

ISLAMIZATION OR DEMOCRATIZATION?

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The Islamization process in Pakistan has not yet started.; the process of de-Islamization has been initiated instead. To substantiate my point I will have, first of all, to define the word "Islam" itself. What we have been taught about Islam from our childhood is that Islam is a hereditary religion, meaning thereby that we have the privilege of being Muslims by birth, not by acquiescence. Similarly a certain class of religious leaders (clerics) have risen among the Muslims who have classified themselves as "*ulema*", but because of their negative, retrogressive and anti-people role people call them "*mullas*". This class has of late developed itself into a political force. Previously it was a class performing religious rites, imparting religious education and giving religious sermons, but lately it has started meddling in politics by forming political parties on religious and sectarian bases, while insisting on acquiring for themselves the right to solely interpret the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and, on the basis of their faulty interpretations, to make laws for the country. *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Islam*, *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Pakistan*, *Jamiat-e-Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Jamiat-ul-Mashaikh* are such sectarian parties. The principal, however, for forming political parties is that their members should be from the various section of society, irrespective of race, creed or religion, and that they should be formed on the basis of programmes for solving the dire problems faced by the people. This principle has been ignored altogether by political leaders as well as governments.

There is a basic difference between "faith" and "religion" that needs to be understood well. Faith, in fact, means a way of life (*deen*) that all the Prophets advocated for the guidance of humankind viz., "firm belief in God and service to humanity" (not to born Muslims alone but to all peoples). Religions, on the other hand, are man-tailored; they were formed mainly by the vested interests after the Prophets had left the world. Even at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) various religions existed which the people had inherited from the past, and he had to struggle against the elite of those religious communities who had formed themselves into powerful groups of vested interests.. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not put forth a new religion of his own; he

only repeated what the earlier Prophets had professed of which the basis call was "*La-Ilaha-illillah*". This "*kalima*" bestows the highest form of freedom that can be awarded to man. It means that there is only one God before whom one should bow and pray to, and accept willingly His commands, and not yield to lordship of any other being or person..Even at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) various religions existed which were inherited from the past, and he had to struggle hard against the religious elite who had formed themselves into powerful groups of vested interests. He did not put forth a new religion of his own; he only repeated what the other Prophets of God had professed viz., *La Ilaha-illillah*. This *kalima* bestows the highest form of freedom that can possibly be awarded to man. It means that there is only one God and before Him alone one should bow and pray to, and accept without any hesitation, and willfully, His commands. But what we as Muslims have inherited from the past, in the name of Islam, is not the way of life taught by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other Prophets of Islam but the wrong concept of Islam developed by the Arab monarchs after the four bonafide caliphs of Islam. The Arab imperialism devised by them gave up the democratic approach of governance of the caliphs. Instead of educating the people about the Islamic principles of life derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, they concentrated on teaching them how to say their prayers and how to perform ablutions and other things pertaining to rituals alone. They tried to popularize the narrow concept of religion in order to safeguard their own interests. They arranged to concoct false *ahadith* and gave recognition to various sects. If any *hadith* fits in the true and simple interpretation of the Qur'an it will of course help in understanding Islam. But the clerics mainly use *ahadith*, and very little of the Quranic verses, in their sermons because they are more interested in cooking up stories before their audience rather than placing the teachings of the Islamic faith before it. Faith (*deen*) unifies people of different religions for working for the betterment of the people of all religions, whereas religions divide people into incompatible and antagonist groups. No matter how many diverse concepts may exist, the fact remains that the destiny of human beings lies in unity, development and prosperity of humanity. We shall have to work very hard to achieve all this, and remove all confusions of thought and ideology, no matter to which religious group we may belong. Future unity of humankind, however, lies in unifying our thoughts on the basis of faith, not on

the basis of religion. Religious tolerance should be practiced steadfastly in any case.

Islamization has been used as a political slogan in Pakistan, as it has been used elsewhere in the world in past history. According to democratic principles, which of course Islam too upholds, the people are the deciding factor in any matter of thought or action in the social, political and economic and other fields. But the people in the Muslim world have been deprived of knowledge and kept ignorant. This is criminal negligence on the part of our leaders. Another important factor is that there is immense centralization of state power whereas we need to devolve power right up to the grassroots level, without which we cannot progress. Islamization is being used as a mere slogan to hoodwink the masses. Prophet Abraham called himself a "Muslim", and "Islam" is the name given by God to the way of life adopted by all the Prophets. Islam is not a different cult from the other faiths, and certainly not exclusive for the followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Islam, therefore, should be introduced as the faith of all the Prophets (*deen-e-ambia*) as it embodies the same principles as were introduced by the rest of the Prophets in various parts of the world..

The process of democratization should, therefore, be initiated in Pakistan instead of adopting the so-called Islamization process. One of the basic things in the democratic approach (which is none other than the Islamic approach) is that all the people living in a country (be it Pakistan, India or any other country) should be considered as members of a single nation. The religious communities in Arabia formed part of the Arab nation at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Christians, the Jews and other communities were considered as part of the *Millat-e-Islamia*. In view of this the imposition of the "Shariat Bill" and the setting up of "Shariat Courts" under cover of the Islamization process is not a move in the right direction. In this way the Shariat Courts will be used to impose such laws as are discriminatory to women and minorities, and are bound to serve the vested interests of the landed aristocracy and the barons of trade and industry as against the interests of the tenants and the industrial and trade workers and the poor and oppressed masses.

We must remember that the basic question is always that of changing the oppressive system of governance and, through it, the socio-economic structure of the society. Soon after the creation of Pakistan the landed aristocracy and the bureaucracy had together

usurped the state power and gained control of the lands and other means of production. They had also acquired the services of the religious elite, who had opposed the creation of Pakistan tooth and nail, to maintain their hold over the country's resources and to control the people. They will never allow, on their own, democracy or Islam to secure firm roots in Pakistan. Therefore, those who are serious about Islam or democracy will have to come forward to dismantle the existing socio-economic structure. There are two ways of doing this: one is through a bloody revolution; the other is through the democratic process. One should believe in a democratic process, however difficult it may be, because in a democratic process you do suffer at the hands of the vested interests in power but at the same time you educate not only yourself but the majority of the people of the lower and middle classes that matter the most in democracy; it is their votes that open the gates to the assemblies and lead to the assumption of power. It is time way engage ourselves in the process of bringing about a radical change in the electoral system that will enable suitable candidates from the lower and middle classes to participate in elections and reach the assemblies. This process will take some time to mature but it should be initiated anyway.

The problem being faced by us is how to coordinate to bring about the required human force that could capture state power, and work for the benefit of the people. The only viable way seems to be to first of all form a group of committed intellectuals, with a practical approach, for preparing well-researched treatises on Pakistan's core issues, and creating a strong lobby among politicians in the government and the opposition as well as other effective members of the society. The next stage will be that of forming a political party of politically conscious individuals with a clean background, both men and women, who will go to form the nucleus for a new and capable leadership suitable for handling the arduous task of national reconstruction. Such a task will have to be undertaken if Pakistan is to play a major role among the comity of nations in future, for giving these nations a sound purpose and a right direction to follow.

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