

Islam and Forced Conversion: A Misunderstood Concept

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Abstract

Force Conversion is adaptation of a different religion or irreligion under duress. Some who have been forced to convert may continue, covertly with the beliefs and practices originally held, while outwardly behaving as converts. At many places the Orientalists put the statement that Islam basic purpose is to establish sovereignty throughout the globe and its primary purport deals with ‘authority’, ‘political’ and ‘economic’ matters for which it also used force for the implementation. Although it is an erroneous statement as Islam’s basic purport is religious, pure and simple; it deals with other social issues. While Islam stressed upon free will and there is no restriction in accepting other religions. As other religions are not in pure form now and Islam is being preserved by Allāh, so it teaches to submit oneself to the Will of Allāh. The early converts to Islam were the Prophet (peace be upon him) close friends Abu Bakr (may Allāh be pleased with her) and his family members in which his faithful wife Khadija (may Allāh be pleased with her), his cousin Ali were on the top, sand his slave Zayed. None of them argued and accepted Islam immediately. Among them Abu Bakr (peace be upon him) enjoyed prominent place among Arabs and with his influence five people accept Islam in which Sa’ad, Zobeir, Talha, Othman and Abd-al-Rahman who were member of prominent families. Abdul Rahman converted four people of his family. Likewise Bilal (may Allāh be pleased with her) was the first slave, ransomed by Abu Bakr (may Allāh be pleased with her). These early converts of Islam were men of piety and dignity.¹

Key words: Force Conversion, Orientalist, Free Will, Establishing Sovereignty, Religion, Early Converts, Men of piety and dignity.

So in the present threads the basic concepts of Islamic way to accept religion without any force is being under discussion. The early converts of Islam are mentioned here. All these converts were fully aware of the characteristics of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Sydney Fisher writes in his book ‘The Middle East’:

“His disposition to all was kindly, and he made no distinction in his treatment of people...His display of sense of justice and his

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revelations of religious truths centered the attention of the citizens of Madinah. His converts, from first to last, lacking this quality, Muhammad (peace be upon him)'s stand as a The Prophet of Allāh surely have been ignored by the world citizens of Mecca.”²

While stressing the point on forced conversion, he thus avers that Muslims attitude was quite different with people of Makkah after the flight to Madinah, in Madinah their dealings with Jews were not on fair grounds. Muslims tried to convert people to Islam by using the force and in the last he asserts that Islam is a chief religion which promotes barbarism.

Allegation: Muslims Hostilities with Makkah People:

To begin with this allegation which deals with the behavior of the Muslims with the people of Makkah. William Muir asserts in his book “The life of Mahomet” that Muslims showed brutality to them. He avers as:

“But the ...command.”³

It was stated in Ibn Hishām's ‘ Sirah un Nabwiyah’ where it was recorded the hostilities of the Clans of Qur’esh who plotted against the early converts and established a committee to inflict Muslims so that they could not preach the doctrines of Islam. It is stated as:

ثم ان قريشا تدميروا بينهم على من في قبائل منهم من اصحاب الرسول الله الذين اسلموا معه.⁴

So they started their conspiracies against Islam so as to halt the way of early converts. Ibn Qayyim recorded the inflictions of the early converts. In which Bilal bin Rabah faced harsh brutality of the Qur’esh and became a victim in their hands even in such circumstances he never uttered a word of discomfort to them.

فاعرض عنهم وعظهم وقل لهم في انفسهم قولا بليغا.⁵

“So oppose them and admonish them, and address them in plain terms about their souls.”

It has been narrated on the authority of Abu Masa that when the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) deputed any of his Companions on a mission, he would say:

“Give tidings (to the people); do not create (in their minds) aversion (towards religion); show them leniency and do not be hard upon them.”⁶

Dr. Hameedullah asserts in ‘Sermons of Bahawalpur’ regarding the ‘defense System in the Time of the Prophet’ as:

“For the defense of a country, the military preparation are not only required but the non-military preparations are also essential. So the defense strategy in Madinah was essential as well. Because infidels inflict while Muhammad (peace be upon him)’s stay in Makkah. They snatched their properties, and for years show brutality to Muslims. After the flight to Madinah, they again started conspiracies against them, they wrote a polemic to inhabitants of Madinah either to kill Muhammad (peace be upon him) or exile him from the country. That threat was directly hit to the security of Madinah, so it could not be ignored. Especially for the Prophet who was ‘Model of Excellence’ for the entire world.”⁷

So for the defense of Islam and for the country Muslims were bound to hold sword. But even then ethics were seen everywhere in the field and after the battle of Ohad, as Adrees Kandhalwi related the behavior of the Muslims with captives in his biography of Muhammad (peace be upon him) that Muslims gratified their appetite with dates only and offered a lavish food to the captives. The conquest of Makkah was a time when he can take revenge from his worst enemies but he forgives them all, it was recorded in ‘Tabākāt ibn Sa’ād’:

لا تثریب الیوم یغفر الله لکم وهو ارحم الرحمین⁸

Dr. Naseer Ahmed Nasir Stated about the purpose of the Conquest of Makkah in these words:

“The real purpose of the Conquest of Makkah is to conquer the hearts of people of Makkah... People entered into Islam day by day that was in fact the conquest of Truth and conquest of heart and its effects were spiritual. But for the susceptible persons that was not a good spectacle.”⁹

At that time he declared forgiveness for all and said:

اذهبوا فانتم الطلقاء-¹⁰

Ameer Ali stated for this event that:

“we can see the practical demonstration of the Qur’ān by the prophet (peace be upon him).”¹¹

He further asserts as:

“On the event of the conquest of Makkah which was the greatest triumph, he annoned anmesty and commanding protection to all feeble and to slaves.”¹²

The sermon of the Prophet at the Conquest was shown how much he was concerned about his enemies:

تكلّم به ، سمعته اذ نادى ووعاهه قلبى ، وابصرته عيناي حين قام به رسول الله
الغد من يوم الفتح انه حمد الله واشنى عليه، ثم قال: ان مكه حرمها الناس، فلا يحل
لا مرى يومن بالله ولا يوم ولا خران يسفك بهادما ولا يعضد بها شجرة-¹³

It was sateted in Sirah Ibn Hisham:

يايهاالناس، ان دمائكم و احوالكم الى ان تلقوا ربكم، كحرمة يومكم هذا، و كحرمة
شهر كم هذا، و ان كل دم كان فى الجاهلية موضوع، و ان اول دمائكم-¹⁴

Muir himself asserts that Qur'esh were agitaitive people. Ha thus asserts:
“The jealousy and enmity of the coresh were aggravated by the continued success of the new sect, which now numbered more than fifty followers,”¹⁵

Allegation: Behaviour with Jews:

Muir alleged that Muslims treatment with non-Muslims are not good especially with Jews therefore they exile Jews from Madinah. While the first step taken afre flight was to create fraternity between Ansar and migrated persons and with Jews. For this the treaty of Madinah which was also considered a charter of fraternity wsa established by Muahmmad (paece be upon him). The treatment with non-muslims was stated by him

عن عبدالله بن عمرو عن النبى قال : من قتل نفسا معاهد لم يرح رائحة الجنة و ان
رتجها ليوجد من ميسرة اربعين عاما-¹⁶

“Narrated Abdullah bin Amr (may Allah be pleased with him): The Prophet said, Whoever killed a Mu'āḥid (a person who is granted the pledge of protection by the Muslims) shall not smell the fragrance of paradise through its fragrance can be smelt at a distance of forty years (of travelling).”

In fact they were continously creating such problems which are a menace for Islam. They rejects to submit theirselves for the Allāh cause. As the Prophet said:

عن جابر بن عبد الله قال: اخبرنى عمر بن خطاب ، انه سمع رسول الله ليقول : لا خر
جن اليهود و النصرارى من جزيرة العرب، حتى لا ادع فيها الا مسلما¹⁷.

At another place he said:

الا من ظلم معاهدا و انتقصه او كلفه فوق طاقة او اخذ من شيا بغير طيب نفس
فانا حجيجه يوم القيامة.¹⁸

The Prophet took a radical step when entered into Madian for peace and prosperity. In fact the Jews were in the wait for the expected arrival of the Jesus for which they stayed at Madinah, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) arrived and he amended their faith, they went against him and plotting against Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ameer Ali in 'The Spirit of Islam' asserts that he tried to create harmony among them but the hatred of Jews did not decrease. He said:

"...and planted germs of cordial relations among all believers; he proclaimed that a Jew, Sabeen or Christian, whoever believed in Allāh and future life acted righteously."¹⁹

The reason behind their exile was that Madinah was surrounded by infidels and enemies who marshalled to abolish the believers so Qur'ān ordered Muslims to have combat with them:

"Defend yourself against your enemies; but attack them not first, Allāh hateth the aggressor."²⁰

In fact, after returning from Hudaibiyah, Muhammad (peace be upon him) decided to expand his preaching methods as they find enough time for this thing. So he decided to send messengers to other countries for this purpose. Husayn Haykal asserts about this period in these words:

"In fact, the Islamic message had by this time reached at a high level of crystallization and comprehensiveness. The time was ripe for its dissemination among mankind. Besides the doctrine of the Unity of Allāh and its implications for the worship and ethics, the Islamic message developed so widely as to include within its purview all aspects of social activity and human relations."²¹

Although there were no such threats and afflictions from Qur'esh but there was Jewish influence which prevailed in Madinah. They started conspiracies against Islam and Muhammad (peace be upon him) so it became need of hour to abolish their plottings against Islam. Montgomery Watt asserts in the book 'Muhammad (peace be upon him) at Madinah' in this regard:

"Though the Jews of Madinah had become quiescent, those at Khayber, among whom the leaders of an-Nadir were the most prominent, were still anxious to avenge themselves on Muhammad (peace be upon him)."²²

So it became necessary to expel them from Arab as it was mentioned in 'The Life of Muhammad (peace be upon him)' by Husayn Haykal as:

"But would Muhammad (peace be upon him) send his missions to the foreign kings while his own domain was threatened by the treachrous Jews who were still living in the North of Madinah? It is true that the Treaty of Hudaibiah had secured his Southern flank, especially from Qure'sh. But what about the North, where both Heraclius and Chosroes might attack Madinah in cooperation with the Jews of Khayber who were anxious for an opportunity to take avenge upon Muhammad (peace be upon him)?"²³

In this sense he decided to attack on his clans; so that their plottings come to an end. This attack creates uneasiness among them and their hatred increased.

It was mentioned in the passage of the Qur'ān:

فبما رحمة من الله --- على الله-²⁴

"It was by the mercy of Allāh that thou wast lenient with them (O Muhammad (peace be upon him)), for it thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from round about thee. So pardon them and ask for forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of a affairs. And when thou art resolved, then put thy trust in Allāh. Lo! Allāh loveth those who put their trust in (Him)."

It was mentioned in the passage of the Qur'ān about the non-muslims as:

قاتلوا الذين لا --- صغرون-²⁵

"Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as belief not in Allāh nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allāh hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low."

Ameer Ali asserts about the freedom of worship for all people regardless they are Muslims or non-Muslims:

"By the law of Islam, liberty of conscience and freedom of worship were allowed and guaranteed to the followers of every other creed under Muslim dominion."²⁶

It is stated in Ibn Hisham's book on the biography of Muhammad (peace be upon him) that if Jews and Christians will accept Islam then they can enjoy equal rights and no one will be forced to accept it.²⁷ All these statements by the scholars of Islam show clearly that Muhammad (peace be upon him) always gave a helping hand to them and gave them free will to accept Islam.

Allegation: Force Conversion in Islam:

The commonest allegation against Islam is that it spreads through sword. They neglect all the historical perspectives in which Muhammad (peace be upon him) hold the sword. They even neglect the ethics shown by muslims in the battle field. It is stated in the Qur'ān that there is no force conversion in Islam:

لا اكره في الدين-²⁸

“There is no compulsion in religion.”

For Ameer Ali the above stated verse directly focused on the principle of Islam. He asserts as:

“...it testifies the principle of toleration and charity inculcated by Islam.”²⁹

فان حاجوك فقل اسلمت وجهي لله ومن اتبعن وقل للذين اوتوا الكتب ولا مين

اسلمتم-فان اسلمو فقد اهتدوا و ان تولوا فانما عليك البلاغ و الله بصير بالعباد-³⁰

“And if they argue with thee , (O Muhammad (peace be upon him), say: I have surrendered my purpose to Allāh and (so have) those who follow me. And say unto those who have received the Scripture and those who read not: have ye (two) surrendered? If they surrendered then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is duty only to convey the message (unto them). Allāh is seer of (His) bondmen.”

فبما رحمة من الله... على الله³¹.-

Then again it mentioned in The Qur'ān about the duties of Muhammad (peace be upon him) as:

انما انت مذكر³².-

“Remind them for thou art but a rememberancer.”

There were two phases of Muhammad (peace be upon him)’s preaching of Islam; one is in Makkah where he individually and publically preached Allāh Message and in Madinah where his strategy was upgraded as he used many other methods like polemics to leaders of Clans, troops sent to other countries and to tribes for preaching and established institution where the preaching was held. It was stated in Ibn Hisham’s book on the biography of Muhammad (peace be upon him) under the caption of “Islam in bani Harith bin Ka’b” in these worship.

و انه من اسلم ليهودى او نصر رنى اسلاما خالصا من نفسه، و ان بدين السلام، فانه
من المومنين ، له مثل ما لهم ، و عليه ما عليهم ، و من كان نصرانية، او يهودية لا
يردعنها.³³

It is clearly stated here that a non- muslim would enjoy the equal rights with Muslims and no one would be forced in the matter of religion. In fact Muhammad (peace be upon him) followed the words of Allāh which highlighted the way of preaching:

ادع الى سبيل ربك بالحكمة و الموعظة ل احسن.³⁴
“Call unto the way of their Lord with wisdom and for exhortation,
and reason with them in the better way.”

The strategy was based on:

1. Individual preaching.
2. Publical propogation.³⁵
3. Preaching by delegation
4. Fight with infidels
5. Sermons deliverence at week, on festivals and on special processions.³⁶
6. Communication through letters to other countries.³⁷

Ameer Ali, a celebrated author of Islamic history used his wits for Islam as being a liberal religion. He asserts that Christianity hide itself and at the time of progress of Islam they fabricated its notions. He remarked:

“Its remarkable success and marvellous effect upon the minds of men have given rise to the charge that, as a religion of the sword, Islam was promulgated by the sword and upheld by sword.”³⁸

He further asserts that Muhammad (peace be upon him) took such steps which clearly shows his perfect strategy of preaching among the Jews and Christians while his stay at Madinah. He said as:

“And planted germs of cordial relations among all believers; he proclaimed that a Jew, Sabeen or Christians, whoever believed in Allāh and future life and acted righteously.”³⁹

Muhammad (peace be upon him) never violated the command of the Qur’ān; as it was stated in that for relations with enemies:

“Defend yourself against your enemies; but attack them not first: Allāh hateth the aggressor.”⁴⁰

Orientalists manipulated the wars in the Prophet's life, Dr. Mehmood ul Hassan in 'Sirah Khairul Anam' asserts:

"It is fact that Islam is religion of peace and serenity in there was problem regarding security and the existence of Islam; then it was cpulsion to hold sword. The concept of war in Islam was for 'peace' not for brutality or for extension of State."⁴¹

Shibli Numani and Sayed Suleman Nadwi commented in the same strain about the force converion as:

"Religion is not a thing to force others. The first and foremost part of it is faith, faith is a name of believe and no one in the world can create cog of belief in man with force even not the sharp sword can create this feeling in the heart of man."⁴²

Pir Karam Shah asserts in this context:

"This was not the office of the the Prophet to submit theirselves for the cause of Islam but your task was to spread the light of revelation which shower upon your heart and his assignment was to differentiate between vice and virtue, he showed man two ways now it depends on him which one man selects."⁴³

These are the verdicts of Muslim scholars while Western authors also penned about this that Islam is a religion of propogating peace. Thomas carlyle asserts as:

"Much have been said of Mahomet's propagating his religion by the sword... the sword indeed: but where will you get your sword! Every new opinion, at its starting, is precisely in a minority of one. In one man's head alone, there it dewells as yet. One man alone of the whole world believes it; there is on eman against all men. That he takes a sword and try to propogate with that, will do little for him."⁴⁴

Professor Muhammad Virk asserts about this:

"Islam gets individuality among revealed and non- revealed religions inthis sense that it mentioned proper rules of preaching and communication and openly demonstrate the facts that religion has no concern with force conversion. Because it based on faith which is its essential part and no one can produced this thing in man with force."⁴⁵

The Qur'ānic passages and the wits of Muslim Scholars shows the wisdom engrossed in Islamic system. Any impartial analyst of facts come to know, how much the comment of Muir justified who states as:

“It was essential to the permanence of Islam that its aggressive course should be continuously pursued, and that its claim to an universal acceptance, or, at the least, to an universe supremacy, should be enforced at the point of the sword.”⁴⁶

Ameer Ali rightly said about this:

“Islam seized the sword in self defense, and held it in self defense, as it will ever do. But Islam never interfered with the dogmas of any moral faith, never persecuted, never established an inquisition. It never invented the rack or the stake for stifling difference of opinion, or strangling the human conscience, or exterminating heresy.”⁴⁷

It is clear that Muslims hold the sword in self defense for those who transgress its ways. Dr. Ata asserts for the tolerance of the the Prophet (peace be upon him) as:

“To attribute intolerance to such a noble soul as Muhammad (peace be upon him), who lived up to the Qur'ānic percepts throughout his life, is nothing but bigotry.”⁴⁸

Muir's next line of attack was on the wars which waged in the the Prophet's time. He alleged that the purposes of wars were to create the brutality and enforcement of violation is wrong. Qur'ān, clearly spot lights the purpose of wars in terms of Jihad in many passages as it is stated as:

و الفتنة اشد من القتل --- الآية⁴⁹

“For persecution is worst than slaughter, and fight not with them at the in violable place of worship untill they first attack you there.”

The Western Scholars also pointed to the Jihad. The purpose of Jihad also mentioned by Muhammad (peace be upon him) as Abdullah bin Umar asserts:

عن عبد الله بن عمرو: قال يا رسول الله: اخبرني ان جهاد و الغزو: فقال: يا عبد الله بن عمرو، ان قاتلت صبيرا محتسبا بعثك الله صابرا محتسبا و ان قاتلت مراثيا مكاثرا بعثك الله مراثيا مكاثرا⁵⁰.

It is also stated in the Qur'ān as:

و قاتلوا حتى لا تكون فتنة⁵¹

“Fight them untill persecution is no more.”

Dr.Khalifa Abdul Hakim asserts that religious communities criticized Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be tyrant for those who rejects the authenticity of Islam. He thus stated as:

“Muhammad (peace be upon him), from the beginning of his mission to the end of his life, encountered bitter hostility from idolators tribes and religious communities like the Jews.

When peaceful persuasion failed, force had to be empolyed.”⁵²

This war was not for collecting the booty but in the cause of Allāh. As it is clearly recorded in hadith of Bukhārī:

قال رسول الله: اذا هلك كسرى فلا كسرى بعده، و اذا هلك قيصر فلا قيصره بعده،
و الذى نفسى بيده لتنفن كنوزهما فى سبيل الله-⁵³

“Narrated Jābir bin Samura (llah be pleased with him): Allah’s messenger said, where Kḥosrau is ruined, there will be no Kḥosrau after him; and when Caesar is ruined, their will be no Caesar after him. By Him in which whose Hands my soul is, you will spend their treasures in Allah’s Cause.”

The same idea was mentioned in Sahi Bukhārī as:

عن ابي موسى: ان اعربنا ما الى رسول الله فقل: ان الرجل يقاتل للذكر، و يقاتل ليحمه،
و يقاتل ليغنم، ليرى مكانه؟ فقال رسول الله من اتل حتى تكون كلمة الله هى اعلى فهو
فى سبيل الله عزوجل-⁵⁴

Abdul Rahman asserts that:

“Whatever the Muslim got as the booty in Honein that was all distributed among the new converts. Moreover this, nothing was distributed among the people of Madinah and they distributed all the material items among these whose swords were still red with the blood of Muslims martyrs that was on excellent model of conversion.”⁵⁵

Muhammad (peace be upon him) set condition for the non-Muslims and if they followed that then they would be beneficiary. The conditions were as under:

1. The Messenger was sent to non-Muslim or to infidels to accept Islam. And fight for the cause of Islam.
2. If they are not accepting Islam, then at least, they must not hinder its way and pay the tax for their security.⁵⁶
3. If they reject the both conditions stated above and continuously creating problem in the mission of Muslims then Muslims will fight with them as Qur'ān says that:

و قاتلوا حتى لا تكون فتنة.⁵⁷

At the time of Fare well pilgrimage he declared that all previous traditions will be eradicate. It was stated in Qur'ān for Islam:

“Lo! Religion with Allāh (is) the surrounded (to His will and guidance).”⁵⁸

It was stated in Ibn Ishaq's 'The Life of Muhammad (peace be upon him)' as:

“Your blood and your property are sacrosanct untill you meet your Lord, as this day and month are holy... the first calim of blood I abolish is that of Rabi al Harith bin Abu Mutalib.”⁵⁹

Mulana Adrees Kandhalwi asserts that Islam is not for converting the people with force but this religion is for peace and for the security of the people and rendered dignity to them as well. He stated as:

“In Islam Muslim is called who accept Islamic doctrines and ideology not only by tongue but by heart and the person who accepts Islam. For under the fear or for any greed and lust, is basically not a Muslim but infidel. And it is obvious that belief and absolute acceptance is exactly the part and the parcel of Islam but it is rightly to say that it is reality. So no one can accept religion under force, not for lust and not for fear.”⁶⁰

The idea of holding sword in defense even promulgated in Christianity. As it is mentioned in it states in Joshua 8: 26 as:

“For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.”⁶¹

It was stated in the context of self-defense:

“And thou shalt stone him with stones that he dies; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord the Allāh, which brought thee out of that land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”⁶²

While Qur'ān asserts thus:

والفتنة اشد من القتل --- الآية⁶³

Ameer Ali asserts:

“Islam seized the sword in self-defense, and held it in a self-defense, as it will ever go. But Islam never interfered with the dogmas of any mortal faith, never persecuted, never established an inquisition. It never invented the rack or the stake for stifling differences of opinion or strangling the human conscience, or exterminating heresy.”⁶⁴

Muhammad Ahmed Béchamel said in his book ‘Conquest of Makkah’ that at that time all were expect leniency from the Prophet (peace be upon him); he not only forgave them all but showed extreme of forbearance and that was all due to the nature of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his strategy of converting them to Islam. He not only forgave them all but prayed for them as well.

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