

Blasphemy In Islam

The Quran does not prescribe punishment for abusing the Prophet

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In Islam, blasphemy is a subject of intellectual discussion rather than a subject of physical punishment. This concept is very clear in the Quran.

The Quran tells us that since ancient times God has sent prophets in succession to every town and every community. It says, moreover, that the contemporaries of all of these prophets adopted a negative attitude towards them.

There are more than 200 verses in the Quran, which reveal that the contemporaries of the prophets repeatedly perpetrated the same act, which is now called 'blasphemy or abuse of the Prophet' or 'using abusive language about the Prophet'. Prophets, down the ages, have been mocked and abused by their contemporaries (36:30); some of the epithets cited in the Quran include "a liar" (40:24), "possessed" (15:6), "a fabricator" (16:101), "a foolish man" (7:66). The Quran mentions these words of abuse used by prophets' contemporaries but nowhere does the Quran prescribe the punishment of lashes, or death, or any other physical punishment.

This clearly shows that 'abuse of the Prophet' is not a subject of punishment, but is rather a subject of peaceful admonishment. That is, one who is guilty of abusing the Prophet should not have corporal punishment meted out to

him: he should rather be given sound arguments in order to address his mind. In other words, peaceful persuasion should be used to reform the person concerned rather than trying to punish him.

Those who adopt a negative stance towards the Prophet will be judged by God, who knows the innermost recesses of their hearts. The responsibility of the believers is to observe the policy of avoidance and, wishing well, convey the message of God to them in such a manner that their minds might be properly addressed.

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anyone who uses abusive language about the Prophet should be stopped from doing so, and that in case he continues to do so he should be awarded severe punishment. On the contrary, the Quran commands the believer not to use abusive language directed against opponents: "But do not revile those



Negating the the essence of Islam

[beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God and out of ignorance" (6:108).

This verse of the Quran makes it plain that it is not the task of the believers to establish "media watch" offices and hunt for anyone involved in acts of defamation of the Prophet, and then plan for their killing, whatever the cost. On the contrary, the Quran enjoins believers to sedulously refrain from indulging in such acts as may provoke people to retaliate by abusing Islam and the Prophet. This injunction of the Quran makes it clear that this responsibility devolves upon the believers, rather than holding others responsible and demanding that they be punished.

Looked at from this angle, the stance of present-day Muslims goes totally against the teachings of the Quran. Whenever anyone—in their judgment—commits an act of 'abuse of the Prophet', in speech or in writing, they instantly get provoked and respond by leading processions through the streets, which often turn violent. And then they demand that all those who insult the Prophet be beheaded.

Muslims generally advocate the theory that freedom of expression is good, but that no one has the right to hurt the religious sentiments of others. This theory is quite illogical. Freedom is not a self-acquired right. It is God, who, because of His scheme of putting man to the test, has given man total

freedom. Then the modern secular concept of freedom is that everyone is free provided he does not inflict physical harm upon others. In such a situation, the above kind of demand is tantamount to abolishing two things: firstly, to abolishing the divine scheme, and secondly, to abolishing the modern secular norm. Neither goal is achievable.

So the hue and cry against the so-called abuse of the Prophet is simply untenable. By adopting this policy, Muslims can make themselves permanently negative but they cannot change the system of the world.

There is a relevant Hadith in which the Prophet of Islam has said: "Min husn Islam al-mar tarkahu ma la yanih" (A good Muslim is one who refrains from indulging in a practice that is not going to yield any positive result). This Hadith applies very aptly to the present situation of Muslims. They have been making noise for a very long time against blasphemy, but it has been in vain. Muslims must know that they are not in a position to change the world, so they must change themselves. There will be two instant advantages of adopting this policy: they will save themselves from becoming victim of negative sentiments and will be able to devote their energies to constructive work.

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