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**The Muslim**

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**The Muslim, November 1968**

**ISLAM AND FANATICISM**

**KHURSHID AHMAD**

'Islam and Fanaticism' can rightly be called 'the topic of the day'. We are meeting this evening\* to discuss the problem of fanaticism when almost the entire western world is caught in the grip of violence, when we find that in many western countries the instruments of peaceful persuasion have been replaced by the instruments of violence, when even in a country which has been regarded as the abode of democracy, doubts are openly expressed on the usefulness and the postulates of the basic traditions of democracy.

First of all, what is fanaticism? It is a much used and abused term, not merely by contemporary writers and speakers. The exploitation of this term rather goes back deep into history. It has been used to silence political opponents It has been used to dub different religious groups as protagonists of violence, rightly or wrongly. It is one of those terms which have always been used by different groups of people. As such we should be very clear as to what it means.

There are three basic points which are to be kept in view. Firstly, I would treat as a fanatic one who is not open to reason, who is not pre- pared to think and argue, who instead of the logic of argument would employ the arbitrary use of authority. Secondly, the problem of violence is very central to an appreciation of what fanaticism is. Using those means, those methods, those techniques which create dis- order, disaffection and violence: such methods can be called an integral part of the paraphernalia of fanaticism. Mere use of force is not violence. Even a policeman uses force but this is not violence unless he transgresses certain limits. Parents, elders, even friends may use some force but that is not violence. Violence is that use of force which violates certain accepted principles. That brings me to my third point. Very fundamental to fanaticism is the violating of those values which have been accepted by humanity as its fundamental code of behavior the rule of law, principles of justice, natural justice and social justice.

Double standards

Now the problem is quite a tricky one. To stand for one's conviction is not fanaticism in the sense of the word as used in common par-lance. To believe in certain values, to live for them, to work for them, to strive for them is not fanaticism. We are living in a strange world of double standards, what George Orwell described as 'double thought' and 'double talk'. It is really strange that if a socialist stands for his cause, this is considered revolutionary fervor. If a Muslim works for Islam this is fanaticism. If a democrat goes to the extent of saying, as not one but many Intellectuals in the West have said, that those who want to change the democratic system through democratic means are rebels and actually perpetrate violence, this is not considered fanaticism. When in Kenya, through the process of direct election, a parliament came to power which was alleged to be communistic, no one but Bertrand Russell comes forward to say that we cannot accept a democratic vote against democracy. And this is not fanaticism? In this age of double talk and double thinking, to stand for one's ideals, to believe in them to have the force of conviction is not fanaticism.

It is a very facile argument that in the name of toleration one must tolerate everything. Toleration is something real and very valuable. Tolerance is a great cultural virtue but it is not an absolute value, you do not tolerate the person who parks on the wrong side. You do not tolerate in any way someone who infringes your law, who acts against decency and the norms of society. Tolerance must have its limits. and this is what distinguishes idealism from fanaticism. Conviction and bigotry are not the same thing. A man with a conviction also believes, but he believes on the basis of reason and argument and he is prepared to argue out his case. A bigot is not prepared to listen to any thing which goes against his views.

Idealism and Fanaticism confused

It is unfortunate that the western writers, even their top scholars, and the order of the column writers, have been in the habit of con- fusing these two and they have been calling our idealism, fanaticism, and calling the word fanaticism, Idealism. For the last 400 years more or less, western writers have been accusing Islam of being fanatic, or being intolerant, of being a religion propagated through the sword and so on actually the pedigree of the allegations goes a little farther. In fact this point was originally raised in respect of the behavior of the Christian Church in medieval times. It was during that period that Islam emerged as a revolutionary force.

When the western world came into contact with the Islamic world, they conveniently shifted this allegation from the doors of Christianity to the doors of Islam and the irony is that Chris- tian writers, missionaries as well as orientalists have taken a leading part in playing this dirty game. Now religion as such has never generated fanaticism or intolerance. The experience of the Western nations is very limited to a particular type of behavior put forward by the organized Church. On the basis of this limited experience some thinkers have generalized that this is the attitude of religion as such. Nobody can dispute that the behavior of the Christian church in medieval times was in certain respects a very ignoble one. There have been some exaggerations, but even if one makes allowance for these, Christianity as it grew in Europe adopted a highly intolerant attitude towards its own folk, not to speak of others. It Is known, that the Jews, whatever may be their ingratitude to the people who gave them protection, were the most haunted people in the entire Christian world for more than a thousand years and if they could seek refuge anywhere, it was in the Muslim world. Muslims extended to them all possible protection, legal, political, economic, social, and religious. Christianity's attitude towards its own adherent had also been highly intolerant. The Church demanded a kind of conformity which is not in keeping with human dignity and human nature. It imposed upon them thought-control and other religious and social humiliations. The history of the Inquisitions shows that hundreds of thousands of people were prosecuted simply for holding opinions which did not conform to the view of the church. I accept all these as facts of history but would ask on the basis of this limited experience how just and how reasonable it would be to generalize that all religions are and must be intolerant and fanatical.

Not one, but many historians say, and very rightly say, that this blood-thirsty attitude of Christianity does not owe itself to the original teachings of the prophets. If you study the politico-cultural history of Europe you would find that the genesis of this attitude is to be found in the Greco-Roman Empire. The Greek type lies at the roots of the following civilizations, which emerged in Europe. The modern West imbibed that very attitude. Toynbee, Russell, all of them think that the intolerance and fanaticism of Christianity owes itself to this particular Greco-Roman type. Others had never been so intolerant or so fanatical before.

A different outlook

In Islamic history you will find an outlook of a different nature. When the Romans conquered any country, the first thing they would do is mass massacre. When the Muslims conquered any country, they would give guarantees of life, property and honor to all the non-belligerents. Even in war a Muslim is not allowed to kill an old person, a woman, a child, those who are crippled or disabled. Only when sword is wielded, must iron be met with iron. Not only that, even trees are not to be cut and crops are not to be burnt. The entire Islamic history does not know of the concept of mass massacre.

For indications of western practice, there is no need to go far back. When in 1945 the fate of Germany was being decided by the victorious powers the idea was that Germany should not be allowed to exist at all but be divided into four and assimilated by the Allied powers. And now they complain about the problem of West Germany and East Berlin! The Supreme Command also planned that conquered Japan should never come to life again, but the plan was thwarted by the changing tides of world diplomacy. That is how they treated in victory.

But look to the way the Prophet of Islam enters Mecca as victor. Everyone was offered complete amnesty. When Caliph Umar entered Jerusalem he was not even prepared to pray in a Church for fear that those who came after him may treat the place as a mosque and take it away from the Christians. But when the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Crusaders there was total massacre of the population. How did they behave in Spain? Not a single Muslim was left unexecuted or unveiled. It was the same in Sicily where all the mosques were demolished.

Even in the 19th and 20th Centuries the same practice was adopted. There was Greece where the entire Muslim population was either eliminated or driven out and in parts of the Balkans where Muslims were in a clear majority, not only their political position was annulled; even their physical existence was not tolerated. A historian who primarily believes in atheism, Robert Briffault, deals with the history of the social evolution of mankind In his work The Making

of Humanity. In very clear terms he says that the role of theocracy (used as a synonym for the religious state) had been very different in the Muslim world and In Europe. In the Chris- tian world, theocracy had been oppression incarnate. In the Islamic world we do not find any such spectacle. Throughout the entire history of Islam you cannot find one single example of any Inquisition. And may I add that if there had been any instance of law suppression or doing Injustice in Muslim history, this had arisen from those who believed in so called liberalism or modernism and the object of oppression had been those who stood for the orthodox, pristine, unadulterated and un- changed teachings of Islam.

The examples can be multiplied beyond number. The entire study of T. W. Arnold on The Preaching of Islam is a document from one of the leading orientalists saying that Muslims definitely have certain commitments. They have stood for them and have spread them in the way typified. by Hadrat Abu Obaida (who won the admiration and gratitude of Christians as against the Byzantine rulers who professed the Christian faith).

A Simple Question

Concerning the allegation that religion en- genders intolerance and fanaticism, I would like to pose a simple and logical question: If religion had been responsible for all this, once religion was done away with and the reign of secularism and materialism established, should there not have been real peace and tolerance in the world? But Is It really so? What is the record of modern nations who are never tired of talking of peace and tolerance? Can we forget that when Paris was ringing with the slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity what the French forces were doing in Africa and South East Asia? When the glorious democracy was taking shape in Britain, what was being done by England and English forces in India, China, in Latin America and in African countries? Even today some are not prepared to tolerate those the color for whose skin is different from their own. They are not prepared to tolerate those who believe in different values. They are not prepared to tolerate those who live in other countries, or according to their terminology, belong to different nationalities. European soil is soaked with blood spilled in the name of nationalism in wars over the last 150 years. In only the two world wars of the twentieth century, more persons have been killed than in all the wars of the nineteenth century. Is this a century of peace and tolerance of the century of wars and intolerance, of violence and bloodshed?

But that is not the only area. The modern age has developed ingenious ways of inflicting violence upon people. This civilization is not prepared to tolerate other cultures or civilizations in any form. They have tried to force people Into slavery through brute power. If Islam was spread by force, by what was imperialism spread? Modern civilization has done physical torture, not in one country but in whole areas. It is known that in Russia and Germany torture had become the way of life and it is not unknown even to Britain and the United States. There is psychological demolition of personalities and a living death is inflicted. People are uprooted from their cultures and left without values like straws in the waters ... This is done through the instruments of education and the communication media, with the youth of the Muslim world, of African countries and other nations.

Look to the intellectual world, As far as Islam is concerned, up till now the modern West has not accepted to call us by our proper name. They would call Islam, Mohammadanism, and a Muslim, a Mohammadan. Our prophet would be called by any name-even derogatory ones. And this you would find in their most scholarly works. In other fields also the examples of such intellectual intolerance are not limited. There- fore can one say that the age of secularism or irreligion has in any way produced equity and tolerance? If not so, of what use is the allegagation that it is religion that breeds intolerance. Specifically in the case of Islam, this allegation cannot stand.

Islam. definitely has certain commitments. It is commitment which makes a man great. Once this is said, it does not mean that we want to force this commitment upon others, through arbitrary power or violence. Had this been so, God Almighty was powerful enough to turn all people to the Islamic way, but he did not. He has revealed the truth and he has given man the opportunity and the freedom to choose. Can you visualize any freedom greater than this?- that you are free to accept your Creator or refuse to accept, This is the way of Allah and once you accept this you would find that the use of violence cannot fit into this scheme. That Is why in the Qur'an it says: Laa ikraaha fi-d-deen. Qad tabayyana ar-rushdu min al-ghayy. There is no compulsion in religion. Wisdom has been made distinct from the untruth.

The two roads are open and man is in a position to choose. Moreover, in Islamic Law, acceptance of a thing under duress is void. How can Iman (belief or faith) such a delicate thing be subjected to this treatment. It no longer remains Iman if it is forced. Now we are discussing the problem on a very different plane. The animal plane on which others think over it is far below the rational plane, the spiritual plane on which Islam discusses the problem. The very concept of Qad tabayyana ar-rushdu min al-ghayy is a revolutionary concept. The great Muslim commentator Imam Razi in dis- cussing this verse of the Qur'an says that the rationale of the ayah there is no compulsion in religion-lies in the following one-wisdom is made distinct from the untruth. Once you appreciate this you can understand what beauty lies therein.

Islam presents the concept that all human beings are equal and we are equal because we are all creatures of God with no distinctions of color, race or country, or tribe or clan or anything else. You would find that fanaticism is generated in the last analysis either from any of these false prejudices, when you try to group humanity into certain water-tight compartments. You cannot change the color of your skin, you cannot change your place of birth. If you believe in any of these standards, then rational fusion of the human race is not possible and you be- come intolerant towards others. In Islam, the rational fusion is possible for whatever tribe you come from, from whatever race you come, whatever color you may have, whatever territory you might be born in, whatever language you speak, you are one, you can be one. You belong to one family. You are one brotherhood.

Psychologically speaking, another source from which fanaticism comes is rather an inferiority complex where an untruth masquerades as truth, where it cannot meet its enemy on the plane of logic and argument. In Islam no such psychological complex is there. One of the reasons why the Muslim society has al- ways been a tolerant society is because of the confidence generated in Muslims by these values of Islam.

Ends cannot justify means

Another point is that Islam is very unique and firm in asserting that ends cannot justify means. A source from where fanaticism and intolerance have most often come is the mistaken belief that ends justify means. This means that to achieve even good ends you could resort to evil means. The principle that Islam has enunciated is that "Good and bad are not equal.

Replace evil by good". If you fight falsehood with falsehood It Is falsehood which prevails. If you replace vice with vice, It is vice which triumphs. If you change evil by evil, it is evil which is victorious. Islam says that evil is to be eliminated by good. If you pursue this technique then only you would be able to fill the earth with goodness, and justice, and peace and fellow-feeling. Islam has struck at the roots of fanaticism. If you reflect upon the system that Islam has given, you would find that fanaticism has no place in it but idealism is the life blood of it.

In the Qur'an it has been mentioned that the mission for which this Muslim nation has been created is that you call people to goodness, you forbid evil and bid truth and right. It is to be a message and an offer. It is not forcing people under goodness. In this pursuit you are to have two things: one is that you have to meet oppression, you have to meet tyranny, you have to meet obstacles. You have to meet those who would not allow you to operate. As far as the wrong (munkar) is concerned, you are permitted to eliminate it. But as far as the truth and virtue (ma'ruf) is concerned, it is not to be enforced by power.

That is why you would find that wherever Muslims went and whatever lands they conquered, they never forced the people to convert. What greater example can I quote than the example of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. There the Muslims ruled for 900 years and when in 1947 we had to partition it, we were in a minority. Of course during that period I must admit that they failed also in preaching. But that is a different matter. But they never forced others to their own way of life. So we find that jurists and commentators have said that using force to eliminate obstacles has been permitted, but once this has been done, you cannot use force to make anyone accept your religion.

This is the position of Islam. You can very easily see that Islam has clearly discriminated between idealism and fanaticism. It has done everything to generate in us real idealism, noble idealism, virtuous idealism, and to protect us from the evil influences of fanaticism. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that Islam Is. a religion of the middle path (Wast). The Qur'an has called the Muslim nation 'Ummat al-Wusta'. the people of the middle, the people who maintain balance and equilibrium in all their affairs. Adhering to idealism, protecting yourself and avoiding the extremes of fanaticism-this is the middle path and it is this path which Islam invites to all humanity.