the mind and preserve the moral values" ( Rihani Al-Qawmiyyat p.50). For Rihani true education teaches tolerance, freedom, respect of others and true democracy. It rejects any form of violence, prejudice, fanaticism and oppression. He knows how painful and damaging ignorance is for the people, as they will be kept in darkness and slavery and under oppression. He opposes those leaders who claim to be from the people and only claim to serve the people when in fact they exploit these slogans to further oppress the people. He wonders how aman could claim being from the people when he is blind and has sold his soul, his people and his country for personal gains. Rihani, Al Qawrniyyat p.9).  
Rihani stresses the fact that because of the people's ignorance such tyrants attain power.  
He confirms Shakespeare's statement that Ceasar would not have become a wolf had the people not acted as sheep. The citizen's political ignorance and lack of culture causes the so called leaders to tear up the country's image and replace it with that of corrupt political parties, to crucify the truth and to bury it in religions factionalism (Rihani, Al-Qawmiyyat p.16). As for Lebanon, the country needs a new reformed political system, not one made of temporary patches on an old coat. He calls for the closure of religiously fanatic and discriminatory schools. It is better for people to remain uneducated in stead of being fed ignorance, fanaticism, prejudice and humiliation in such quantities as would destroy the greatest nation on earth. (Rihani, Al-Qawmiyyat p.p.l6, 51).  
Rihani praises technology that has brought to humanity the telephone, electrical equipment and modern transportation, but in his opinion such technology is not able to develop the county's culture and soul. It might help the monarch become more despotic and more fanatic. It does not necessarily educate him in the art of government.  
"What the country is in great need of", he said, "is culture and education rather than weapons, high standards in national and educational institutions rather than railroad systems. However having both culture and technology at the same time would be the optimum state." (Rihani, A1 -Qawrniyyat, p.38). In a humorous comment he adds: "A wise man riding a donkey is better than a donkey riding a train."  
Education and culture cannot be limited to specifically selected subjects or issues treated and presented to the reader from a very subjective, often narrow-minded and prejudiced point of view.  
For Rihani, true education cannot be subjected to censorship by ignorant, narrow-minded and self-appointed judges. True education is above censorship. It is the true expression of freedom, culture and democracy. Education is the light that flows from the Eternal Truth. The people must be exposed to all types of cultures and writings so that they may learn to scrutinise, analyse and enjoy acquiring information to reach a better understanding not only of their own cultures but of those surrounding Muslims in the west prefer "Muslims" and so consequently peacefully coexist with others and develop. (Rihani, Al-Qawmiyyat p.45).  
He warns that if the government fails to wipe out the fortresses of ignorance, soon ignorance itself will destroy the walls of the government. ( Rihani,Al-Qawrniyyat, p.52).  
He calls upon the Christians, Muslims and followers of other religion to set aside their differences, open up their minds, and free themselves from their prejudices and blind fanaticism. Let the government build schools where all the children would grow together in love, respect, and unity he pleaded. Rihani was not an atheist and anti-religious. Just on the contrary, he believed in the most sublime doctrine of love, fraternity, freedom, coexistence and peace. He rejects religious practices and teachings if they lead to violence, blood, destruction and oppression of the people. He refers to the crusades and other religious wars in these words." They spilled human blood in rivers in the name of religion; they destroyed the sources of life and the monuments of civilisations in the name of religion. They covered the earth with human bones in the name of religion. They filled the sky with poison and darkness in the name of religion. They reproduce and liveunder tyranny and misery in the name of religion." (An - Nakabat p. 189).  
Here Rihani meets Rabindranat Tagore, who also calls for education and self-emancipation of tris people as he wonders how the people can live in dignity when their main objectives are to blindly clin" to their old and rotten traditions and superstitions. As a result they feel no responsibilities for the present and no tropes for the future.  
Rihani strongly relates oppression and tyranny to ignorance, which in turn produces discord, weakness, fanaticism and blind submission (An - Nakabat - 212).  
Ignorance is the cause of the basic socio-economic and political ills in Eastern societies. Without ignorance, tyranny would not have existed. Without ignorance there would be no national division, national weakness, religious fanaticism and slavery under foreign occupiers (An- Nakabat p. 212).  
Culture, by contrast, makes man understand his basic political rights. Those rights are granted him by God himself as the greatest gifts to the comrnunity of brothers sharing and caring for one another and the surrounding environment. Those gifts are those of free choice, equality and freedom. In all known religions on this earth the ten basic commandments call for the respect and honor of other human beings; as a result the gravest sin man commits against God is in fact a sin committed against another human being. While love and tolerance generate compassion, security and happiness, extremism generates greeter extremism. This process as in the Hegelian analysis is based on the principle of thesis and antithesis. Rihani wants the Christian, the Muslim, the Jew and others above all to truly know and understand the spirit of their religions and then to live that spirit of love, mercy, peace, mutual assistance and respect for human rights. This would be the ultimate education and culture leading to democracy and peace. Without this knowledge there is no justice and equality among people.  
Rihani calls upon his fellow human beings to wake up and through culture free themselves, if need be to start a politically non-violent revolution. Najib Trad, a Lebanese scholar contemporary to Rihani, supported the latter's views as he declared in Paris, on June 25, 1 92S, in reference to Lebanon.  
"We are not a nation and have no country; rather we are a mixture of religious factions. As long as we remain as such, a man like Rihani who embodies the freedom of thought and national principles is more useful to us than thousands of deputies who represent religious factions and trends. The seeds he sows in tris words will penetrate the conscience of future generations to produce freedom and independence" (An Nakahat - p. 242).  
For Rihani, ignorance and fear are twin sisters with a common mother, slavery, and a common father, tyranny. "the people themselves are responsible for their own calarnities. They are the ones who build the temples of fear, who burn the candles for tyranny, who offer the sacrifices to corruption and who sit lamenting, accusing and judging each other." (An - Nakabat p. 256).  
Eastern society as a result is filled with spiritual, civic, political and economic deception.  
Every human being is called upon to join the revolution because it is the best and only tool to purify man himself and to break the shackles of all superstitious traditions and lead the way to real freedom. Rihani's revolution is not the traditionally violent one filled with violence, modeled after the French or the Bolsheviks; instead it attacks the roots of the problems and resolves them by replacing the ruling traditional elite by a new one through law and order. Such revolution is one of culture, social development, high moral conduct, art and the love of humanity. (An-Nakabat p. 257). Rihani declares: "I oppose the old and corrupt traditions and beliefs. I call for a general and total revolution in oriental life. I ask for a political uprising along with a cultural, educational and spiritual one". (An - Nakabat p. 267).  
Throughout his travers in the Middle East, from Arabia to Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Rihani remained persistent in tris appeal to his fellow Arabs to free themselves and to ride the wagon of development and democracy. To his disappointment, the responses to his call were shy, often twisted and reduced to socio-religious fanatic norrns and practices. His diagnosis of the Eastern society was clear, transparent and truthful. He referred to these three main reasons as causes for underdevelopment in the Eastern society: ignorance, laziness and pretension.

He refers to ignorance as the darkness self, the tyranny of fanaticism and superstition... It is blind obedience, fear, cowardice and humiliation. As for laziness, it is stagnation and death. It is poverty, misery and pain, it is the cheating of one's own soul. Oppression and ignorance lead to chaos, continuous conflict and wars (The three's Alliance p. 3). Pretension for its part, is the disease per se of the oriental being. It is the love and worship of social statue, wealth and titres of nobility . (An - Nakabat p. 265)  
If Rihani were to return today to revisit this oriental world he left almost three-quarters of a century ego, what would he discover? Would it be a fake social world, busy collecting and distributing unearned titres of nobility and academia to an uncultured class, pretentious in its behaviour and social statue, ignorant of the true morals preached by God's prophets, proclaiming itself the beginning and the end, and exploiting the masses. A mixture of blind ruling the blind, an animal kingdom where everyone verbally claims altruism and righteousness while betraying his own soul and burning the soif of the national home.  
Rihani confirms, by contrast, that in spite of the existence of so many private and public schools in the country, little and slow or no improvement has been recorded . Here Rihani, alas, feels that the education given in those schools is incomplete and often damaging because it was not clone in what he called national spirit and need, a specially designed and unique "laundremat", reflecting not only pure scientific theories learned but also the moral values of the Oriental culture.  
Rihani makes a striking comparison between a young AngloSaxon graduate and a French one. Both have completed their Bachelor of Arts. The Anglo-Saxon begins immediately to work and becomes productive while the French one does not qualify for any job. He consequently becomes dependent on governmental welfare or roses himself in vices. ( An-Nakabat, p.274). As a result, Rihani clearly defines true education and culture in ten principles:  
1. Dependence on oneself in search of knowledge, true analysis and freedom to choose the principles and concepts deemed to be right.  
2. Self-esteem and self-actualisation, relying on oneself to create and produce by usina one's own mina and capabilities.  
3. Thinking well of other humans, being honest and courageous in discussing pressing issues with others, while having the courage to tell the truth.  
4. Freedom of the will to choose and decide one's own future and beliefs.  
5. Cultural courage to learn about others and compare their culture with one's own culture.  
6. Rejection of old, faded traditions and superstitions.  
7. Honesty in speech.  
8. Honesty in one's opinion and work.  
9. Love of sincerity and justice toward oneself by recognising one's faults and errors, then toward the others with compassion and understanding in thought and conduct.  
10. Application of secularism in political and educational institutions and policies. ( An-Nakabat p. 275)

Rihani calls upon the Arab mother, teacher and scholar to perform well their duties in the formation of the young, free and democratic generations. Enough of shedding tears upon the emotionally dead past and lost dreams! The time has come to face reality as it, to be pragmatic, realistic and to meet the problems head on with openness and courage.  
"Remember", he said addressing all three groups "Whether you are Muslem, Christian, Druze or Israelite, religious fanaticism used for political or religious objectives, is the most wicked and evil of all extremism." (An-Nakabat, p.280)  
He believes that students of the new generations are the trope for change. They are the ones to leap into modernism and developed their country. He addresses them at Souk-Al-Gharb School in 1927 in these words:  
"I greet in you a future in which shine the lights of a free independent homeland. I greet in you a united country... ruled by goodness and love; a country free from fanatic shackles, from fear and cowardice." He refers to the students as the oil, the electric power and light of the homeland. They will lead it out of darkness to an age of renaissance and enlightenment. He wants them to be faithfully united brothers regardless of their religious beliefs, affiliations, and even languages. Then he asks them to follow his motto which he proudly proclaimed standing before them: "I am a Lebanese volunteer in the service of the Arab nation to which we all belong. I am an Arab volunteer in the service of the humanity of which we are all members." (Men of Tomorrow, An-Nakabat p. 286).  
This slogan can be put into action when the citizens are truly educated, literate and meticulously applying the democratic principles of equality, mutual respect, co-operation and love for one another. (Men of Tomorrow -AN-Nakabat p. 285).

**Democracy**

Democracy, is the magic word, which the leaders of states pronounce to serve and apply in their political systems. Although it has been meditated since the beginning of humanity, when man had to choose the type of government he desired to adopt to govern his relations with tris fellow -citizens, the 20th century can be truly called the age of modem democracy. Even the most ruthless dictators -theocratic or secular- have claimed at one time or another to be the true defending champions and servants of democracy. The examples are too many and unworthy of listing in this study. Rihani by contras was not only a believer in democratic principles but also a dedicated, staunch disciple and promoter.  
For Rihani democracy, in order to bloom and survive, needs the environment of a cultural and literate masure society, a society that will struggle and break the gates of darkness and oppression to enter a world of light and happiness. It is through this society that Rihani expresses tris tropes for hurnanity. He wants the people to disobey their ignorant and oppressive rulers, rally in non-violent strikes, refrain from paying their taxes and go even to prison in the defence of the truth and freedom (My Will, An Nakabat p. 311).  
Rihani's call was heard by famous world leaders of the 20th century such as Martin Luther King Jr., Ghandi and others. These principles of total equality between the races, sexes, minorities and religious creeds have been clearly expressed in Christian ethics, the American Constitution, the United Nations Charter and put into effect by all democratic regimes in our present world. As a result, Rihani urges the Arabs to give up the old trends of political discrimination against Arab minorities, when these minorities do not belong to the same faith, and treat them with full equality so that the genuine Arab Unity will be achieved based on justice and equality. ( An-Nakabat p. 240) .  
Democracy is not a state bought or granted automatically to people who fail to demand it and do not continuously fight to keep it. In Rihani's opinion, it is more gratifying to spend two days seeking changes in the government for democratic laws and practices and asserting one's natural political rights than to work the fields for years, accumulating wealth while remaining a slave, insecure and oppressed. ( A1-Qawmiyyat p. 21).  
Sometimes to achieve such democratic objectives the government must be changed, and the prerequisite for such a change is a radical coup d'etat in the citizen's thoughts and culture.  
Every citizen must educate himself and by doing so educate his surroundings and social environment. He ought to be a holder and defender of the ideological doctrine based on the respect of human rights granted to him by All Mighty God. As a result, the right to oppose ignorance and governmental corruption is the duty of every citizen whether old or young, rich or poor. It is a sacred duty not subject to negotiation and comprornise.  
Governments have not been established to exploit and abuse the governed ones; rather they have very specific responsibilities and functions to fulfil. First is to unite the citizens and boost national morale. The second is to provide justice for all citizens through the rule of law equally applied to all subjects including government officials themselves without exceptions. The third is to provide security and peace throughout the land. The fourth is to establish national sovereignty over all its territories. The fifth is provide happiness and cornfort for the citizens and lastly to lay the foundations for econornic development and prosperity serving future generations. (Youth Particles, P. 105)  
The main questions, however, focus upon the ways and means government should use to accomplish these goals. Will the guillotine of Robespierre be the answer whereby a few leaders establish themselves as gods and decide who should live or die? What policies are to be adopted? Should the ruling oligarchy apply the principle of "the end justifies the means", or colonise other nations, subjugating theirnationalsto barbarismand slavery. History is filled with endless examples. Is democracy sincerely served by majority rule even when such a majority is ignorant, fanatically blind and itself controlled by few bigots and corrupt despots?  
For Rihani, human history is filled with examples of atrocities and outrages cornmitted by man against his fellow men. Just to cite few by studying British colonialism, Turkish despotism, the French Revolution, all types of wars even when justified by the victor, Islamic religious conquests, the crusader's atrocities, Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin's mass killing campaigns and so forth.  
For Rihani true democracy as expressed by Thomas Jefferson applies to all peoples, free and equal, under publicly approved laws with no exceptions (Youth Particles p. 191).  
The real democratic government was defined by President Abraham Lincoln of the United States of America as being from the people, by the people and for the people. It is that government with its employees regardless of its label that constitutes the family of public servants. In a democratic system these servants are elected by the people, fed by the people and removed by the people when they fail to perforrn their duties. The true governrnent is not a club of the rich, of feudal lords, of a princely or royal affiliation or birth. The democratic government applies faithfully the principle of separation of powers or the "checks and balance" theory and adhered to.  
Democracy does not allow any official to exploit members of the public. It does not believe in blood nobility and inherited family titles of power. Here Rihani asks the absolute despot and ruler regardless of his secular or religious status to show proofs claims that his or her power is divine and that God has given them the mandate to exploit and take from their subjects their properties, basic freedoms and even lives. (Rihani, Youth Particles, p. 195).  
Rihani moreover attributes the emotional and dangerous popular support of such despots to the people's political immaturity and ignorance of their political rights.

**Peace**

    The result from the union between education and political literacy, as well as the strict application of democratic rules and systems, will lead to peace at home and abroad.  
    Through education man will discover the beauty and perfection of humanity's heart and soul. The education will lead him to understand and tolerate his neighbour regardless of colour, race, sex, religion or beliefs and will afford hirn/her the necessary respect and cooperation through transparent, honest and peaceful means. Violence and warfare, no matter what their causes or motives might be, are illegal, immoral and unjustified not to be tolerated by literate and democratic men. It is inconceivable that brothers could so ruthlessly ancl savagely murder each others for a handful of dirt, the dream of vainglory or the serving of God. Both parties, the victor and the victim, are actually losers. This behaviour, this obsession with violence and destruction of those who do not share one's beliefs and taboos, is far from rationality and civilisation and can only be characterised as sheer madness and evil.  
Rihani proclaims that all humans belong to one nation. He prophetically forsees the creation of a World Government providing development, prosperity, security and peace for all mankind. In the future he declares there will be one university, namely that of arts, literature and true knowledge along with one universal religion based upon divine fatherhood and universal brotherhood. (Al-Qawmiyyat, p. 63).  
He calls for a universal world unity and religious unity under the roof of equality, freedom and peace. He consequently believes that the materialistic, rational West and the spiritual East shall meet, throwing away ignorance, corrupt and superficially old traditions and practices, and replace them with the wealth of rationalism and technology along with the wealth of the spirit to reach the highest levels of freedom, democracy and peace. He warns and asserts that the political systems in the East will remain underdeveloped if religious evolution and modernisation do not materialise. Political and religious development are twin sisters and must evolve together.  
Peace is the magic vocabulary all humans continuously spell out, and yearn to live under its wings. In all known religions peace is given by God to humans as the most precious gift since it will help create beautiful art, science, prosperity and love.  
Rihani quiet eloquently described the ills of war and specifically of World War I as he travelled from one country to another. He vividly describes, the hunger, pain, suffering and savage degradation humanity reached. (Al - Qawmi,yyat p. 116-117).  
To Rihani being a Syrian, a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew or a Druze are only names and references, but the real family name of all peoples is humanity. He yearns for the day when all humans can live in harmony and love following the teachings of Christ, the spirit of the Koran, and the exemple of Ghandi, of sister Theresa, of Martin Luther King and of many others, with a harmony and respect that go beyond the human relationship to the respect of the environment in its vegetarian and animal kingdoms. Nations canonly survive through peaceful relations, cooperation and exchange of ideas and goods.  
    In a speech delivered at Harvard in 1928 Rihani predicted the future and clearly expressed his tropes. "The day will come when all nationalities will whither away and peoples of the world will merge into one single nationality; namely that of humanity and world order. (Al-Qawrniyyat P.213). He predicted the European Unity of today and admitted that, when it was achieved, he would have died, but as long as he lived, he would always look to the future with the eyes of nostalgie, trope and faith.

**Conclusion**

    In his last will Rihani states very clearly expresses his disgust toward violence and wars. He declared in his last will:  
    "I ask you to tell the others to oppose violence and warfare and to disregard all sacrifices and act of hero‹sm for the homeland's sake. Remember that the real hero of the present and of the future is the one who has the courage to say: I will not fight, I will not carry weapons and go to war. Instead the real hero is the one who chooses cowardice in the face of murder, death and destruction.?" ( An-Nakabat, My Will p 313).  
    Hero‹sm for Rihani is in the purity of the soul and mind, in art and literary works filled with love for humanity. The heroes are those who promote world peace.  
He urges future generations to destroy the shackles of slavery and ignorance, and to liberate their souls and mind from wooden, copper and golden cages made by corrupt and irresponsible leaderships whose god are money and power. Only one cause is worth dying for; it is love, because life itself has no value nor beauty safe within the circle of love.

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