

DOES ISLAM STAND FOR TERRORISM? Nasir Karim

AFTER 9/11, Islam has been consciously, or unconsciously, equated and amalgamated with terrorism, war and violence. A vicious campaign against the Muslims has been let loose in western media and other means of publicity.

Ever since, my mind has been haunted by some fundamental, nonetheless intriguing questions such as:

Does Islam really stand for terrorism, war and violence? Or

Does it have an essential respect for democracy and democratic institutions?

If Islam does accommodate democratic dispensation of the state and its institutions how come we do not have a single Islamic state that might be referred to as model?

Is this the fault of Islam or of the Muslims?

What measures can be recommended for the establishment of an operational (if not an ideal) democratic state in the Muslim world?

These and other questions have been nagging my mind and nerves for quite some years. This short paper, therefore, is devoted to a critical appraisal of these and similar other questions.

THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF A DEMOCRATIC STATE

TO BEGIN WITH, it may be emphasised that Islam does not stand for western brand of democracy where sovereignty lies with the people and a brute majority can sanctify even the most heinous and sinful of acts, such as unisex marriages, child-birth without law-full wed-lock, or condemnation of a layer of their own society to slavery; and recommends of death and destruction of any innocent nation. Logically speaking a day may come when even incest relations would be legalised in western democracies.

In Islam, contrary to that, establishment of a real democratic society is regulated by certain moral norms and ideals. Let us note and briefly examine these essentials:

The author is a Research Scholar at the Department of Management Sciences, Qurtuba University, Peshawar Campus. Editorial changes have been made in text to maintain clarity. Ideas are however those of the author.

- Islamic democratic system is regulated by certain moral norms underlined in the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.). These norms determine the basic parameters of human conduct. In other words, sovereignty lies with God, the Almighty, not with the people, as is the case with western democracy.¹
- Man, his dignity and his divinity are the cardinal principles of an Islamic state. No law is permissible to violate or militate the fundamental principle. The Quran has emphasised that God breathed His spirit in man. It means that man is not a sinful, depraved and detestable being. Instead, he is endowed with a divinely element, being the viceroy and trustee of God.

This divinely characteristic calls for respect and honor and is the source of all human rights. It means that if we disgrace and dishonor a man, we are guilty of disgracing and dishonoring the Godly element in his person.

Further it signifies that all human beings are at par with each other. Solely, because they are humans and the distinctions of colour, caste and creed are accidental in nature, serving as marks of identification, not sources of discrimination.²

In brief Islam stands for universal humanism and universal equality. All human rights, it may be underscored, are founded on the same foundational principles—that is, the sanctity and the vicegerency of man to God. This principle hence should not be compromised.

- Islamic state is obliged to establish a just socio-moral order in this world. For, without justice man is an armed animal.³
- Community is supposed to act as a watchdog over the state who are state's functionaries and actively participate in affairs of state. People are to show allegiance to the rulers, so long, as they are committed to the administration of justice and fair play and follow the constitution, that is, the Quran and the Sunnah. If by chance they depart from justice and become oblivious of the injunctions of the *sharia*, community is supposed to straighten them out, even seek their replacement.
- State is to respect and protect the individual's life and liberty, honor and dignity, property and privacy. The freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of work for decent living, freedom of choice, freedom of movement within and outside the country, freedom of education and so on are guaranteed.⁴
- Independent judiciary is the backbone of an Islamic state. It is the judiciary that protects individual from state's power abuse and transgression. Likewise, it ensures operation of state's governing institutions within their defined limits.⁵

- Succession to power is open to the reflective abilities of the community. One thing is certain: succession is based on public consent. Rulers are forbidden to impose themselves against the will of the community and govern them according to people's will. Rule through force and fraud is illegal in Islam.
- Treasury is a sacred trust of the people on one hand and of God on the other. The rulers cannot use these resources for bribing and buying loyalties of their people to stay in office.
- Defence of country is a sacred duty of the rulers. State should take all possible measures and probable means to defend its borders. In brief the rulers are supposed to reflect Godly attributes in their conduct and prepare their communities for the best of life here and hereafter. They must be kind, compassionate, just and fair in their dealings with fellow humans. That is a qualification for distinction on the Day of Judgment.

MUSLIMS ARE TO BLAME, NOT ISLAM

IN SPITE OF such clear teachings, one wonders as to why Muslims have failed to establish democracy and democratic institutions in their respective countries. It may be observed that there is a vital difference between the teachings of Islam and the conduct of the Muslims.

Obviously, Islam cannot be blamed for the conduct of the Muslims, especially, when their conduct is not reflective of Islamic values or Islamic worldview. In any case, it has to be admitted that Muslims derailed their political process in the early stages of history. Leaving Islam to itself, Muslims turned to dictatorial and dynastic rule. Centuries of repressive rule weakened the will of the community to assume the watch-dog role. Likewise, judiciary, the backbone of the society, was broken up and the doctrine of necessity was contrived to legitimise dictatorship and autocracy.

Resultantly the priorities and liking of leaders have changed totally, who merely became self-seekers and self-centered instead of serving the state and society. This has really damaged the political process owing to which we are starved of farsighted, visionary leadership. Naturally, we are condemned to invent and reinvent the same wheel, time and again, and still we are entrapped in the vicious circle and are groping in darkness.

It may be emphasised that in the absence of astute and popular leadership, our national problems and issues are left unattended, thereby multiplies and compounds as we move on. These lingering problems breed frustration, resentment and intolerance. Many of these problems are caused by external interference. Sometimes, people turns to external forces and opt for militancy and violence. Obviously, this militancy cannot be dismissed without resolving the basic problems.

CONCLUSION

TO CONCLUDE, we may emphasize that Islam is the most liberal and pluralist religion. It does not allow conversion through coercion or compulsion—no other religion can match Islam on this count.

In Islam, there is no room for war and violence, except defensive war. The aim is not to conquer but protection and security. Islam champions liberation of the oppressed and manumission of the repressed.

Anyhow, there is much to be desired in the Muslim world. There is an urgent need of establishing democracy in the Muslim world. What is immediately needed is two-phased reformation process.

In the first phase, Islam should be resurrected and made intelligible to the elite and common man alike. In the second phase, we should make it relevant to our socio-political, religio-moral dimensions of life, allowing our institutions deriving inspiration from Islam.

To facilitate this process we urgently need establishment of academies to produce leaders able of rendering requisite services. It may be noted that we do have civil and military services training academies, but we do not have political services academies. We should therefore pay immediate attention to this deficiency.

The Immediate repercussions of this deficiency emerged in the shape of incompetent, sluggish and self-seeking leaders that lead us astray of the designated path, enjoined in the teachings of the Quran.

The requisite qualification of an honest leadership is: “[T]o prove to be the best you must reach for the help of oppressed. You must come up to the standard of being able to command, respect and enjoin civility, by force if necessary. . . . to sever humanity without any distinction whatsoever.”⁶ The last sermon of the Holy Prophet is a clear constitutional landmark. Accordingly:

“O people, your God is one and your father is also one. All of you are from Adam and Adam was created of clay. The best amongst you in the eyes of God is the one who is the most pious of you. Neither any Arab has got any preference over the non-Arab nor any non-Arab has got any preference over the Arab, except on account of Piety.”⁷

So as, it becomes our moral and religious obligation to come up with best possible, upfront solutions to tackle the dilemma the Muslims face. Farsighted leadership is one way out. That can be achieved only with a solid platform, where everyone will be facilitated and trained in the service of the community and project Islam on the international stage in its true perspective. The natural offshoot of it will emerge in the shape of honourable and just solution of the multifaceted problems the Muslim Umma confronts at large.

ENDNOTES

¹ Maududi, Abul Ala, *Khilafat-O- Malukiat*, Idara-e-Tarjuman-ul-Quran, Lahore, 26th ed., 2000, pp 27, 54-55 *passim*.

² *Ibid*, p 64

³ *Ibid*, pp 43, 403 *passim*

⁴ *Ibid*, pp 44-49 *passim*

⁵ *Ibid*, pp 43, 63-64 *passim*

⁶ Ali, Syed Wajid, *War in Islam*, Maqbool Academy, Lahore, 2005, p 80.

⁷ Hameed Ullah, Dr. Muhammad, *Political Life of Muhammad*, Darul Ishaat, Karachi, 1987, p 338.