

Islam Believes in Freedom

India's secular law is more Islamic than Pakistan's so-called Islamic law

Blasphemy is in the news. According to general perception, Islam prescribes capital punishment to a person who indulges in blasphemy, that is using profane language against the Prophet of Islam. But this concept of blasphemy is completely alien to the original teachings of Islam. Before the advent of Islam, difference of belief was also a punishable act. They used to punish on matters of belief just as on matters of social crime. This old practice is called religious persecution in history. Islam abolished this practice. The Prophet of Islam declared that personal belief is a subject of discussion and persuasion rather than of legal punishment.

However, if non-believers use profane language against the Prophet, Muslims are directed not to react. They have only two options, either to simply ignore it or to respond on equal basis, that is, issuing a statement in return for a statement. The Quran says: "The recompense of an ill-deed is an ill the like thereof (42:40)." According to this injunction, reaction must be on an equal basis, that is, word in return for word, statement in return for statement, book in return for book.

If you go through the Quran and the *hadith* (sayings and actions of the Prophet of Islam), the only two authentic sources of Islam, you will find that there is not a single Quranic verse or *hadith* that gives this kind of injunction which says: "*Man shatama nabiyaikum faqtuluhu*. (Kill the person who commits blasphemy against the Prophet)."

Such an injunction was added in the Islamic law only during the Abbasid caliphate, about 150 years after the

death (632 AD) of the Prophet. Although the majority of the *Fuqaha* (Muslim jurists) of this period accepted the law, it was clearly an innovation which is not acceptable in Islam.

According to a well-known *hadith*, there are three authentic periods of the Islamic history: the period of the Prophet, the period of Sahaba (companions of the Prophet), and the period of Tabein (companions of the companions). It is a fact that all the *Fuqaha* belonged to the Abbasid period which came after these authentic periods. According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam has said: "I have left behind for you *thaqalain*, two authentic sources of Islam: the book of God, and the Sunnah of the Prophet. You will not astray till you adhere to these authentic sources." (Mu'atta Malik, *Hadith* no.1661). And those additions made by the Muslim jurists of the later history are certainly not a part of the authentic sources. According to this Islamic injunction, if there is a person who commits blasphemy, then the responsibility of Muslims is to meet him and persuade him and to remove his misunderstanding by peaceful means and if supposing he fails to understand then Muslims are left only with one option, that is to pray for him.

There is ample evidence that tells us what to do in such cases. For example, once when Prophet was in Mecca, one idol-worshipper came to him and told him face-to-face, "*Muzammaman abaina* (O Muhammad you are a condemned person)." The Prophet simply smiled. This smile was a kind of moral response and was bound to hit his conscience. He fell into introspection. And after some time he accepted him as the Prophet and became one of his followers.

Islam greatly believes in freedom of expression. I would like to say that the secular law of India in this context is more "Islamic" than the so-called Islamic law of Pakistan.