



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ISLAM

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Islam gives everyone right to exercise freedom of expression, as long as he does not intrude upon the freedom and dignity of other people. There is no place for the propagation of evil and wickedness in Islam. It does not grant anybody the right to use abusive or offensive language in the name of criticism and freedom of speech. Indeed, Islam grants everyone the right to have his own opinion within the boundaries of morality.

The happenings of recent past like the publication of the cartoons in Denmark in order to create false impression about Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) leading to recent turmoil in France, hijab issue in France and Australia are quite unfortunate. The film about Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), burning of Quran in India and the recently dismissed criminal prosecution for apostasy in Afghanistan, makes it incumbent to mention the real face of freedom of conscience within the context of the Islamic legal view and constitutional provisions of different countries regarding freedom of expression related to the issue of blasphemy, and freedom of religion related to the issue of apostasy. These issues mostly happened in those countries where Muslims live as minorities or under the subjugation of foreign colonial domination. After the decline of the Ottoman Khilafah many challenges raised their head, which were of great importance for the Muslims. The rise of the West as strong industrial colonial force changed all the ethical basis of human development and gave rise to some new philosophies and ideologies which revolve as a hallucination around human ethics more particularly to the Islamic morality.

Though the cause of emergence of these philosophies was the complete freedom of thought linked to religion and other aspects of daily importance, the repressions perpetuated by the Christian religious heads under the gloominess of divine guidance were the main cause for emergence of these thoughts. Many Western thinkers are of the view that, significance of free will is not limited to its necessity for free action and moral responsibility. Various philosophies suggest that free will is a requirement for agency rationality, the autonomy and dignity of persons, creativity and co-operation.

In order to understand the freedom of expression from Islamic view point, it is necessary to understand first different forms of Ra'yis. Generally Ra'y classified into three types i.e. praiseworthy, blameworthy and doubtful. Praiseworthy speaks the opinion which helps to elaborate the Qur'an, sunnah, and views of Prophet Muhammad's companions which result after the consultation while expressing one's opinion. Another one is blameworthy which express one's opinion in violation of certain laws intentionally and dishonor the Allah and Prophet Muhammad. While as third one creates doubt in Law/ Shari'ah and results in social disturbance and confusions in order to create dissent among the people, such expressions are punishable as per their intensity. Shari'ah provides opportunity to express one's opinion in consonance to public interests. The primary goal of Shari'ah is to free man from the grip of his own whims and fancy so that he may serve the cause of Allah in a superior comportsment.

Freedom of speech and expression is the person's right to express his ideas and feelings with his own choice and will, as long as there is no aggression on the rights of others. It is an undeniable right which cannot be snatched or from which a person cannot be denied. It is a prerequisite for a Muslim under certain legal conditions, so that a person can express freely his thought and religious duty. About freedom of speech in Islam, an example is quoted that once Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) consulted some Sahaba about the payment of half of date palms to Ghatafan tribe. In response, all the companions said if it is revelation or order from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), we will accept it and follow it in Toto otherwise they have right to express their thought and opinion about the issue and were not stopped from expressing their views and opinions.

Islamic perspective on right to freedom of expression is comprehensible which facilitates to put up society in a serene behavior. In Islam people are restricted to communicate their opinions only when one feels to lend a hand community fellow to continue in peace and tranquility and to maintain richness of diversity so that people stay behind from social tribulations, pandemonium and muddle. Therefore, restrictions on freedom of speech and expression necessarily do not reduce the discovery of truth and did not degrade humanity.

Islam guides us how to exercise one's freedom of expression and speech. Two words were coined during early Islamic age, which helps us how to express one's feelings are "*hisbah* and *naseehah*". *Hisbah*, a term coined by Hadhrat 'Umar(ra), the second Khalifa of Islam, sum up the duty to advocate good and advise against evil referred to in the Holy Qur'an so that peace and human values in societies remain in intact. *Naseehah* refers to the manner in which *hisbah* must be conducted, namely, the requirement that Muslims practice *hisbah* by giving sincere and friendly advice and counsel to others. *Hisbah*, or the advocating good, assumes the right to freedom of speech. Muslims are

directed to enjoin good and restrict themselves and others from evil speeches and designs.

The endeavor following is to build up love, toleration, social harmony and understanding among members for peaceful coexistence. Islam limits freedom of expression where it twirls as blasphemous and creates social disorder. Islamic law based on the Holy Qur'an and *Sunnah* maintains and upholds the right to freedom of expression but restricting it when it results in hampering the cause of the unearthing truth, even where speech is offensive and hurtful. But in Quran no worldly criminal sanction exists for it in Shari'ah as the matter is left solely to God. The Holy Qur'an teaches one should express oneself, through gentleness, courtesy and quiet discretionally through the concepts of *hisbah* and *naseehah*.

The foregoing discussion also demonstrates that the Holy Qur'an maintains and upholds the right to freedom of religion, speech and expression in a decent way. Applying Islamic approach to freedom of expression on the existing conditions seems more applicable and appropriate and will help social engineers to develop theories as per Islamic design; otherwise complete freedom and discussion on all aspects of religion will turn into biasness and turmoil in the society.



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