CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES AND ISSUES OF ISLAM IN THE MODERN WORLD

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Abstract

Islam being the universal religion of peace and prosperity is facing many challenges and issues both externally as well internally. In the globalization Islam has to face the challenges and resolve the issues like external pressure of western countries- calling Muslims as terrorists, inter-religious conflicts (sects), social issues, socio economic issues, political issues at local and international level and individual issues of Muslims relating to their career.

Western countries through media trial and false propaganda have presented the negative picture of Islam all over the world and tried to prove Muslims as terrorists. Until and unless all the Muslims, all over the world, do not unite and face the western propaganda, the resolution of such issues will not be possible. The internal sectarian conflicts of Muslims have not only divided them but also weakened them to face the global challenges. As a result social and economical issues are being emerging making Muslims even weaker. Political disputes of Muslims and Muslim countries based on sectarian conflicts at national and internal level have added fuel into fire and made the Western propaganda against Islam even stronger.

In the presence of such unfavorable conditions, Muslim individuals are seeking their career in modern science and technology and paying more attention on western knowledge and culture. If this process remained continue for several years, it will be very difficult for Muslim families to

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survive and face the challenges and issues of Islam and Muslim especially living in western countries or even Muslim countries where one Muslim kills another Muslim due to sectarian conflict. The Muslims scholars and intellectuals should have to realize the internal threats to Islam in the shape of sectarian conflicts and take some measure and initiates to unite the Muslims before it is too late. The survival, growth and development of Muslims is not possible without making Muslims united.

Introduction

Islam, being the religion of peace and complete code of life, is facing many challenges and issues all over the world. After nine eleven incident Islam is being openly criticized directly or indirectly from all corners of the world especially European countries has called the Muslims as terrorists. The wave of tension between Christian and Muslims is not a recent issue. It is as old as Islam. In this regard Schantz (1993) affirms that "there have been tensions between Christians and Muslims since Islam emerged on the world scene 1400 years ago" (p. 443). However, challenges confronted to Islam from outside world (non-Muslims) can be justified by saying hostile attitude of the enemies of Islam but the issues within Islam (sectarian conflicts) has created real tension for Muslims round the world. On one side the image of Muslims is declining on international level and on other side social and economical issues are emerging making the condition of Muslims even more miserable.

The world is becoming a global village and moving towards secularism under the influence of science and technology. The growth and development has become very difficult without science and technology. People all over the world are shifting to science and technology. Even some Muslim countries have adapted secularism and some other countries are thinking about it for the economic

growth and development. Watson (1997) describes that "the Muslim communities with an emphasis on the secular ideology of politics, such as Turkey and Egypt, the general welfare is slightly better" (p. 2). He further adds that "the majority of Muslims live under governments with a qualified acceptance of a secular ideology" (p.2).

The Muslims countries following the western economic models, following European ideology and imparting education on the pattern of western world are making progress comparatively faster than other Muslim countries. The countries like Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Brunei etc following the western ideology are not only appreciated but also supported by western countries in different areas of growth and development. As a result they are in the race of growth and development. The living standard of people of these countries is also comparatively better than other Muslim countries.

On the contrary, the Islamic countries like Iran, Yemen, Iraq and Libya etc that do not follow western ideology are criticized harshly. They are neither appreciated nor supported at any level. Many Muslim countries are even sanctioned for their Islamic ideology. They are considered terrorists and are targeted on international level not only by European countries but the countries favoring secular ideology also oppose them. Such countries following Islamic ideology are by whom economically and politically poor and backward on international grounds.

In such circumstance, where Islamic countries are divided, more possibly due to sectarian difference, the growth and development of Muslims is not possible. Khatimi (1997) suggests that "Islamic countries 'should' undertake a comprehensive, precise, and scientific assessment and evaluation of their capabilities and capacities, and help create through utilization of their respective comparative advantages a ring of interconnected links of

complementary developmental undertakings across the Islamic world" (p. 4). It is usually said that united we stand separated we fall, so until and unless all the Muslim countries all over the world do not unite, the issues and challenges of Islam and Muslims will not be resolved.

Islam as a Religion of Peace or Violence

Is Islam a religion of peace or violent has ever been questioned throughout the history. Fuller (2010) describes that "is Islam inherently in conflict with democracy, with liberalism, with 'the West'? Or is Islam just a façade for the real issues that are at stake? This question has been asked and answered so many times in the past" (p. 336). He further asserts that the most answers of the intellectuals were in favour of Islam as a religion of peace. Yahya, H. (2002) argues that "in America, where there are some six million Muslims, Islam is said to be the nation's fastest growing religion, despite there being no systematic form of missionary work" (p.8). Islam did not have conflict with democracy, liberalization or West.

Ahmad (2007) describes that "Islam is portrayed today as a religion of violence. To call Islam a religion of violence is a contradiction in terms, for Islam means peace" (p. 19). Haddad (1997) adds that it is only "Islam's inherent flexibility, which has historically helped it to flourish and expand, has assured its survival in the very different social and cultural environment of the United States" (p.7). Similarly, many intellectuals and scholars quoting the verses of holy Quran and saying of prophet (PBUH) believe that Islam promotes peace, brotherhood and prosperity.

However the opponent also giving the reference of Quran, Hadith and history argue that Islam promotes violence. In this regard Azumbah (2010) describes that "the question however remains, as to whether Islam as a religion is intrinsically violent. There are lots of ambiguities in the Quran as well as Muslim tradition and history on the issue of violence" (p. 85). He further says that those who believe

that Islam promotes violence quote this verse of holy Quran "so when you meet those who disbelieve smite at their necks till you have killed and wounded many of them" (Al-Quran, Surah, Muhammad, verse, 4). Landscheidt and Wollny (2004) add that the majority of the people are unable to understand Islam properly due to its ambiguity. At one place "the Islamic law includes the cut of extremities as punishment for committing. On the other hand Islam means peace and submission to God" (p.1).

Additionally, Azumbah (2010) asserts that all Muslims are not peace loving. No doubt "there are Muslims who assert and genuinely believe that Islam is a religion of peace, while there are others whose discourse and activities proclaim the opposite" (p. 85). Islam is being targeted because of the adverse actions of such fundamentalists.

Contrary to this, Schantz (1993) describes that "Islam is a holistic religion, a complete way of life, which encompasses not only religion, but also business, politics, law, education, human relationships, and family" (p. 447). To sum up, Islam, being the universal religion of peace and complete code of life, covers all the areas of life. For the sustainable peace and justice, Islam commands to crush the cruelty and promote sympathy to all.

Islam and Terrorism

Islam is a religion of peace. Yahya (2002) describes that "Islam forbids terrorism and aims to bring peace and security to the world" (p. 17). He further states that "terror 'is' murder of innocent people 'and' in Islam it is a great sin, and Muslims are responsible for preventing these acts and bringing peace and justice to the world" (p. 18). Naik (2008) adds that Islam has not any connection with terrorism. It is only a false propaganda and misinformation against Islam. Islam keeps peace and justice at top priority. The people who disturb peace and justice for their own material interests are strictly disliked and punished in Islam. Allah commands in Holy Quran that "and what is wrong with you that you fight not in the cause of

Allah and for those weak, ill-treated and oppressed among men, women and children, whose cry is: "Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors" (Al-Quran, Surah Nisa, verse, 75). Muslims always fight against injustice and cruelty for the sake of peace and prosperity. Describing nine eleven terrorist crime Yahya (2002) affirms that it "may have been the work of some misled individuals, it was certainly not the product of Islam. Islam is a religion that preaches peace, compassion, justice, and frowns upon suicide" (p. 9). There is misconception about Jihad in Western countries. Yahya (2002) further adds that "in the West, the term jihad has come to be known as something wholly negative" (p. 11). They connect jihad with terrorism. But fact is that jihad is nothing but a war against those who disturb peace and justice. Jihad is not against innocent. Islam does not allow any body to threaten the others irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Holy prophet (PBUH) says "A Muslim is the one who avoids harming others with his tongue or his hands" (Ibin-Ismail, 2000).

Islam strictly forbids Muslims to spread terror or hurt anybody. It is nothing more than an absurd myth repeated by historians that Islam is spread by sword (Leary, 1923: 8). Islam does not allow Muslims to change the religion of others through force. Allah says in Holy Quran that "let there be no compulsion in religion" (Al-Quran, Surah, Al-Bakarh, verse, 256). However, the misconception propagated by western media which connects Islam with terrorism is an issue that needs to be resolved for the progress of Muslims all over the world.

Islam and Different Sects

One of the greatest internal issues of Islam is sectarianism. Muslims are divided into sects and each sect has its own contradictory thinking. Sectarianism is an act against Islam. It is a process of supporting one's ideology on account of violating everything like law, justice and peace. Islam has strictly forbidden Sectarianism.

When their Allah, the prophet and Quran are same, then how could they be opponent to each other. In some cases they behave like enemies. Irrespective of the fact that Allah and His Prophet (PBUH) have commanded Muslims to be united, yet the division of Muslims into sects is beyond understanding. Allah say in Quran, "and hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves" (Al-Quran, Sura Al-e-Imran, verse, 103). In Sura Hugurat of Quran, Allah says that "the believers are but a single brotherhood: so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy" (Al-Quran, Surah Hugurat, verse 10). Similarly the Prophet (PBUH) says in a Hadith "the Muslims are like a body; if one limb aches, the whole body aches" (Ibin-Ismail, 2000). At other place the messenger of Allah says that "the Muslims are like the teeth of a comb" " (Ibin-Ismail, 2000).

The history shows that philosopher may have different views regarding social or economical issues. Even teachers and students in past had opponent views on different issues and they hold different schools of thought but they did not hate each other. They were respecting each other irrespective of having opposite arguments on the theory. There was intellectual difference between Plato and Aristotle, Bergson and Hegel and so on but they did not say anything personal against each other. Furthermore idealism, realism, functionalism, rationalism, progressivism and Marxism also differed from each other but there was no dispute among the followers of these philosophies.

Then why do Muslims, following same religion, having one God, prophet and book not only hate each other but also indulge and promote violence against each other. By doing so, they not only defame Islam but also destroy their social, economical and moral values. Rather than to make growth and development they move in reverse direction. Now a day, a Muslim does not tell "I am Muslim" but he tells directly his sect. if anybody tells that he is Muslim, none

believes until he tells about his sect. In this way, once a very strong nation in past – Muslim nation has been divided and became very weak and miserable.

Islam, Science and Technology

It is doubtless that Islam is a complete code of life and Quran is a complete revealed book, covering all the aspects of life. The solution of all the issues and challenges of mankind is available in Quran. Quran is equally beneficial for all people of all the ages (periods) living in any area of the world. But now the question raises, how many people understand Islam and Quran. Allah says in Quran that "and the messenger (Muhammad) will say: O my Lord! Verily, my people deserted this Quran (neither listened to it nor acted on its laws and teachings)." Al-Quran, Surah Furqan, verse 30).

Quran is in Arabic language and majority of Muslims are non-Arabs. Furthermore, non-Arab majority have been misguided that reading of Quran is obligatory whether they understand or not. In this regards Desai (2001) describes that "many people read Quran without translation and know 'nothing' of what Allah is saying to them. They insist that there is a special effect of the words and that the recitation of Quran and its virtue is unmatchable" (para. 2). Reading Quran without understanding is common in most of countries of the world. As a result majority of Muslims read or memorize Quran like a parrot but having not understood, the real benefits of Quran are not availed.

Now a day, Quran is only the authentic source of Islam and when majority do not understand Quran, how can it be possible that they may understand Islam. In that case, Muslims always follow few learned people who for the sake of their own material benefits make the misuse of their knowledge. As a result, rather than to unite Muslims at one platform, those learned people try to influence and dominate different groups according to their own understanding and benefits. They often propagate against other groups of Islam by

saying that they are right while all the other groups are wrong. They often dispute and fight on minor human problems making the dogmas of Islam contradictory. The differences, created by those few learned people, based on the ignorance of majority of Muslims, due to reading Quran without understanding, have caused the Muslims divided into different sects. These differences are made so rigid and inflexible that Muslims of different sects rather than to face external issues and challenges fight with each other.

On one side, Majority of Muslims does not understand Islam and Quran properly. On the other side progress of science and technology has attracted the Muslims for their better future and living standard. The people equipped with science and technologies lead a life comparatively better than others. In such circumstance, parents rather than to send their children to a religious institution prefer to send their children to an organization imparting secular education.

To sum up, Muslims have closed their doors leading to Islam and Quran. Rather than to read Quran with understanding and making their routine decisions in the light of Islam and Quran by themselves, they depend upon few religious clerks and practitioners (scholars) that make the misuse of Muslims for their own material benefits. The progress of science and technology has also attracted many Muslims for better future and living standard.

Conclusion

Muslims, once being very strong and united, are becoming weak and neglected due to their internal conflicts and external pressures. The division of Muslims into sects has provided an opportunity to enemies of Islam to defame the noble religion through media trial and false propaganda. Islam is being criticized all over the world due to indefensible misdeed of Muslims who do not follow the

commands of God and teaching of His prophet (PBUH) regarding universal unity and brotherhood.

Majority of Muslims neither understand Islam nor Quran. They often recite Quran without understanding. The reciting of Quran without understanding is not beneficial for Muslims regarding understanding of Islam. In such circumstance, majority of Muslims are at the mercy of few religious clerks who disobeying Allah and His prophet divide Muslims into sects. Until and unless Muslims do not recite Quran with understanding, gain complete knowledge about Islam and follow what is commanded in Quran, facing of challenges and solution of issues of Islam is not possible.

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