Muslim World and Urgency for a Unanimous Political System

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Introduction:

If the problems of the Muslim world are counted then the list will just go on and it would be difficult to remain definite about their count and names. Some problems are common at the global level, shared by non-majority Muslim states as well, and some are particularly about the Muslim world. However, the only problem which is the root cause of many problems in the contemporary Muslim world and in its history is the political one.

Historical Roots:

The political problem in Islamic history goes back to the time when the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) rested in peace. The first gathering of people with different views without any conflict assembled in *Saqifah Bani Saidah* : a shed where the disciples of the Prophet assembled to discuss the appointment of the ruler, *khalifa* (caliph). However, since the generation of Muslims at that time included the earliest Muslims, *saabequunnal-avvaluun*, and the noble disciples of the Messenger who had rendered great sacrifices for Islam and were at the highest level of faith and purity, therefore, appointing (by *tawliyah*), selecting (by *shura*), and accepting (by *biaah*) a ruler for the greater good of the community, *Ummah*, did , in fact, require some consultations and brave decisions, yet it remained free of any dispute, conflict, bloodshed, and division and sectarianisation of the community, *ummah*.

The first four rulers, *khalif*, of Muslims, Abu Bakr, Ummar bin Khattab, Osman bin Affan, and Ali ibn Talib (May Allah be pleased with them.) are the best examples of statesmanship in Islam after the Messenger (PBUH). A complete political philosophy of Islam could be constructed from the Quran, the Sunnah, and the history of the above-mentioned early four rulers, *khalifahs*.

After the end of early khilafah, *al-Khilāfah ar-Rāshidah*, which lasted for 30 years, until today, the governance in Muslim world took many forms and shapes including dictatorships, dynastical regimes as monarchical systems, democracy, republican system etc. Though these systems did not match the quality of a state to be a very true of an Islamic philosophy of governance,

howsoever, despite a number of shortcomings, many good developments happened and the history is packed with lot of great advances that Muslims made in all areas that an establishment of a civilization requires such as knowledge, science, architecture, social justice, governance, trade etc. These developments took place because, on one hand, the Islamic spiritual values and worldview was at work, and the other hand, the civilizational needs of Muslims made it necessary.

Most Disturbing Side of Muslim History:

In the history of every empire, state, and civilization there are events and ideas that could be criticized from various angles. What has gone right and wrong about every civilization is subject of many academic works. Muslim civilization is not any different in this regard. However, the most disturbing side of Muslim civilization in its history is political. And it has been a problem and continues to remain the main problem of the contemporary Muslim world. What this main problem is could be actually stated in a question: Who should rule and by what right?

Western Solution:

Other cultures and civilizations including Western civilization had the same problem. The long history of the Western civilization also grappled with the same question. Nevertheless, the West was able to reach at some conclusion on this question, so did other civilizations and cultures and of course in their own way. The West agreed on liberal democracy under republican and constitutional monarchical systems and this solution became popular in the East as well and it replaced even Communism, the strongest rival of Western democracy and capitalism during the Cold War, therefore, Francis Fukuyama thinks that the liberal democracy is the “end of history”.

By resolving the above question, the West and other cultures got rid of internal conflicts and hence they could focus on institutionalization and economy. The West particularly and its followers in the East such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore were able by political stabilization to weed out many evils such as corruption, empowering the institutions, developing educational and scientific institutions, training their citizens, and improving their economies. The political solution in the West also helped in arresting the

polarization of the society and ended the evils of religious sectarianism. It also helped in fair selection of right people for the right job for the greater good of the society and did not lose sight of their own national interests. The most important thing is that makes Western civilization possible and alive today is that the whole Western world is unanimous on this solution. Even those Eastern countries which follow the Western footprint are now included in the Western civilization when the question is asked about what geographical part of the contemporary world could be named as the West. This unanimity and consensus has come with great benefits to these countries. It has made their cooperation easy and has, therefore, brought them closer; in this regard, the European Union could be said is the best example of the regional cooperation and integration in the present world.

Question in Muslim History:

The political issue - who should rule and by what right -is present in the Muslim history since the sad demise of the Prophet (PBUH). The early solutions which are present in the history of the *khilafah* that lasted for thirty great years show- that there were three forms: (1) selection with public support in the form of *biaah*, giving pledge at the same time, this is present in the cases of the appointment of Abu Bakar and Ali, (2) appointment (*tawliyah*) with delayed *biaah* , this is present in the case of Ummar ibn Khatab (3) consultation (*shura*), selection by consultation with delayed *biaah*, this is present in the case of Usman ibn Affan. What is common in all these three forms of appointing a ruler is *biaah*, giving pledge, which simply means the community accepts the ruler, and the acceptance is voluntary, in such a majority or overwhelming way that it would be hard to say that the ruler was a tyrant. And this is very true in the history of the *khilafah*. As a surprise, *biaah*, giving pledge, in other words the public acceptance and approval was always thought as the main principal of legitimacy for being a ruler. That is why after the fall of early *khilafah*, the succeeding regimes persuaded, motivated, and campaigned for receiving the public support in the symbolic form of *biaah* from public, sometimes the regimes even used influence and sometimes they even took the pledge by force. This obviously shows the democratic nature of the political philosophy of Muslims.

After the end of the *khilafah*, Muslim history became politically a history of dynasties. Despite unnecessary bloodshed now and then there appeared many pious rulers time to time. Though

they could not change the political system, yet they ruled justly and contributed to the development of the Muslim civilization. One can read all that what happened in a good history book and find critically what was good and where things went wrong. Howsoever, in spite of many developments, the political question remained, but not many were interested to address it, as they had got used to dynastical regimes and monarchical systems.

The question reemerged in Muslim history in the Modernity when the colonialism ended and Muslim majority lands emerged as countries, some of them according to the designs of colonial powers. Muslims in their countries, in addition to other issues, faced the issue of rulership and political system. The Muslim world ended into frustration in all important areas such as legal system, educational system, and politics. Regarding the political system, the question, who should rule and by what right, is not yet resolved. Though in a few Muslim countries it seems that the question is resolved with the pleasure of the majority of the people, however, the fragility of its stability could not be underestimated.

Baggage of the Unresolved Question:

After the end of early khilafat that lasted for thirty years, the question of selecting a ruler remained unresolved. Might is right worked most of the time when one family toppled other one. No doubt that there appeared time to time many good rulers who ruled justly and set good examples in governance and focused on the development of Muslim civilization. However, the baggage which came with the unresolved question has not been empty, and it is still hurting the interests of Muslims. The worst consequence of it came as sectarianism and polarization of Muslim community.

Sectarianism:

Sectarianism in Muslim history rose after the end of *khilafah*. The root cause of this sectarianism was the same political question. The different opinions on theological issues were also watered and nourished by the politics to use them as tools in political manipulation. This could be seen in the issue of discord between *qadariyah* and *murjiah* how this difference was used politically to justify the status quo. On the other hand, the *muataẓilah* thought was used later on to crush the contestants and so on and so forth.

However, the division of Muslim ummah into three sects that are present even today came out clearly from the political tension and dispute on the selection of the political leadership. These sects are Sunni, Shia, and Khawarj, now known as *Abaadiah*. Though *Abaadiah* are a small minority, the actual and far-reaching division in regards to political and social consequences is between Sunni and Shias.

Leaving out the history prior to a few decades, one can see how the division played out between Sunnis and Shias during the Iran-Iraq War, Gulf war, and the Arab Spring. The devastation and bloodshed remains unending till the day, and who knows if the question is not addressed with broad-mindedness, how this division will play out in the future of the Muslim world and particularly in the future of the Middle East.

The countries where Sunnis and Shias live together show the presence of violence and discrimination against each other. Sunnis in Iran and Shias in Saudi Arabia blame their governments for mistreatment and discrimination. The struggle and conflict like a civil war between Shias and Sunnis is present in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and the discrimination against each other happens in many other countries as well.

On the other hand, those who are in power use the sectarianism and fuel it time to time to stay in power unquestionably without coming up a solution that could resolve the problem. The basic fault in their way is disregard for public representation, equality before law, and equal opportunity; and supporting absolute monarchy and dictatorship.

Common Sense:

In many Muslim countries Shias and Sunnis live together with varied ratios. The common sense tells us that they are as many that even they go out to kill each other that would not make them extinct. They both will remain. Therefore, they have no choice but to live together. The only thing remains that they have to find out how to live with each other and, most importantly, they need to resolve the basic political question. Instead of autocratic systems, these countries are in need to move to public representation and constitutionalism. No doubt that some of the influential Muslim countries are still under absolute monarchies. These countries are in need to adopt the constitutional monarchical system. Sometime, I wonder if Kadafi of Libya, Saddam

Husain of Iraq, and Bashar of Syria had given way to public representation and had themselves remained as constitutional monarchs perhaps what happened and is happening might had not happened. During Arab Spring, the best example remained of Morocco in which the monarchy was able to address the political issue with wisdom without any bloodshed.

Muslim World in Need of a Unanimous Political System

Beside the Shia-Sunni division in Muslim world, there is tension between autocratic systems and democratic movements; the toppling of *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen* government led by Mr. Mursi by General Sisi is a clear example of this tension. And the support and help that general Sisi received from various Gulf States is not hidden. The autocratic systems in the Middle East are afraid of democratic movements such as *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen*. This tension has further divided Sunni Muslims among themselves and power and politics is at the root of this polarization. Loyalists of *Ikhwan* who were favored by these states until yesterday have become suspects and are treated as enemies, their books are banned, and their movement is being watched. Under the cover of *Aqeedah* (creed) and the selected references to *salfi-salah* (early Muslims) every voice for reformation and the political question is being suppressed. The people in power have whole machinery on disposal that uses propaganda covered under theological canvas. By refereeing to just *Aqidah*, a narrow vision of Islam is being portrayed and criticizing the reformists and political movements is being made easy and digestible by criticizing them while applying those principles of *Aqidah* which are secondary, debatable, biased, and do not count as the test-stone or criteria for being a Muslim. On the other hand, selected references to *salfi-salah* (early Muslims) are also being used as tools. And one of their example that is very useful to the interested parties is that *salf-salah* were very virtuous and did not offer any opposition to the ruling class and system. They were not behind any political uprising and famous political movements. It is historically true about the *salf-salah* who dedicated themselves to scholarship (*ilm*), worship (*ibadah*) and self-purification (*tazkiyah*). But these interested parties lose sight of the fact that how *salf-salah* were treated by the regimes, how many of them were threatened, and how many were jailed and punished. To illustrate this they should wonder where Imam Abu Hanifa (RA) died, how he died, and what his political views were? And how many of them, *salaf-salah*, remained away from political issues because of being

afraid of getting wasted and therefore dedicated themselves to the scholarship, seclusion, and worship (*ibadah*).

How Common People are Being Misled:

The common people are misled in many ways to stay away from questioning the political system. Public representation and equality before law is being rejected on the grounds that democracy and Shariah law cannot go together. And it is only the autocratic system that can ensure that Shariah is implemented. This happens in one part of the Muslim world, and in another part, if Islamists win elections in democratic ways, they are being victimized and ousted from the power or remain in constant threat from internal forces, sometimes of army and sometimes of the opposition, on the grounds that Islamic democrats may do away with democratic values itself.

Many arguments could be made for and against the contesting forces. However, in short, to escape any foolishness, the constitutional democracy is the solution. It is the best choice to balance the Shariah and democratic values which should be in consistency with the spirit of Islam as well. Constitutional democracy whether under republican system or constitutional monarchical system could make a good base and foundation for mutual trust and confidence.

Unanimity in Politics:

Muslim world at the moment is working against its own interests. Outside forces easily find ways to manipulate them. However, the internal side is more crucial and bears the blame for the most of the devastation and instability.

Powerful Muslim nations interfere in the internal affairs of other weaker and needy Muslim countries. Any reformation and change in one Muslim country is conceived as a threat to other Muslim nations. The democratic win of Ikhwan-ul-Muslemeen was obviously conceived a threat to political systems and regimes in the Middle East. Therefore, general Sisi had all the support on disposal. In the same way, the Iranian Revolution long before was treated a threat to political systems and Saddam Hussain, then with support from the most Middle Eastern nations, stood against Iran and helped in putting block to the spread of the revolution which , in fact, was a symbolic and inspiring win of people in democratic way against an authoritarian ruler.

Back then many students of theology were used to criticize Iranian revolution as propaganda. Now during and after Arab Spring, the same criticism is being made of Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen. At the root of all this, is a very less amount of spirit for an honest theological discourse and more about how to help those in power to remain in power and how to frustrate public opinion regarding the political change.

The above situation has made sovereignty of Muslim countries fragile and weak. A nation after long suffering and struggle may become able to change its course, but what if the neighbor is not happy with it. This is very catastrophic.

To overcome the above problems, Muslim world is in need of unanimity in politics and political systems. So they will not conceive each other a threat. The unanimity is possible only by constitutional democracy. The constitution guarantees the basic law, rights, liberties, and checks and balances in the system. And democracy is of use to make public representation possible and changing hands on power time to time by public franchise without any bloodshed and revolution. This solution will face less trouble and complications in the countries which are free from monarchies. Whereas, it can face more trouble and complications in the countries under absolute monarchies; however, any political movement in such countries may receive sympathy from the governments if they choose constitutional monarchy as their political goal. And this choice will save people from bloodshed in making the desired political transformation possible.

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