

Islam, Violence and Muslim Insurrections

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Introduction

I met a non-Muslim scholar during my European trip. During the course of our conversation, he remarked that presently Muslims constituted around ninety five percent of the total refugee population of the world. His argument was that it may be construed that Islam being a militant religion, turns its followers invariably into an anti-establishment band of people. Everywhere they rise in revolt against their Governments. As a result they are persecuted by the rulers and they are forced to take asylum in other countries. This interpretation of Islam, the scholar felt, had landed Muslims in trouble and given rise to the perception that they were a problem throughout the world.

The statement of the Western Professor is not an isolated individual opinion but it is by and large the general impression about Muslims around the world today. The impression is not altogether fallacious. The Muslims today are very often guilty of indulging in such rebellious activities. Almost at every place they are perceived as anti-establishment group of people raising the banner of revolt against their governments. This conflict generated by some sections is causing a great destruction to Muslims themselves. Their large numbers among the refugees of the world is one of its consequences.

In ordinary circumstances, this could have been termed as a matter of few sections or their leaders; and all such apprehensions would have been related to a few Muslims alone. However, the problem is that these Muslim activists are carrying out their militant campaigns in the name of jihad (religious or holy war). This particular act of Muslims, and to some extent rightly, is being linked with Islam. This is unnecessarily bringing a bad name to Islam.

In fact, majority of Muslims were not a party to these extreme political activities, and only a fraction of them were actively involved in such activities. The problem is that the scholars and clergy from the Muslim World are not coming out in the open to condemn such activities. As a consequence, all the Muslims, directly or indirectly, according to the principles of Shariah, have become a party to this Muslim militancy. Because silence over some bad actions amounts to a support for such deeds.

It is ironical that most of these movements, obviously, are declared as the representative movements of Islam. Generally the people may also perceive these movements as approved acts of Islam, and start believing that Islam is a violent religion and that it cannot co-exist with other religions and forms of governments. Here in this article I have made an attempt to discuss the academic aspects of this particular problem.

Islam: A Non-Violent Religion

Islam is basically a peace loving religion. The prophet of Islam (PBUH) is remembered as the harbinger of kindness and mercy for the whole universe. (*Rahmatanlil Alameen* – see *Alanbiya* –107). He is a messenger of kindness and not of war or conflict. He has emphasized a non-violent path, and not the violent one.

The controversies and conflicts are integral to the present day world. The clash of interests between various individuals and groups has always been present in the society. What can be done in such a situation? The answer to this can only be patience and tolerance. Patience has been accorded the highest place in Islam. If all direct and indirect commands are taken in to account, the holy *Quran* may appear as a compendium of patience. Islam suggests that in unpleasant situations tolerance and patience should be preferred over resistance. This strategy may put an end to the bickerings and conflicts at the very outset.

In spite of all this, at times, the circumstances may aggravate the situation giving rise to conflicts. What the followers of Islam are supposed to do in such a situation? The directive for such a situation is to go for compromise (*Alsawah-ul-Khair* – *Alnisa*- 128). The *Quran* nowhere says that ‘war is preferred’, it always recommends that ‘compromise is preferred’. This goes on to suggest that in conflictual situations the spirit of Islam suggests peace and not the war.

To sum up, it may be observed that Islam follows a uniform principle during the situations of conflict, which is applicable to individuals and groups alike. In all such situations clashes are to be avoided as far as possible. If inspite of all the precautions a clash does take place it should be resolved through a compromise at the very first opportunity.

Case of the Muslim Rulers

The most serious conflict situations are those which involve the people and their governments. These may be termed as political disputes. The people generally expect an ideal conduct from their rulers (which is not possible in this world). Whenever a new ruler or group comes to power, people start complaining against him/them. These complaints with cumulative effect, at times, may lead to clashes or even war.

The *Hadith* (the saying and actions of Prophet Mohammad, PBUH.) provide detailed instructions to deal with such situations. These are based on the principles of practical wisdom. The *Hadith* suggest that instead of aspiring for the impossible one should try and divert one’s energies to achieve the possible. A large number of such instructions are available in the books of *Hadith* under the Chapter of *Babul-Fatan*. These *Hadith* prescribe the religious law relating to wayward rulers. The dictum is that a political clash with such rulers should be avoided at all costs. It also suggests that in such situations one should confine oneself to non-political issues. According to traditions, Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) warned his followers that after him they may come across a number of incompetent rulers. He, however, suggested that in spite of their incompetence and unjust rule people should not revolt against them and should always follow the principle of patience. He further added that instead of clashing with them on some pretext, the people should look after their business and professions and follow their routine religious duties.

This clear and unambiguous saying of the Prophet (PBUH) is available in all the collections of *Hadith*. The illustration of the point may be found during the period after the rule of first four Caliphs. It is during this period that a great decline in Islamic polity took place. However, the great Muslim scholars of the day never initiated a political campaign against such rulers. Conflicts during the rule of *Umayyads*, *Abbasids* and other rulers were confined among the rulers themselves. The companions of Prophet, the scholars and the great jurists never initiated any campaigns to oust them from governance and politics in the name of political reforms.

This was not merely practised but was also approved at the ideological level. Almost all the scholars of the period were in agreement about following such a policy. All the scholars and jurists unanimously decreed (issued *fatwas*) that revolt against a Muslim ruler in power is not permissible even if he may appear to be cruel or a person with double standards. In this connection I may cite an example. Imam Nuwi explaining some *Hadith* observers:

“The meaning of this *Hadith* is that do not fight with those who are in power on the matters pertaining to their rule. Nor should you raise objections against them. If you find that any of the fundamental principles of Islam were being violated only then you should ask them to correct it; that too though argument. Always say right and just things wherever you are. Revolt and war against them (rulers) is unlawful (*haram*) for Muslims even if the ruler is cruel and a sinner. A number of *Hadith* are available to support the above interpretation provided by me. The collective opinion of scholars of Islam provides that a ruler cannot be deposed on the ground of his being a sinner. The explanation given for such a directive is that revolt against the ruler would result in disorder, internecine conflicts and bloodshed. The extend of disorder and bloodshed would be much more in case of ruler’s deposition rather than his continuance in power.” (*Sahi Muslim, Ba-shrhul Nuwi, 229/12*).

In the light of above rules of *Shariah*, if one was to judge all the movements launched in the present century in Islamic countries to displace Muslim countries to displace Muslim rulers, were illegal *ab initio*. All these movements were launched in the name of removing immoral rulers and to establish the Islamic rule. But, in fact, all these movements were negating the very Islamic law itself. Because the Islamic law clearly states that rebellion against established Muslim rulers is not permissible under any circumstances. Thus, all such movements, from the viewpoint of the dictates of *Shariah* were illegal because they were launched to remove the established Muslim rulers who were in power. It should be noted that all these aggressive movements have failed to yield anything in favour of Islam. In spite of large scale bloodshed and sacrifices of a number of people they have resulted in the ruination of their countries. In this world of God any non-Islamic act is not likely to yield any Islamic result.

We do not propose to make the Muslims passive by opposing their participation in political conflicts. However, the main aim behind this argument is to divert their energies from the fruitless struggles towards more constructive work. This world, in fact, is full of problems. It is always not possible to achieve complete freedom from the problems. It is always not possible to achieve complete freedom from the problems. If you wage a war against some political ills in order to put an end to them, some fresh problems may emerge. A few illustrations would help to elaborate the point. A large number of Muslims made sacrifices to put an end to the British rule in India. Once this objective was achieved, the problem of supremacy of majority rule cropped up.

In Egypt a revolt was launched to put an end to king (Farooq's) rule. Soon after it was over, the problem of the military dictatorship of Nasser was witnessed. The Islamic groups in Pakistan launched movement against General Ayub Khan and later against Bhutto, but the problems could not be resolved and the society is still reeling under fresh problems.

It is a fact that the problems are an essential part of the present day world. In such a situation taking extremes steps to resolve them would not be wise. It is advisable to ignore them and take steps at the appropriate time. This is what Islam prescribes and seems logical too.

The insurrections and clashes are no permanent solution to the present day problems. If war is waged to put an end to some evil in the society there would emerge some new problems to be again countered by a fresh struggle. As a result, these conflicts and clashes will continue till eternity — resulting in useless sacrifices on the part of human beings.

Avoiding struggles and waiting for appropriate opportunity is not a status quoist approach. In fact, it is a strategy to utilise one's resources and power in the domains of 'possible' and avoiding 'impossible'. All historical experiences testify that the people who use their energies in the arena of possible achieve both possible as well as impossible feats.

Case of Non-Muslim Rulers

It is clear from the above discussion that rebellion against Muslim rulers is forbidden in Islam and there is a consensus among *Ulema* (religious scholars) about this principle. Let us now examine what *Islamic Shariah* has to say in case of non-Muslim rulers.

In such situations, the principle of *Qiyas or analogical deduction of Shariah* provides us the guidance. There are four sources of Islamic law — *Quran, Sunnah*, (The actions and sayings of the Prophet, PBUH), *Ijma*, (consensus of opinion) and *Qiyas* or (reasoning). In the present context the principle of *Qiyas* or analogical deduction can lead us to the right direction.

The concept of *Qiyas* has been discussed in all the important contributions on Islamic Jurisprudence. "Apart from technicalities, in simple terms, the *Qiyas* means evolving rules on the basis of existing comparable rules", (Nasiruddin albazavi, *Minhajalusool*, 2/3). Dr. Salahuddin Zaidan, elaborating the above statement of Bezavi, comments:

"If the causes of the directives have similarities then the directives would also be similar (*Hajita-I-Qayas*, Dr. Salahuddin Zaidan, p.23)." The illustration to the point may be found in the prohibition on drinking. The religious code clearly lays down that drinking is forbidden but no similar commands are laid down in Quran or *Hadith*, regarding the fermented juice of dates. However, the religious code has declared even this fermented juice as forbidden. This has been done on the analogy of similar characteristics of the two, i.e., intoxicating effect of both. Following this premise, logically, consumption of all intoxicating substances should be governed by the same rules as are applicable to wine and that is what is being followed.

Let us examine the point under discussion in the light of the above stated principle of analogical deduction. The Prophet (PBUH) has unambiguously stated that rebellion against unjust Muslim

rulers was not permissible. The apparent reason was that such a rebellion would lead to a greater loss of life and property and cause chaos in the society. Thus, we realise that the main reason for such a decree was that it might give rise to much worse condition. The same situation may arise in a country where the ruler is a non-Muslim. Thus the reason in both the cases is similar; therefore the directive in both the situations should also be the same. It leads us to the conclusion that as per *Shariah*, the rebellion against non-Muslim ruler (even though he might appear to be unjust) is forbidden as in the case of Muslim rulers. In fact, in this matter the difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim ruler is immaterial. The reason for opposing such a rebellion is the fear that it might give rise to greater mischief rather than the fact of ruler being a Muslim or otherwise. It was felt that such a step will practically be counter-productive. The rebels may rise against oppression but in the end the whole situation may lead to more tyranny and oppression, and such a result is inevitable. The ruler as a head of an establishment has unlimited powers and when his very existence is at stake he will make use of all the powers at his command for his self preservation. This will give rise to tyranny, massacre and civil disturbance leading to a great loss of life and property. Thus the efforts to end a smaller evil will give rise to a bigger evil.

Therefore, it is quite clear here that the reason for such a directive is keeping the ruler's position in view rather than his being a Muslim. In case of rebellion, the ruler, by virtue of his position can push the whole society towards destruction. Therefore, the opposition to sedition is simply for the fear of anarchy which might ultimately arise. Thus, while applying the rule of analogical deduction as the source of *Shariah*, it is well established that if the causes are identical, the law or rule would also be similar. Therefore, rebellion or sedition against a non-Muslim ruler is as invalid and non permissible as against a Muslim ruler because the after-effect of both are the same.

According to *Shariah* any rebellion against a ruler is not permissible as long as he is not obstructing people from performing their religious duties. Here the concept of religious duties figures in the context of freedom of religion. This would mean that as long as Muslims enjoy the freedom to worship and have the freedom to follow their religion in word and deed, any rebellion against their ruler is illegal, whether the ruler is a Muslim or non-Muslim. In modern times, Muslims enjoy complete religious freedom. Except for any anti-state politics, they are fully free to follow their religion. Under these circumstances any political movement against the rulers of these countries is illegal from the religious point of view. All such political disorderliness, even if carried out in the name of Islam should be considered as un-Islamic.

A careful study of the above referred *Hadith* and *Shariah* laws would reveal that shortcomings of rulers and complaints against their rule should be expressed through the word of mouth, that too not through public speeches but in personal meetings. As advised by one of the great companions of Prophet (PBUH), Abdullah Bin Umar, "if you have to convey something important it should be said in a private meeting with the ruler."

Today Muslim press narrates the horrible stories of tyranny and cruelty against the Muslims in a number of non-Muslim countries. This is called *tatfif* which the *Quran* describes as one of the worst deeds. However, it would be worthwhile to analyze at what point did the oppression and tyranny start in the non-Muslim countries? After a thorough enquiry we have come to the conclusion that all this has taken place after Muslims started a political *jihad* in such countries.

In these regions Muslims were enjoying full religious freedom and had a peaceful existence. When in the name of *jihad* a 'gun culture' was introduced in these countries only then did the rulers start oppression to counter the rebellions. Thus, under such circumstances the responsibility for this oppression of Muslims lies squarely on the extremist Muslim leadership and their rebellious activities were responsible for creating such a situation.

A principle of Shariah

The Holy Quran ordains that Muslims should not show contempt towards persons or objects worshipped by others. The logic provided is that they might in turn call names to *Allah* (God Almighty) and that God has assigned tasks to different groups of people (Sura *Alanam*, 108). This leads us to the principle of judging the action in Islam on the basis of result it is likely to yield. If the result is meaningless then the action is to be avoided. In other words, if the results are likely to be counter-productive such actions are not permissible in Islam.

According to one *Hadith*, Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) remarked that one who abuses his father is detestable. The people enquired 'O! Prophet, nobody would abuse his father'. The Prophet (PBUH) replied that if you abuse somebody's father or mother, that person would retort in the same way. On the basis of this *Hadith* a doctrine has been formulated and it is called *tarkul-maslahat-al-mufsadat*. This means to give up such an act which apparently may be needed but may worsen the things. (*Tafseer-ibn-kaseer*, 164/2)

In the light of this religious doctrine all present day movements started in the name of *jihad* (holy war) are un-Islamic. Because such actions result in ruination and disaster. Whatever rights Muslims enjoyed before these so called *jihads* were also lost and they failed to achieve anything.

The Objection

Some Muslim scholars object to the above discussed point of view on the ground that it is a Christian point of view and is passive and that Islam is a revolutionary religion which believes in action. This, in fact, is the personal opinion of these scholars. It is to be noted that our conclusion is based on the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, while objections to it are the personal opinions of these individuals. In no case can personal opinions override the religious doctrines based on Holy *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

Many Muslim scholars without any basis feel that Islam is an evolved and the latest religion while other religions were not. Such assumptions are against the principles of Islam. According to *Quran* every Prophet was asked to propagate the same religion. The basic difference between Islam and other religions does not lie in their being evolutionary or non-evolutionary but their being changeable and unchangeable. (Islam remains unchanged, and in other religions changes have been brought about. Ed.) The saying of Christ, "to Qaiser (King) his due and to God whatever is his" (May 21:22) is despised by many Muslim scholars and preachers. However, in specific circumstances it seems to be a genuine instruction and is found in Islam almost in the same way. There is a sound tradition from Abdullah Bin Masood and both Bukhari and Muslim have reproduced it. According to this tradition: "After me (the Prophet) you will come across selfish and wicked things in rulers." And when people sought Prophet's (PBUH) advice in such a

situation, the Prophet said “you should pay them their due and pray to God for yours.” (Mashkatal Masabaih, 1087/2)

Clarification of a Doubt

The above religious doctrine does not suggest that Muslims should become absolutely passive and status quoist. This doctrine only suggests that in a critical situation they should decide upon a starting point for themselves. Thus, in a conflictual situation, if the reactions are avoided it might result in status quo for the time being. Otherwise they (Muslims) would be banging their heads against a rock without finding a way out. It is under these circumstances that the *Shariah* prescribes the way out for Muslims as discussed in the earlier section of this paper. In other words, they are asked to practise patience in adverse situations and avail of the favourable circumstances. In every situation both these opportunities exist in some measure. To use a favourable situation one has to keep patience during unfavourable circumstances. The above discussed religious doctrine is just asking to pay this much price.

The road to life does not begin at the dead end; there has to be a starting mark. The pre-condition to a successful journey is to find a correct starting point. Once, the appropriate starting point is found one is as sure of reaching the goal as one is sure of the dawn after a dark night.

The Matter of Interpretation

If Islam has forbidden rebellions leading to the displacement of rulers than the question arises as to why Muslims all over the world are engaged in such political activities? The blame for this must go to those present day scholars and thinkers who have introduced a new dimension of the political interpretation to Islam. These thinkers promote Muslims to fight against all opposing forces with the objective of establishing the supremacy of Islam in the world.

According to *Hadith*, the call of Islam was directed towards the human soul. But the above stated interpretation wrongly identified the political change as the goal of Islam. This wrong interpretation made an improper act as the exalted objective of Islam. As a result, people are fighting against those in power and considering this as a noble cause on their part.

One can assess from the Holy *Quran*, and as mentioned in *Sura Al-Kahaf* that there might come a time when people might indulge in futile pursuits considering these to be great deeds. This precisely is the condition of present day so-called Muslim revolutionaries. In the process of condemning the worthless rulers, their thinking has been distorted to such an extent that they consider the genuine work of preaching Islam as inferior. Thus, the self proclaimed revolutionary work, which they define as Islamic Revolution, is considered as of great importance. In the present context the only solution is to correct the thinking of present day Muslim generation. Their revolutionary orientation should be replaced by orienting them toward the true spiritual thinking.

In present times, the Islam has been interpreted in three ways. These can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The Prophets came to this world as vice-regents of God. They were sent to this world to subdue the enemies of religion and establish the law of God.
- 2) Through the Prophets, God revealed His plan for humankind. They conveyed the message of God that this world is just a temporary abode for human beings. The life after death is the real and everlasting. A person will get rewards for good deeds done in this world in the everlasting life after death.
- 3) The third is a comparative viewpoint. According to this viewpoint, the difference between the above two points is that of the order. The second point is the starting point of Islamic invitation while the first is its fulfilment.

A careful study of the *Quran* and the Prophet's (PBUH) tradition testify that only the second point of view is correct. All related evidence also leads to it. There is no direct tradition available to support the first and the third viewpoints. Those people (supporting first & third viewpoints) have based their arguments merely on deductions and to establish the Islamic principles only on deductions are not sufficient.

The real Islamic principle is that the people must be made aware of the scheme behind the creation of the world by the God. Making this as the basis, the efforts should be initiated to bring revolution in the minds and the souls of the people. This is the real call of Islam. Every collective action has some implicative consequences. Similarly preaching of Islam also has some constructive consequences and some implicative. One of the consequences by implication is establishment of the Islamic rule. However, establishing Islamic rule is not the basic objective of preaching Islam. This depends on the will of the God Almighty. The God is the best judge of this and it is only He who decides at times in favour of one or the other.

(For a further detailed study on this topic the following books of this author may be consulted. *Tabir-ki-Ghaliti, Al-Islam; Din-i-Kamil, Rah-i-Amal, Ahya-I-Islam etc.* (All these books are in Urdu language)

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