

MUTAZILISM AND IT'S IMPACT ON SUBCONTINENT

Ali Raza Tahir

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy, University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan.

Abstract. *Mutazilism* was the first school in Muslim theology. According to the Muslim calendar this school of thought was founded by Wasil ibn Ata in the end of the first or in the beginning of the second century in Bsra-a famous city of Iraq. The basic aim of a theologian is the affirmation, or defense, of the fundamentals of religion on the basis of religious manuscript, divine text, or Scripture only. But the Mutazilites started to use reason along with the sacred text to prove their stance. Use of reason along with revelation is the prominent feature of this school of thought. They tried to comprehend and interpret religious doctrines on rational grounds. They put their emphasis on reason along with divine text. It was the first theological movement based on reason along with revelation raised up on the horizon of the Muslim thought. We may say it a rational movement in the theological domain of the Muslim world. In the reaction of this movement and in the perspective of some specific political scenario another theological movement emerged on the horizon of Muslim world under the name *Asharism*. Its emphasis was on tradition rather than reason. *Asharism* took the way in Muslim world instead of *Mutazilism*. In nineteenth and twentieth centuries some renowned Muslim thinkers and reformers of Subcontinent adopted Mutazilism with some new interpretations. This article is an exposition of above said movement and its impacts on Subcontinent in modern era.

Key Words: Mutazila, Jabaria, Qadaria, Murjia, Waidia, Rationalism

Introduction

What is meant by Theology?

Theology means fundamentals of faith or a branch of knowledge which deals with the fundamentals of faith or discussions related to faith.

Subject Matter or Core Issue of Theology

Ultimate Reality (as defined by religions) is the core issue for all theological discussions.

What is meant by a Theologian?

A theologian is a person whose basic scope of discussion is the fundamentals of a religion.

Aim of a Theologian

The basic aim of a theologian is to affirm or prove or defend the fundamentals of his religion.

Methodology

In general a theologian uses the dialectical method but sometimes he uses rational method along with its dialectical method. Theological dialects mean the use of divine text to prove the standpoint. So we may divide that methodology into two kinds:

- i. Traditional, Transmitted and Scriptural
- ii. Rationalistic.ⁱ

Muslim Theology

It means the discussions of theologians in respect of basic principles or roots of Islam.

First School in Muslim Theology

Mutazilism was the first school in Muslim theology. According to the Muslim Calendar this school of thought was founded by Wasil ibn Ata in the end of the first or in the beginning of the second century in Bsra-(a famous city of Iraq.)

Mutazilism (Definition and salient features)

As we have pointed out in earlier that it was the first theological movement raised up on the horizon of the Muslim thought. Although, the basic aim of a theologian is the affirmation, or defense of the fundamentals of religion on the basis of religious manuscript, divine text, or Scripture only but Mutazilites started to use reason along with the sacred text to prove their stance.ⁱⁱ Use of reason along with revelation is the prominent feature of this school of thought. They tried to comprehend and interpret religious doctrines on rational grounds only. Although Allama Dr. Muhammad Iqbal appreciated the rational mode of Mutazilites but he criticized their approach also.

“The Mutazila conceiving religion merely as a body of doctrines and ignoring it as a vital fact, took no notice of non-conceptual modes of approaching Reality and reduced religion to a mere system of logical concepts ending in a purely negative attitude. They failed to see that in the domain of knowledge—scientific or religious—complete independence of thought from concrete experience is not possible.”ⁱⁱⁱ

They put their emphasis on reason along with divine text. We may say it a rational movement in the theological domain of the Muslim world. So they are named as Muslim rationalist.^{iv} According to Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam:

“Mutazila is the name of the great theological school which created the speculative dogmatic of Islam.”^v

Background of *Mutazilism*

There were number of reasons which helped to set the foundations of Mutazilism i.e. rationalistic theology. We may conclude to all in these words.

- The emphasis of the teachings of Islam i.e. Quran and Hadith on the use of reason in all religious and worldly affairs
- The need of reason in answering the objections and question of the non-Muslims and newly born Muslims on the fundamentals of Islam
- The importance of argumentation in response of the inquiries of new born Muslims in respect of religious doctrines and practices
- The influence of Greek philosophy and logic^{vi}

Along with above said reasons there were some internal issues and specific socio-political situations which were related with the core of religion, helped in the establishment of Mutazilism. Now we try to describe all of them respectively.

Some Specific Religious and Socio Political Issues

After the martyrdom of Hazrat Usman, majority of Muslims elected to Hazrat Ali as their caliph. He is known as fourth guided caliph. Madina was the capital of Muslim state. Syria was one of its provinces. At that time Muawiyah' was the governor of Syria. He revolted against the elected caliph and refused to accept Hazrat Ali as a caliph. Consequently a war state appeared in the followers of Hazrat Ali and the governor of Syria. Thousands were murdered on both the sides during these wars. For example only in the war of Sufain more than eighty thousand were murdered on both the sides. The questions arose:

- Who was on the right? and

- What will be the ultimate end of murderers and murdered?

After the martyrdom of Hazrat Ali, Amir Muawiyah became the ruler of the Muslim world. In his life he appointed his son Yazid, as the ruler of the Muslim world.

To legitimate his ruler ship he started to take the oath of Yazid from all over the Muslim world. Majority of the Muslim world was against the nomination of Yazid due to his undesirable conduct, behavior, and character. Hazrat Imam Husain (a.s) the grandson of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad S A W W refused the nomination Yazid due to his ill deeds. He protested against Yazid's misdeeds with his family members and companions which were total seventy two in number. To snub the powerful voice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (a.s), Yazid murdered Him with all members of His family along with all his companions in Karbala.

Approximately, Yazid ruled over Muslim world for three years. Following is a brief account of his era.

- In the first year of his rule he murdered the grandson of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAWW) i.e. Hazrat Imam Hussain (A S) with His companions and family members in Karbala. After the martyrdom of the grandson of the Holy Prophet (SAWW) in Karbala, Yazid's army victimized the remaining family members of of the Hazrat Imam Hussain (A S). His army arrested the orphans and respected ladies of the followers of Hazrat Imam Husaain (A S) along with the grand daughters of the Holy Prophet and sent them in prison to Kofa and Damishq (the court of Yazid).
- In the second year of his rule he attacked on Madina and looted it relentlessly.
- Hazrat Abdullah ibn e Zubair refused to accept his leadership and took refuge in Macca. In the third year of his rule he attacked on Ibn e Zubair, besieged Macca, and started shelling on Baitullah. Meanwhile, Yazid died.

- Other than the murder of the family of the Holy Prophet (S A W W) a number of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) were murdered by Yazid also.^{vii}

The successors of *Yazid* (*Umayyad* rulers) continued these ill practices in their regimes. The core of the basic teachings of the Quran is that every-body is responsible and accountable for his/her actions and deeds.^{viii}

The questions arose in the minds of people:

- “What will be the end of the committers of these grave sins?
- Why do you practice such barbarities?
- Is not all this against the spirit of Islam?
- Are you not Muslims?”^{ix}

They had no answer for their brutalities and no justification for their ill deeds. People started to raise their voices against their cruelties. To save their faces and to justify their antagonistic rulership they started to misinterpret the verses of the Quran. For this purpose they established an institution of pulpiters (courtier priests) to defend and justify their all brutalities. They started to misinterpret the fundamentals of religion and to communicate them wrongly to defend the rulers for their own mean objects. They propagated that God is Absolute, Ultimate, Almighty, All Power, Omnipotent, and Omniscient. All discretion is for God. Everything is in the jurisdiction of God. All occurrences are due to God. Human being has no choice. He / She have no freedom of will. All others except God are compelled being. So, how can we hold to a compelled being responsible for his/her deeds? They promoted to absolute determinism in all spheres of life. The followers of this approach were named as determinist or *Jabarites*. Jeham bin Safwan was the main representative of this group.^x

They further viewed: Human being is a compelled being. Nobody is responsible for his/ her deeds because there is no freedom of choice to any-body. Ultimately every-body should be optimistic for his / her end. For them even if a being commits a grave sin like polytheism or the assassination of an innocent that may be rewarded by God because every-thing happens by the decree of God.^{xi}

In respect of the beginning of Mutazilites, historians reported that Hasan of Basra was a celebrated religious scholar in those days. Ma'bad al-Juhani was an advocate of free will and was condemning the fatalism of Umayyad rulers openly and publically. To get the support of his stance one day he met with Hasan al Basri. He asked him that the Umayyad rulers to justify their misdeeds misinterpreted the doctrine of Omnipotence of God. What was his answer? Iqbal narrated his answer in these words.

“Ma'bad is reported to have said to Hasan of Basra that the Umayyads killed Muslims, and attributed their acts to the decrees of God, replied Hasan, ‘are liars.’”^{xii}

Unjust and relentless rulers and dishonest priests of their courts promoted to *Jabriat* and *Murjiat*. It was absolutely against the basic teachings of Islam and the Quran. So a protest started against them from all walks of life.

Al Maabad al Juhni was a prominent figure of that time who demonstrated against the Umayyad's standpoint of *Jabariat* and *Murjiat*. According to him, human being is not a compelled being. Every-body has the freedom of choice. Omnipotence and Omniscience of God does not mean the determinism of a being. The problem of good and evil is related with free will. So he preceded the doctrine of *Qadar* (free will). The followers of this doctrine were known as *Qadarites* (representatives

of the freedom of will). As *Jabariyat* (determinism) implies to the doctrine of '*Murji'it*', (the committer of a grave sin should be optimistic because he may be rewarded) the doctrine of *Qadar* necessitates to "*Wa'idia*" (promise of reward and threat of punishment).

We may conclude all above discussion in these words. There were two approaches in Muslim society at that time. First one was the

- *Jabaria / Jabarites /* or Determinists (Human being is a compelled being and every-thing and every act of a being is determined by God. So no-body is responsible for his/her deeds.)
- *Murjia / Jabaria /* or determinism brushes off all possibilities of responsibility. Consequently it implies to *Murjia*. (one should be optimistic for his/her end despite the committing of a mortal sin because he/she is bound and have no freedom of choice) So, all brutalities of rulers are justified and no-body is accountable for his/her deeds.

The second approach was the

- *Qadaria / Qadarites /* or Freedom of Choice (There is no compulsion on a being. Every -body has the freedom of will and allowed to choose his/her own way.
- *Wa'eedia*. (Reward and Punishment) The approach of Qadaria necessitates to *Waidia* or promise of reward and threat of punishment. It requires that every-body is responsible and accountable for his/her deeds.

This controversy was not favorable for relentless Umayyad's rulers. So they crushed every voice which was raised against them. Al Ma'bad al Juhani promoted the doctrine of Qadar and was hanged under the orders of Umayyad ruler Abdul Malik by Hajjaj ibn-e Yousaf (governor and

right hand of the ruler) in 80/699. Only the fatalism was in the favor of their misdeeds. Allama Dr. Muhammad Iqbal pointed out it as:

“Now the practical materialism of the opportunist Umayyad rulers of Damascus needed a peg on which to hang their misdeeds of Karbala, and to secure the fruit of Amir Muawiyah’s revolt against the possibilities of a popular rebellion.”^{xiii}

After the murderous fate of Ma’bad, Ghaylan al-Damishqi adopted his mission and started to preach his views. It was not tolerable for the rulers. So, in the penalty of holding the flag of Ma’bad, he was murdered in 105/723 at the hands of Hisham ibn Malik. There were many other people who suffered the end like Mabad Juhani and Ghaylan Damishqi. Despite of all these cruelties and unfavorable circumstances the doctrines of Qadaria and Waidia were in progress.

Beginning of *Mutazilism*

Hasan Basri (24/642-110/728)^{xiv xv} was practicing to deliver lectures in the Msjad e Basra (Mosque of Basra) after the Morning Prayer. The historians have been related the beginning of the Mutazilism to an incident, happened in the form of a dialogue during a lecture of Hasan Basri. They have narrated the story of beginning in these words. One day Hasan Basri was delivering his lecture in Msjad -e Basra (Mosque of Basra). Someone from Basra came to him and asked what will be the fate of the committer of a grave sin? Either he may be rewarded (Jabaria and Murjia) or he must be punished due to his misdeed (Qadaria and Waidia). Hasan Basri was in confusion. Principally he was of opinion that the committer of a mortal sin would be punished. He had known better that if he expressed these views he would be hanged by the hands of the rulers. On the other hand the concept of the reward and forgiveness of Murjia was against his faith. He became silent and was

searching the way. Meanwhile among one of his pupils i.e. Wasil ibn Ata (80/699)^{xvi} or Amr ibn Ubayd (Most of the historians considered it Wasil ibn Ata) broke up the silence and adopted the middle position as described by Saeed Sheikh:

“One day when Hasan was busy discussing some problems with his pupils, someone came to him with a question regarding the conflicting standpoints of the Murjiites and the Waidities. The first held that perpetrator of a grave sin should be reckoned as a Muslim and not labeled an unbeliever, and that his case should be left to God. The second, lying more emphasis on the threats in the Quran, maintained, that the committer of a mortal sin, having *ipso facto* deviated from the right path, could not possibly be considered a believer. Before Hasan could give a reply, either Wasil ibn e Ata or Amr ibn-Ubayd broke out with the assertion of a middle position i.e. such a one was neither a believer nor an unbeliever. Hasan took it ill and said *ae y ta zala ana* (i.e. he has seceded from us). So, Wasil and Amr left the circle of the master went to another corner of the mosque and began teaching their own views. Those who gathered around them came to be known as the Mutazilites i.e. separated beings.”^{xvii}

The author of ‘The A to Z of Islam’ has also pointed out above said facts.^{xviii} Nicholson attributes to Mutazilites in these words:

“During the Umayyad period Basra was the intellectual capital of Islam and in that city we find the first traces of a sect which maintained the principle that thought must be free in the search for truth.”^{xix}

Meanings of Mutazila

Mutazila was not a name of a specific being, or an individual. It is an Arabic word. It has its historical connotation related with a specific incident as we have reported it in the above said lines. Mutazila means separation or separated. In the beginning, Hasan Basri said to Wasil ibn Ata ‘*ae y ta zala ana*’(this person has been separated from us). So, Mutazila means a separated being. He established his own circle and

started to deliver lectures on the other corner of mosque. All men who left the circle of Hasan Basri and gathered around Wasil ibn Ata were named as Mutazila (separated being).

Mutazila or Adalites (Representatives of Divine Justice)

The basic emphasis of Mutazilites was on Tauhid or Divine unity. For them justice is the fundamental attribute of God. The entire thesis of *Mutazila* revolves around Divine justice. Their opponents named them *Mutazila* but they claimed that they were Unitarians and Adalities (Adlia) i.e. be holders of Divine unity and Divine Justice. For them they were the representatives and real precursors of Divine Unity and Justice and *Mutazila* was not their real name. According to them they were named as *Mutazila* or *Mutazilites* by their opponents.

Mutazila and the Abbasids

The age of the establishment of *Mutazila* is the end of first or beginning of the second century. (According to Hijra the Muslim calendar) The expansion of this movement took place in the age of Abbasids. Some main Abbasid rulers patronized this movement. Some renowned scholars of *Mutazila* and early Abbasid rulers were close friends.

Basic Doctrines of Mutazila

Prof. M.M. Sharif has given a long list of their tenants but the following are the main themes of this movement.^{xx}

- *Tauhid*- (Divine unity/Oneness of God)
- *Adl e Ilahi* (Divine justice)
- Al wad al walwaeed (The promise of reward and threat of punishment)

- *Al manzilatu bayn al manzila tyn* (state between the states of belief and unbelief)
- *Amr bil maroof wa nahi anil munkar* (To order the doing of good and to prohibit the doing of wrong)^{xxi xxii xxiii},

Decline of Mutazilites

Mutazilites emphasized on the use of reason. Reason allows to every-body to take his/her own way. In the beginning they progressed to rationalism. But under the patronage of Abbasids they started the preaching of their doctrines by force. At the peak of their career they adopted the irrational attitude and started to victimize the people for acceptance of their tenants specifically the doctrine of createdness and uncreatedness of Quran. Due to their ill-treatment in respect of the propagation of their doctrines a restlessness and anger developed in laymen and specifically in the spheres of orthodoxy. This was a starting point of their decline. They continued their unjust behavior in respect of the propagation of their doctrines. Ultimately this movement reached to its end.^{xxiv xxv}

Prominent Mutazilites

Historically they have been divided into two main branches i.e. the Bsarite branch and the Baghdadi branch. Following are the prominent thinkers of both the branches respectively. Wasil b. Ata, (d.748), Amr b. Ubaid (d.762), Abul Hudhril al Allaf (d. 841 or 849), Abu Bakr al-Asamm (d. beginnig of ninth century), Ibrahim al-Nizam (d. 835-845), Ali al-Aswari (a cotemporary of al-Nizzam), Mummar b. Abbad (contemporary of al-Nizzam), Hisham al-Fuwati (813-833), Abu Yaqub al-Shahham (d.847), Abbad b. Sulayman (d. 864), Amr b. Bahr al-Jahiz (d.868), Abu Ali al-Jubai (d.915), and Abu Hasim son of Al-Jubai

(d.933) were the representative of Basrite branch while Bishar b. al-Mutamir (d.825), Abu Musa al Murdar (d. 841), Jafar b. Mubash shir (d.849), Thumama b. Ashras (d. 828), Al-Iskafi (d. 855), Ahmad b. Abi Daud (d. 855), Abul-Husain al-Khayyat (d.902), Abu Qasim al-Balkhi al Kabi (931), and Abu al-Molitian (d.1025), were the representative of the Baghdadi branch. All of them played an important role in the shaping of Mutazilires school of thought. ^{xxvi}, ^{xxvii}, ^{xxviii}

Mutazila Tradition in Muslim History

Mutazilites way of rapprochement between revelation and reason set the foundations for the philosophies of renowned Muslim philosophers of classical age like Kindi, Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. ^{xxix}

Ghazali(1058-1111) was basically a theologian. He studied philosophy also but finally took refuge in mysticism. He was a great representative of Ashairism. He attacked on philosophy. To refute philosophy he wrote a book under the title: Tahfat ul Falasfa (incoherence of Philosophers).

Ibn e Rushd a celebrated Andalusian philosopher tried to defend philosophy. To refute Ghazali he wrote a book under the title: Tahafat ul Tahfa (Destruction of Destruction.) Being a philosopher, Ibn e Rushd's inclination was towards Mutazilism. At that time Muslims were losing their position in all over the world in all walks of life. Ghazali's refutation of philosophy played a key role to block the nourishment of philosophy in Muslim world. In medieval age Muslim world was in decline. In this age the Asharism movement nourished in maximum area of the Muslim world. It would be better to quote here that the main focus of Asharism was on tradition rather than reason.

Mutazilism and Subcontinent

Syed Jamal al Din Afghani is known as the founder of Modern Muslim world. He set the foundations of renaissance in Muslim world in nineteenth century. He put his emphasis on the use of reason along with revelation. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a contemporary of Syed Jamal al Din Afghani. He was a politician, reformer, educationist, theologian, and a social philosopher. In those days Subcontinent was under British Imperialism. On one side the Europe was advancing in the fields of science and technology while on the other hand the approach of Muslim community was absolutely conservative. Before British Imperialism, Muslims were ruling over Subcontinent. Great Britain snatched the power from Muslims. So, a feeling of enmity naturally developed in Muslim community. New rulers also considered them their rivals. Some social and political incidents also increased this seriousness. Muslims were so much irritated from new lords that they banned everything which was related with them. Majority of the Muslim community was the follower of Asharite's school of thought. The basic emphasis of Asharism was on tradition. According to Asharites the use of reason in religious affairs was allowed only to some extent. The dependence of Modern Western thought (science and technology) is absolutely on reason and sense perception. Muslims of the subcontinent held that the study of all these disciplines irreligious and a heinous sin. Most of the traditional religious institutions insisted on traditional educational system only and condemned the study of philosophy and science. On the other hand Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan promoted and advocated the study of philosophy and science. He appreciated modern education along with religious educational system. He spread a network of modern educational institutions blended with Islamic educational system.^{xxx} He

translated and interpreted religious text on rational grounds. Although his absolute rationalism was against the basic spirit of Islam and was not acceptable for traditionalists but he opened the new avenues of understanding in religious affairs in Subcontinent. He opened the door of Ijtihad in Subcontinent. He was named as Neo Mutazili. Despite all disagreement with Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khans, it is a fact that he played a major role in the awakening and rationalization of the Muslims of the Subcontinent. The emergence of Pakistan is based on two nation theory. Categorically he was the first representative of two nation theory in Subcontinent. In this way a movement of rationalism started in Subcontinent. After Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan we find a continuity of intellectuality and celebrated personalities in all disciplines of knowledge blended with religion, philosophy, and science which played a key role in the rise of the Muslims of the Subcontinent and in the emergence of a new state i.e. Pakistan.

Conclusion

As we have described in previous lines Mutazilites promoted to bare rationalism. For the understanding of faith, to know the mysteries of universe, and to believe in the profundities of religion, reason is not sufficient only. Due to an extreme emphasis on reason they fell in contradiction in the explanation and interpretation of some basic dogmas of religion. The beginning point of Mutazilites was their self-derived doctrine “the state between the states of belief and unbelief-*al maziltubayn al manzilatain*”. It is not a rational statement. It is against the two basic laws of thought i.e. the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle. Further, for them religion was only a set of doctrines and they failed to create a link between thought and

experience. Despite of all these demerits there are many positive dimensions of this movement.

- They were expert in dialectics(munazra), and they promoted this approach in Muslim society. At that time it was required to answer the objections of non-Muslims.
- They defended religion against the attacks of non-Muslims.
- They gave answers of the questions raised by newly born Muslims.
- They were expert in Greek Philosophy. They contributed to introduce the Muslim society with Greek treasuries of knowledge.
- They opened the door of philosophical discussions on the intellectual horizons of the Muslim society and in this way they set the ground for Muslim philosophy. So, they contributed in the development of philosophical systems of great Muslim thinkers like Kindi, Farabi, IbnSina, and Ibn Rushd etc.
- Mutazilism could not get the popularity in the Muslim world throughout the history due to two reasons:
 - i. The absolute rationalism in the understanding, explanation, and interpretation of religious dogmas which deprived of them to adopt a balanced attitude towards reason and revelation.
 - ii. A rational approach was not harmonious with both the temperament of Muslim dictators and the rigid attitude of traditional and conservative religious clergymen.

In the end we may conclude that the enlightened minds welcomed the rational approach of Mutazilites throughout the history even the renowned thinkers of modern age Syed Jamal-ul-din Afghani, Sir

Sayyed Ahmad Khan and Allama Iqbal promoted their rationalism to some extent in the perspective of the needs of their age.

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End Notes

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