

Political Interpretation of Islam

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Introduction

In today's newspapers there were reports of clashes between Cairo's police and Islamist groups. Thirty people have been reported killed and several others were injured. Why is this happening? This state of affairs has been witnessed in Egypt for the past sixty years. Thousands have been killed, immense loss has been incurred, and the economy of the country has been shattered. But violence is still not coming to an end. What is the reason behind this?

In this context, I recalled many traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. He had predicted beforehand that the Muslim community will be embroiled in violence in later times. According to one of the traditions, the Prophet said:

لَا تَرْجِعُوا بَعْدِي كُفَّارًا يَضْرِبُ بَعْضُكُمْ رِقَابَ بَعْضٍ

“Don't become *kafirs* after me, and start killing each other.” (Bukhari: 121)

This is not a simple matter. The Muslim Ummah has the preserved Book of God, the Seerah and sayings of Prophet Muhammad are preserved and the model of Companions and history of Islam are also preserved. In spite of these, if killings have been continuing for the past sixty years and are not coming to an end, then this is an issue that must be pondered over and explained. In case of Muslim Ummah, violence cannot happen for the sake of violence. There has to be a justification for it. In other words, only justified violence could be perpetrated by the Muslims as its preserved nature will become an obstruction in its way.

The reason for this unabated violence is that it is Islamically justified violence. If the violence you are engaged in, is justified through your religion, you will never cease to perpetrate it. For example, Gamal Abdel Nasser was the leader of Egypt. He ordered for the execution of Syed Qutb. After his death, Qutb's followers glorified his killing and bestowed on him the title of *shaheed*, that is, a martyr. He became Syed Qutb Shaheed. Those who believe in religiously-justified violence, think that if they die while perpetrating violence, they will be rewarded with Paradise in the Hereafter. So, even if you meet death while striving for your cause, it will be regarded as praiseworthy. This is what I refer to it as Islamically-justified violence.

Ghulu: Culture of Intolerance

Yesterday, I heard an Egyptian scholar say that the violence in Egypt is not between the army and the civilians; but, in fact, it is violence between the army and religious extremists. According to me this statement of his is right.

But, still there remains a question: what is religious extremism and why does religious extremism lead to unabated violence? The name for religious extremism in the Quran and Hadith is *ghulu*. According to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْعُلُوَّ فِي الدِّينِ، فَإِنَّمَا هَلَكَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ بِالْعُلُوِّ فِي الدِّينِ

“Save yourself from *ghulu*, for the previous communities were destroyed because of indulging in *ghulu*.” (Musnad Ahmad: 1851).

Ghulu (or extremism) refers to the culture of intolerance. When you follow your religion in your individual life, it will not be called *ghulu*. However, when you want others also to accept and follow your religion, then that is *ghulu*, and another name for it is intolerance. If one becomes intolerant, then there is no end to it. This intolerance then leads to hate, protests, clashes, violence and lastly, suicide bombing. So, *ghulu* is when you are not satisfied by following of your beliefs, but expect others to follow what you are following. In this world, because everyone has freedom, the other person will not be ready to accept your religion. And, if you try forcing it on him, it will only lead to clashes between you and him.

The entire Muslim world is living in this kind of culture of intolerance. The hate, protests, clashes and violence that we see in these countries are all offshoots of intolerance. The reason behind all this is the political interpretation of Islam which is a phenomenon of the twentieth century. The political interpretation of Islam, which propagates the idea of implementing your religion on the rest of the world, did not exist earlier.

Religion of Self-Following, not Religion of External Implementation

Religion, according to the Quran and Hadith is religion of self-following, that is, you should mould yourself according to Islam. However, the political interpretation falsely made religion a subject of external implementation, making a Muslim duty-bound to implement religion in the outside world.

For example, everyone wants justice. In this regard the Quran says:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

“We sent Our messengers with evidence and, with them, We sent down the Book and the Scales of Justice, so that men might act in all fairness.” (57:25).

This verse of the Quran clearly says: “...*liyaqum an-naas bil qist*.” That is, you have to adhere to justice in your own individual life. But, according to the political interpretation of Islam, this verse was taken to mean that justice should be implemented as a system in the society.

Although the Quran said you should follow justice, certain Muslim ideologues falsely gave the political interpretation of Islam by saying that it means the implementing of a just system in the society. It is this interpretation that has led to intolerance and violence. When the Prophet said “Don’t become *kafirs* after me”, he actually meant: Don’t change a self-following religion into a religion of external implementation.

Governments’ Use of Coercive Power to Crush Islamists

Another aspect to consider is how those in a position of power in the Muslim world are handling this situation. They are suppressing the dissidents in their country through the use of coercive power. But suppression or crushing through the use of force or by coercive power has not led to any positive result. The violence is still happening unrelentingly. Now the time has come for us to do reassessment. Why has the suppression by Muslim rulers not yielded any result? Many generations have passed, so why could religious extremism not be brought to an end? The reason for this is that when you kill somebody who is engaged in violence, that person’s followers regard him a martyr, who would go to Paradise. Thus, the followers of those killed do not cease violence when their companions are killed. They perpetrate further violence thinking it is for a noble cause in the name of religion and they will go directly to paradise where fair maidens will be waiting for them. Therefore, the solution of this issue is not suppressing it by violence or through the use of force or coercive power. So what is the solution to this problem?

The Alternative Ideology

The only solution to this problem is providing an alternative ideology based in Islamic scriptures. Those who are engaging in violence in the name of religion have an ideology, though falsely linked to Islam, in their minds to support their actions. This ideology makes them think they are justified in doing the violence they are perpetrating. This ideology I refer to as the political interpretation of Islam. Based on this ideology they feel they are justified in conducting violence. Their thinking is: ‘If others kill us, we will go directly to paradise.’ To kill this ideology you have to offer an alternative ideology based on Islamic sources. An ideology can never be crushed through violence. The need today is of an alternative ideology. The political interpretation of Islam, which is widespread throughout the Muslim world, presents the ideology that Islam is a religion of external implementation. The result is that the entire Muslim world is directly or indirectly engaged in violence. Some are doing active violence, while others are engaged in passive violence. Some are actively engaged in violence through gun and bomb culture while others are passively engaged in it by thinking, speaking and writing on violent lines.

Thus, those who are actively engaged in violence have an ideological support from the entire Muslim community. In such a situation, how will they leave the culture of intolerance and violence? Only by developing an alternative ideology can the political interpretation of Islam be demolished.

However, this alternative ideology cannot be created from your own mind. The base of this alternative ideology should be the Quran and Hadith. Anything else would not be satisfactory because the political ideology pertaining to external implementation of religion is based on the misinterpretation of the Quran and Hadith. You have to explain through the Quran and Hadith that what they are doing in the name of implementation of religion is incorrect. Only that ideology will hold weight in their eyes which is based on the Quran and Hadith. Merely by declaring a fatwa against them or explaining the losses or stating enormous statistics of death toll, you cannot convince them to abandon violence. They are activated through the wrong interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. If you want them to take a U-turn, you have to tell them why they are wrong in the light of the Quran and Hadith and present the right interpretation of Islam. For example, the Quran says you have to adhere to justice in your lives. Referring to this verse, we should challenge the followers of the political interpretation as to how they have developed the idea of implementing justice on others? This is not in the Quran. Where have you taken this from? Taking such references you have to tell them that you are standing on a false ideology.

With God's help our mission is directed towards achieving this end. One aspect of our mission is the development of such literature that has shown in the light of the Quran and Hadith that the political interpretation of Islam stands on false grounds. Our literature clearly points out that the political interpretation is entirely invalid. Another aspect of our mission, which I refer to as the alternative ideology, is the development of such literature that gives the true interpretation of Islam. This material should address the Muslim mind as well as the minds of others to show that this is the true religion given by God Almighty. This presentation of Islam should also be relevant to the people of the modern age. For example, the present world gives importance to freedom of expression without engaging in violence. So, we have shown through our books that Islam too gives importance to free expression provided you do not indulge in violence. We have to present Islam as a religion which believes in freedom of expression. Similarly, today's world hates violence and war considering peace as summum bonum, as all development can only take place in an atmosphere of peace. We have to establish Islam as a religion that accords an important status to peace. This has to be established through a serious study of Islam, and not just by superficially stating that Islam believes in so and so.

By studying the Quran and the model of the Prophet, you have to show that Islam is indeed a religion of peace and tolerance; it gives importance to freedom of expression and fosters respect for mankind, etc. All our books, directly or indirectly, are presenting the alternative ideology or the true picture or the right interpretation of Islam. The political interpretation is a case of deviation from Islam. We, through our literature, bring the Muslim thought back on the right track. This is the need of the hour and the goal of our mission.

Through various reasons, the political interpretation of Islam has spread rapidly and has influenced the minds of all Muslims. Let us understand how. First the Muslim thinkers assumed that they have to Islamise politics and international life and for this cause, they started by disseminating their message peacefully. But, when this yielded no results, they participated in elections across Muslim countries with the aim of capturing the political power. They lost elections everywhere. This defeat made them initiate street activism, by doing protests and shouting slogans. Here too, they didn't achieve anything. They then resorted to violence by bombing political places. This also was resultless, and in the end they took to suicide bombing. In retaliation, the rulers of Muslim countries stepped in and started killing these extremists. This has become the case of all Muslim countries. Those who are in power feel that they will be unseated through the actions of these extremists, who wish to Islamise everything. In view of this, the rulers do everything to crush the extremists by force. This trend is being seen today in those Muslim countries where there is freedom. While, in Arab countries, where there is dictatorship, extremists are carrying out subversive activities. The entire Muslim world is, as it were, situated on a volcano, which has been developed due to the political interpretation of Islam, and is ready to erupt any moment.

The political interpretation of Islam has divided the Muslim world into two camps: *one*, those who are in power, that is, the rulers and *two*, the other side or those who call the rulers the agents of enemies. These two sides are continually fighting with each other. There is no exception to this division among Muslims. They are killing each other, even though this is called *kufir* in the tradition of the Prophet which I cited earlier. This evil is happening because it is a justified evil. It has enveloped the entire Muslim world.

Our Mission

Those in power in Muslim countries want to crush by force the violence being done by extremists. However, this strategy has yielded no result. In fact it has proved to be counterproductive. When a secular person dies while engaging in violence, his people would realise that such violence is

worthless and should be forsaken but when a religious person who does violence is killed, people regard him a martyr; they consider the dead to be in a better situation. So, you cannot crush this kind of violence through force. In order to bring it to an end, you have to take away their false justification.

It is easy to save oneself from external enemies, but very difficult to save oneself from the enemies inside. It is a two-fold mission to save the Muslim world from the eruption of the volcano on which it is situated. The two-fold mission consists of: on the one hand, demolishing the political interpretation of Islam through reason. However, this is not enough. The second task is to provide an alternative ideology based on the Quran and Hadith. It should address the modern mind and give regard to the modern norm. An ideology that fulfils these conditions will be an alternative ideology. Our mission is carrying out this two-fold task. It officially started in 1970, although we have been doing this work long before 1970. The registered title of our mission is *al-markazul islami lil buhooth wa al-dawah*, 'Islamic Centre for Research and Dawah'.

I read that the Pope referred to the Internet as a divine gift. But I thought why did God give us this divine gift? It is so for us to spread the word of God. Today God's religion is being used for violence. There is hatred, intolerance, and killings all over the world in the name of God's religion. By utilizing modern communication, we have to spread the word of God. We already have prepared the literature for this: books to demolish the political interpretation and books that provide an alternative ideology. Now, it is our task to spread this all over the world, in different languages.

The political interpretation of Islam is the biggest *fitna* of our day. To point it out, demolish it and give an alternative ideology in its place, have all been done in our literature. The only task left now is to spread this literature at a global level. This political interpretation has tarnished the image of God's religion. We have to utilize modern communication to spread the right ideology of Islam. There isn't anything of greater importance in this world than to erase the non-Islam being done in the name of Islam, and to give to people the right picture of Islam.

Our mission is non-political, we do not want fame or stage. We just want people to spread the literature of our mission that presents the right image of Islam. It has to be conveyed to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

May God guide us to perform this important task!