

The Social Reformist Impetus of Islam as Reflected in Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's Holistic Discourse: a Critical Study

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Abstract:

Islam aims at eradication of social evils of the period of ignorance and uplift of humanity. For this purpose, the messenger of God bore colossal hardships and sacrificed the comfort of his life. After his demise, the four rightly guided caliphs carried on his mission and put in force justice and equality. They never let someone do business of immorality and wickedness. They administer the affairs of their governments with immense excellence that the worst foes of Islam were self-compelled to admire their administrative systems. After thirty years of the caliphate, the period of monarchy came from where social collapse started. The battles between various tribes for the cause of attaining power wounded social and moral values severely. In these battles, the role of religious scholars always remained very vital. The monarchs utilized religious offices for personal benefits to secure administrative power. They hardly allowed themselves to sketch the true face of Islam in front of the public. In the struggle for power, the deprivation of religious class had been intensified so rapidly that they left the presentation of the social aspect of Islam. Now, the situation has become worst and there are hardly a few religious scholars who do not use Islam for personal uplift. Due to such dearth, the condition of human values in Muslim societies has become the poorest. There are huge crowds in religious places but a deficiency in the promotion of human values. Impatience, injustice, and dishonesty are very

common in society. Even blood relations do not respect each other and involve in mutual exploitation. Now, it is time to revive the true spirit of Islam in which people have respect for human values. For this purpose, the role of our religious scholars is very important. Unfortunately, most of them do not realize the need of situation and hence, do not effort for such a purpose. At the same time, there are few ones, who think that Islam cannot be revived till the revival of its true spirit. Among these Muslim scholars, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan has a significant place. He always promoted a soft image of Islam and advocated human values. The study in hand is an estimate of the efforts of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan as a benchmark in the modern Islamic era. He set an excellent example for his contemporaries and followers.

Keywords:

Spirit of Islam, Revival, Moral Values, Social Responsibilities, Bargaining, Footsteps, Human Desires, Worship, Mercy

Full Text:

Islam advocates a collective way of life in the light of the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). These teachings cover the whole program of life on earth and are technically termed as 'the complete code of life, leading towards the prime goal of developing a peace-loving society based on mutual respect and cooperation. Islam has dignified a human being through the title of *Ashraf-ul-Makhlūqat* (the noblest among all the creatures); and highlighted all the factors that affect human status negatively (*The Holy Quran*, 17:70). These factors are called social evils; and include selfishness, greediness, stinginess, inequality, injustice, etc. A dignified person never indulges in such activities and promotes human values.

Today, our existing society is facing numerous social glitches which are harmful to social peace and harmony. The Holy Quran and Sunnah offer a universal solution for each and every social anomaly. But unfortunately, most of our humans do not pay attention to these fundamental sources. And for this reason, social problems are increasing rapidly. At this stage, the verdict of Allah is ordained as the change in conditions of nations is subject to the initiative taken by them in this direction (*The Holy Quran*, 13:11).

It clearly connotes towards collective human attitude. If a particular society aims to eliminate social glitches, people of that society will have to take responsibility and make a potent effort to better their manners. Less capable, in the light of Quranic injunctions, are assisted by the fully

capable people. On continuum; a vast number of verses in the Holy Quran undertake human responsibilities in different circumstances. For example, it says:

“Worship God and do not associate anyone with Him; and do well to parents, relative, orphans, needy, neighbors who reside near, and who reside away, companions at your side, travelers, and whom your hands possess. Certainly, God does not like those who are arrogant and narcissistic.”

(*The Holy Quran*, 4:36).

The above verse clearly shows that where worship is compulsory for human success, there are some other social responsibilities equally important for it. In this case, the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is the best example. He was very sensitive towards social and moral responsibilities. There are various *ahadith* (sayings) in which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) stressed social and moral obligations and termed those who benefit others as ‘best amongst humankind’ (*Al Mu’jam al-Awsat*, Hadith No. 5937). In all his life, His solution-oriented approach towards issues and challenges of life bade Him help the needy and side with the poor and the wrecked ones. It is reported that once a slave was grinding some grain by mill grinder. He was very uneasy at doing his job and crying bitterly. When the Holy Prophet (PBUH) took a look at him, he immediately asked the reason behind his howling. He answered, “I am ill and cannot grind the grain but my chief is ferocious. He will beat me if I will not complete my work.” The Holy Prophet (PBUH) came to him, took the charge of the grinder, and ground the rest of the grain (Arshad, 1983). Then he offered to call him any time if needed. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) lived his whole life in helping others and advocating it for humanity. When the Holy Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina along with his companions, Muslims had nothing to live in this new city. In such a challenging situation, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) did not lose heart and set standards for conviction. He gathered the entire Muslim community at the house of Anas Bin Malik and appointed ninety Muslims, forty-five from Ansar (locals) and the remaining forty-five from Muhajrin (migrants) as brothers. They showed an excellent demonstration of brotherhood and not only shared their business but sacrificed their properties (Azzam, 1999). They also established that leader of each family in Medina would accommodate a migrant Muslim family with the residence. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) also negotiated the constitution of Medina with local clans for the sake of peace and laid the foundation of a welfare Muslim state. This state helped Muslims in proving themselves a social-political entity that later ruled over the world by

defeating two world superpowers i.e., Romans and Persians. This is the actual face of Islam but is hardly discussed in religious meetings.

It is obvious that the nations cannot progress until human values are restored. The conduct of citizens plays a vital in the development of societies. If people are cooperative, sensitive towards humanity, and well mannered, they can overcome every difficulty. But if contrarily, they are selfish, egoistic, and manners less, society becomes a place of obstacles. For this reason, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) promoted high moral values throughout his life. He was a symbol of integrity as stated in Holy Quran; and hence, his companions had no issue at all to demonstrate morality. When he came to Medina after migration, there was a shortage of drinking water in the city. There was only a single well of drinking water called Bir Ruma. It was a property of a Jewish. He used to sell the water at a very heavy cost. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was so caring towards Muslims that he often becomes dejected at the misery of Muslims. One day he addressed his companions and offered: if someone would buy this well and endow it in the path of God, he can get according to his wish in Paradise. Hazrat Uthman immediately accepted the offer (Al-Sabai, 2012). The Jewish was not agreeing to sell it as he used to earn a very heavy amount of income from the well. Hazrat Uthman continued bargaining on several days and at least succeeded in purchasing the well at a very high cost. He paid twelve thousand dirhams for the first half of the well and eight thousand dirhams for the second half of the well. This was the true spirit of Islam for which it came. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) kept this spirit intact in his whole life. For this reason, he always overcame obstacles whenever they arose.

Today, unfortunately, Muslims are facing a disastrous situation. The fundamental cause behind this debacle does not lack worship activities as mosques are full of worshipers. The main cause of this catastrophe lies in disregard for social and moral responsibilities. If Muslims would follow the footsteps of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), they could achieve respect and regard in the entire world. But they exhibited a materialistic approach (Khan, 1995). They started taking Islam as a religion that can only be enforced in mosques and not outside. Consequently, they practically parted their ways from the only eternal religion.

In this awful ambiance, it was a liability of our religious leaders to correct the minds of astray and realize the importance of social and moral responsibilities. Unfortunately, materialism has also affected many of our religious sages; hence, most Muslims scholars do not discuss the real

face of Islam too. They use Islamic identity to accomplish their personal goals. So, time demands someone to take responsibility. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is one of the very few Islamic scholars who feel the need for the revival of true Islamic identity in times of crisis. His teachings are based on the true spirit of Islam. He presented a soft image of Islam which deals with entire human issues. He wrote over 250 books which are available in five different languages. He started to publish a monthly magazine in Urdu named '*Al-Risala*' which had been continuously printed from 1976. At the same pattern, he also issued a monthly magazine in English named '*Spirit of Islam*' from 2013. He wrote over 1000 articles on multiple topics in different newspapers and research journals (Hassan, 2015). He participated in thousands of conferences and seminars and addressed various topics. His ideology is based on Realism instead of any Utopia. He discussed almost all modern human issues.

According to him, the role of human nature is very vital in human issues. He quotes Luzia A Costa, an Italian writer, who says that all human beings by their very nature suffer from the feeling of incompleteness. Maulana thinks that the entire phenomenon lays the foundation stone of human desires. Sense of incompleteness has produced an enormous number of desires in human nature. Almost all individuals want to accomplish their personality; for such a particular task they think that fulfillment of their desires is a prerequisite. In pursuance of their desires, they often fail to understand the creation plan of God. They start exploiting others without realizing its consequences. Subsequently, pursuance of their desires takes them to a stage where they start treating others inhumanly. According to Maulana, it is the pivot where all human issues arise. He advises that human beings should look at those who are below instead of those who are above. In this way, one will be able to appreciate God's bounty (Khan, 2018). It is because there is no uniformity in the distribution of worldly benefits. The class difference has constantly aroused envy and created friction in society. Now, if someone compares himself to one another that is apparently less endowed, he will surely be filled with a sense of gratitude. But if contrarily, he looks toward well offs, it will lead him towards ungratefulness. He quotes an incident of great spiritual leader Sheikh Saadi who had no shoes and walked barefooted. Once he realized why he had been deprived of such blessing. Meanwhile, he saw an individual with no feet. He immediately sought forgiveness from his Lord; and thanked Him for His benevolence of granting him two healthy feet (Khan, 2018). For this reason, a man should have been full of gratification all the time. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

“Very delightful is the matter of a believer. For him, there is all good. This is for no one besides a believer. If some good comes to him, he does gratification of Allah, and it is good for him. And if some harshness befalls him, he shows patience over it, and it is too very good for him.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 7500)

The above Hadith vibrantly articulates that it is a human attitude that causes troubles for him. If a man has trust in God, nothing can ever make him desperate. The reason behind such extreme calmness of a believer lies in his awareness about the Creation plan of God. A believer knows the attributes of his God, and it makes him able to trust Him wholeheartedly. Such a person remains contented even in harsh circumstances. According to Maulana, circumstances have no importance in this world. What is important is man's relation with God. If a man has a close bond with God, a harsh situation will take him closer to God and his trust in God will be boosted. On the other hand, if a man's relationship with God is weak, he will be ungrateful to Him. The Holy Quran describes such person in Sura al-Fajar,

“But when He tests him by straitening his means of livelihood, he says: My God has humiliated me.” (*The Holy Quran*, 89:16)

According to the creation plan of God, the whole Islamic teachings are based on two principles. These principles include worship of God and service to mankind. If someone does not put both of these principles into practice, his religious obligations cannot be performed. As Islam is a natural religion, it inculcates the spirit of love and respect in its adherents. Service to mankind, whom most of our religious section undervalues, works dually. On one hand, it makes our Lord pleased; and on other hand, it helps human beings for their spiritual development. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said,

“If you will be merciful to mankind on earth, God on the sky will be merciful to you.” (*Sunan Abu Dawood*, Hadith No. 4941)

It is a very open invitation for people that they can earn the pleasure of God by alleviating the sufferings of mankind. In this way, Islam connects personal salvation with service to mankind. For this reason, the service to mankind should not be accompanied by any expectation in return.

If we look into the essence of helping others, it is an acknowledgment of the Divine blessings. Only which person helps others who have the aptitude to help others. On all those occasions where a man helps out another by virtue of Divine blessings, he is in fact showing his gratitude to God for all of His benevolence. On the other hand, helping others is also raised a man's own moral status. Human beings have been created as the noblest amongst all the creatures because they possess sentiments contrary to animals and other creatures who do not share anything. For this reason, a human being should have been a well-wisher to all, a 'giver' member of society, who helps others by acknowledging others' right over his own possessions. It is called social work and it is the spirit of worship (Khan, 2016)

According to Maulana, the Divine principle of mercy and compassion is not restricted to human beings only but also extended to the animal world. Islam advises being equally caring to the animals. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) gives us a vibrant guideline on how to treat them with fairness, love, and compassion. He (PBUH) asserted that "a virtue done to an animal is like a virtue done to a human being, or otherwise, a cruelty to an animal is as obnoxious one as to humans" (Ramadan, 2020)

Once, a group of companions inquired from the Holy Prophet (PBUH) about the reward of serving animals and He replied in positive to their satisfaction. Islamic injunctions always soften the hearts of its adherents. For this reason, when these injunctions penetrate people's hearts, they will of necessity become kind and sympathetic to others. They will see the entire universe with the eyes of love and sympathy. An urge is also produced within themselves to serve humanity and fulfill others' needs. If even after having belief in Islamic injunctions, such feelings of love and sympathy do not surge in the hearts of its followers, they should reconsider whether or not Islamic injunctions have actually entered in their hearts and minds, whether they are able to exercise wholly what they believe and whether they are successfully molded themselves on the pattern of Islam. When Hazrat Umar (RA), the second caliph of Islam, traveled from Medina to Palestine, he had taken just a single camel with him (Khan, 2016). He realized that if he continued his journey without any interval on the camel, it would be unkindness to the animal. For this reason, he used to give it a considerable rest by intervals of rest. It reflects that if the true spirit of Islam is inculcated in a human being, he becomes so caring and sympathetic to others, that, he happily extends his helping hand towards others even at cost of his own benefits. According to a famous Hadith, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said,

“He, who fills his stomach with food while his neighbor is hungry, is not a Muslim.” (*Sunan al-Kubra*, Hadith No. 19049)

It shows that a Muslim is always concerned with others' hunger and thirst same as he is concerned with his own stomach. Islam is a religion of humanity. It considers serving others as a great deed of worship. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) always kept this spirit alive. He always helped the poor and needy; He always feed the hungry; He always eat with his servants; He always shack hands with the people, he met; He always spoke in favor of the weak; He always brought the people closer and not pulled them apart; He always considered what was beneficial to others; He never grows angry; He always treated the visitors with patience and did not mind their rough conduct; He was polite, tolerant and sympathetic. He was never harsh, stringent, and ill-mannered. But unfortunately, the Muslim of today is not a man of action. Often he used the name of Islam as a slogan to acquire personal benefits (Khan, 1997). The whole of mankind is suffering from severe pain. Poverty, poor health, and lawlessness have increased human issues. But Muslims are busy building worship places for the purpose of reward. They have no concern with the misery of *Ummah*, for which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) constantly rattled in the darkness of the nights and shed his tears. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, “By God, The sanctity of a believer is more than the sanctity of Kaaba.” (*Sunan Ibn-e-Majah*, Hadith No. 3932)

Conclusion

Today, all the Muslims have great respect for Kaaba but they do not have such respect for human beings who are declared more respectable than Kaaba. It is agonizing as it is not the true face of Islam. It is also against the spirit of worship. The true spirit of worship is a complete bow down to God, and one who does worship but does not care commandments of God and His beloved Prophet (PBUH) is not a true worshipper. In such a devastating condition, where human values have been wiped out and there is no respect for miserable humanity, it was the fundamental duty of our religious scholars that they may uncover the true face of Islam but most of them did not realize it either due to negligence or for the fulfillment of materialistic goals. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is one of the fewest Muslim scholars who has kept alive the social aspect of Islam which is more daring than the venerated one. So, the need of the time is that his contemporary religious scholars also feel the responsibility of promoting the human values for eradication of social issues, and by this way, the true spirit of Islam can be revived.

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