

Religion and Politics:

Both religion and politics have one common goal: that is to acquire political power and use it to fulfill their aims. However, to achieve this object, their methods are different. Religion mobilizes religious sensibilities of people in order to get their support to capture power; while politics uses intrigue, diplomacy, and makes attempt to win public opinion either democratically, if the system allows it, or usurps power with the help of army, if the society is under-developed and backward.

Therefore, in power struggle, both politics and religion make attempts to undermine each other. If religion holds political authority, its ambition is to exploit it to fulfill a divine mission. It claims that it derives authority from divinity and therefore its mission is holy, motivated to reform society under the spiritual guidance. Politics, on the contrary, bereft of any value, directs its policy on the needs and requirements of society whereupon, **it obliges to change laws and system of government accordingly.** This is a basic difference between two approaches of religion and politics:

- Religion determines its authority on divine laws which could not be changed with human intervention;
- While in pragmatic political approach society should move ahead, change and adjust itself with the new arising challenges of time.

In its secular approach man is responsible to determine his destiny. He is not under the control of divinity to remain submissive and inactive. On the contrary, he is supposed to initiate and plan to build a society according to his vision.

There are three models in history related to religion and politics.

- **In one** when religion and politics both unite with each other in an attempt to monopolize political power. We call it integration and sharing model.
- **In the second model**, politic, after subduing and overpowering religion, uses it for its interests. In this model religion plays subservient role to politics.

- **In the third model** both come into conflict with each other that subsequently lead their separation. In this model they appear as rivals and compete to struggle for domination.

The study of beginning and spread of any religion shows that every religion is started in particular space and time; therefore, main focus of its teachings is the solution of existing problems. However, with the change of time there are new challenges and a religion has to respond them for its survival. In this process, it has to adjust its teachings according to changes. With the passage of time, a stage comes when a religion fails to respond challenges of its time and finds hardly any space to adjust according to new environments. For example, in case of Islam, it took nearly two and a half centuries to complete its orthodoxy. Once the process was complete, it became impossible for orthodoxy to give any place to new ideas and new thinking. It was believed that any change in the structure would weaken its base. On this plea it persists to retain its old structure without any addition.

At this stage there remain three options for any religion:

- **1. Avoid and disapprove any change in its structure.** If any attempt is made to reinterpret its teachings, such attempts either is crushed politically or with the help of religious injunctions (fatawa in case of Islam). Those who claim to reconstruct religious thoughts; they should be condemned as enemies of religion and believers should be warned to boycott them and not listen to their views.
- **2. In the second option, religion has a choice to adapt itself** according to the needs of time and accept new interpretation relating to its teachings and accommodating modernity.
- **3. In the third option, if religion fails to respond to the challenges and feels insecure,** it withdraws from the active life and decides not to entangle in worldly affairs. It confines its activities to **spirituality**.

The helplessness of religion is obvious in the present circumstances in which scientific and technological inventions are rapidly changing the society and its

character making it more complex and mechanical. Especially, with the extension of knowledge, politics, economics, sciences, technology and other branches of knowledge assume a separate entity that could be specialized and handled by professionals. Ulema or religious scholars are not in a position to understand intricacies of these professions and adjust them with religious teachings. This is the reason why in some societies religion is separated from politics and economics and it no more enjoys the domination over the society, which it did in the medieval period.

The characteristic of three reactions may be defined as **aggressive, compromising, and separatist** respectively.

There are groups of people in every society who want change in their practical life but at the same time they desire not to abandon religion. These people become supporters of new interpretation of religion that suits their way of life. It causes emergence of new sects. Therefore, we find that in every religion, there are new sects, which fulfill the demands of a group of people within a span of time and then disappear in oblivion of history. However, some sects persist and survive. For example, in the Christianity, when bourgeoisie wanted religious sanction of interest, Calvin (d.1594) a religious reformer, allowed it on the basis of religion. It removed business hurdles and the merchant and industrial classes flourished. R.H. Tawney, in his classical book 'Religion and Rise of Capitalism' rightly says, « *Calvin did for the bourgeoisie of the sixteenth century what Marx did for the proletariat of the nineteenth...* »

I. The Abbasid period

In the Islamic history, conflict between religion and politics settled after the Abbasid revolution (750.A.D.) when the Iranians, who made the revolution a success and subsequently assumed position of power and authority in the government administration, formulated the state policy of their liking. They wanted to make the Abbasid Caliph just like the Persian monarch having absolute political power with religious authority: a combination of temporal and spiritual powers. The Iranian bureaucracy was opposed by ulema who strove to curtail the power of the caliph in view of the shariat (religious laws). As the Iranians had political and military support, they cornered ulema in their efforts and made the caliph a Persian king along with all royal symbols and rituals which once prevailed at the Sassanid court. However, it was settled that in practice the caliph would remain absolute in administrative and political matters but he would not

interfere in the affairs of the shariat nor would make any effort to change it. It would remain the domain of ulema. It is how religion and politics separated with each other in the early stage of Islamic history.

As a result of this settlement, a system emerged in which the ruler had unlimited power. Professional bureaucracy to administer the state and its affairs supported him. Ulema joined the state as qazi (judge), mufti (interpreter of law), muhtasib (ombudsman) and as imam (prayer leader). In these capacities they became servants of the state and as such their responsibility was to obey ruler and state and interpret shariat according to the interest of the caliph. Once the economic interest of the ulema were linked to the state as they received either stipends or jagir (fief) from the state, their main concern was to please the ruler. On the other hand, rulers also adopted a policy of conciliation toward them. They showed outward respect to them; invited them to their court to deliver sermons and ask for their advice on important issues. However, whenever, they wanted to use these ulema for their political interest; they asked them to issue fatwa in their favour, which they obliged with pleasure. We find that how these ulema religiously justified the Persian court ceremonies of prostration before the ruler, kissing his feet or hands and address him with high-sounding titles. They also helped rulers if they wanted to avoid religious duties such as obligatory daily prayers and fasting in the month of Ramazan. To get sexual pleasure, rulers got religious sanction by ulema to marry and divorce as they liked and to keep as many slave girls as they wished. During the Abbasid period, as the power of the Caliph increased, influence of ulema decreased and they ultimately became subservient to the ruler and his whims.

II. Sultanate period

With the decline of the Abbasids, provincial ruling dynasties emerged and introduced the institution of the sultanate (kingship). Muslim jurists justified it on the plea that it would prevent chaos and keep law and order in the society. Secondly, they also legitimized the usurption of power by powerful military man arguing that to reject him meant to create political unrest and a situation of civil war. Al-Marwardi (d.1058) was the political thinker who in his book al-Ahkam al-Sultania advises that a usurper should be recognized as legal ruler just to avoid bloodshed. *After settling the issue of kingship and usurper, the question was whether a ruler should remain under religious authority or should he use religion for his political motives?* To respond to this question and how king should

behave, a genre of literature was produced known as the « *Mirror of Princes* ». Some of the important books are Qabusnama by Kaikaus (d.1082), Siyasatnama by Nizamulmulk Tusi (d.1091) Nasihat al-Muluk by Ghazali (d.1111), and Fatawa-i-Jahandari by Ziauddin Barani. In this literature, kingship was recognized as a hereditary institution and the ruler was addressed as « *Zill-I-Ilahi* » (shadow of God). It was a Machiavellian step that freed king from all religious bindings and made him authoritative and powerful. Similarly, the « *Adab* » or the literature of the Mirror of Princes made the Muslim king free from the shariat and allowed him to rule absolutely. Their model was the Sassanid king who was all-powerful: in religion as well as worldly matters. However, attempt was made to control the authority of the ruler by asking him to follow a policy of justice like Anushirwan, the legendary king of Persia, who was famous for his benevolence and acts of justice. **The method was to control absolute power by asking him to follow and adhere moral and ethical values in order to govern people.**

In India, the Sultans of Delhi (1206-1526) adopted this model but the Mughal king Akbar shaped a different theory of kingship which suited the Indian environment. Abul Fazl (d.1602), the court historian and close friend and advisor to Akbar provided the philosophical basis for Mughal kingship by exalting the position and emphasizing the importance of royalty. Royalty, according to him, was the highest dignity in the eyes of God. It was light which emanated from God. He calls it 'the Divine Light'. This light created paternal love for his subjects in the hear of the king and increased his trust in God.

Commenting on the Mughal concept of kingship, Vanina writes that apparently this theory does not look different than the Islamic or Hindu theories of kingship. However, deeper study reveals that it is not the same but quite different than the previous traditions. According to Abul Fazl king rules for the welfare of his subjects and to achieve this he has right to change ancient traditions and communal institutions. As royalty emanates from God, king does not need to follow the advice of ulema or religious scholars. He is authorized by the divine power to bring changes in social structure according to the need of time. Akbar did it. He banned the child marriages and marriage among close relatives. He also banned sati, though could not eliminate it altogether. In this respect, Akbar was the first Indian ruler who interfered in the affairs of community, caste, and family that were otherwise taboo for rulers to talk about or change them.

Akbar further extended his power when his sadr al sadur (Highest religious post at the Mughal court) ordered execution of a Brahman on the charges of blasphemy. *On this occasion Akbar asked Abul Fazl's father Shaikh Mubarak to guide him how to get rid of ulema?* The Shaikh suggested that Akbar should assume the authority of mujtahid with the approval of ulema. Akbar following his advice asked the ulema to sign a mahzar (so called decree of infallibility) delegating him authority to interpret religion. This combined in him religious as well as political powers and ulema lost their authority to challenge the royal decision.

Ziauddin Barani, a historian of the Saltanate period, explains his theory of kingship in his book fatawa-i-Jahandari that it is very difficult for a king to rule following the shariat. According to him there is difference between shariat and the rules and regulations of kingship. It is important for a king to keep and preserve his grandeur, pomp and glory. He should observe all court ceremonies such as prostration, and kissing of hand and foot by courtiers. He should live in palaces, keep his treasury full with all types of wealth and use it for his own personal needs. All such acts are justified on the ground that a king without display of power and glamour is not respected by his subjects.

In this regard Ziauddin Barani quotes a dialogue between Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316) and Qazi Mughis in the Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi. When the king asked the qazi about his policies whether they were according to the shariat or not. The qazi replied in negative. On it, the response of the king was that he did not know anything about shariat. He did what he thought was good for his subjects.

Therefore, Muslim rulers in order to rule did not follow the shariat but formulated their own rules and regulations that were in favour of practical politics. As he was the shadow of God (Zilli-i-Ilahi) and deputy to God, those who rebelled against him were regarded as his personal enemies and were punished likely. They were not judged according to the shariat but on the basis of king's anger. Sometimes, they were hacked to pieces, and sometimes were trampled under the feet of an elephant. Alauddin Khilji not only punished the rebels but also in retaliation their family members including women and children were imprisoned, tortured and enslaved. According to Barani the custom to imprison women and children of rebels as a punishment was started by him that was continued later on by other rulers.

Under this model of kingship, muftis (jurists) and qazis (judges) became servants to the state and as such served the interest of rulers rather than implementation of the shariat. They issued fatwa whenever it was need by ruler to justify their acts. There are many such examples in the history. One interesting fatwa was regarding legitimizing Akbar's marriages. He married more than four wives and when it was pointed out that his extra marriages were illegal, he asked the ulema to find out some solution. The matter was discussed in the Ibadatkhana (house of worship) which was founded by him in 1575. The result was that one religious scholar interpreted that in the holy Quran there is verse which says to marry: 2, 3 and 4 which according to him was $2+3+4=9$. Another scholar's interpretation was $2+2+3+3+4+4=18$. However, Abdul Qadir Badauni, the historian, suggested that as in the Malki school of jurisprudence muta' (temporary marriage) was legal and a qazi of Malki school could legalise his marriage after issuing such fatwa. Akbar was pleased on this suggestion. He immediately appointed a Malki qazi who forthwith issued the fatwa to legalise his extra marriages. Akbar, after getting the fatwa dismissed the qazi from the post. He did not want that the others should take advantage of it.

When Aurangzeb (1658-1707) executed Dara Shikoh and Murad, his two brothers, he made their execution religious and not political. Dara was condemned to death on the charges of atheism and Murad on the basis of qisas (revenge for homicide). Though everybody knew that he wanted to get rid of his brothers because they were claimants to the throne. He used religion to fulfil his political motives and ulema readily gave fatwa according to his liking.

In another incident when he was in the Deccan besieging the fort of Satara, four Muslims and nine Hindus were brought as prisoners of war. He asked the qazi for fatwa. He told the king that if the Hindus were to convert to Islam they should be released and the Muslims should be kept in prison, as punishment. Aurangzeb did not like this fatwa because he wanted to punish all of them and reprimanded the qazi that instead of Hanafi school of jurisprudence, he should find out other jurists for different opinion. The qazi understood that the king wanted severe punishment and issued another fatwa recommending that both the Muslims and the Hindus should be executed.

On one side Aurangzeb used religion for political purpose but when religious elements made attempts to use politics for their advantage he resisted it. For example when he was asked to expel the Hindus and the shias from his administration, his reply was that religion and politics were two separate things

and they should not be mixed with each other. Similarly, when a qazi refused to recite the khutba in his name on the plea that his father, emperor Shahjahan, was alive, he dismissed him and appointed a qazi of his liking. Later on when some ulema opposed his invasion to the Deccan states as the Muslim kings ruled them. He did not bother their opinion; neither he bothered when a religious scholar reprimanded him in public that why he did not marry his daughters.

Against this model of kingship in which ruler became absolute, there were different movements to bring political authority under the shariat. One and the significant movement in this regard was of Imam Hanbal (d.855) who opposed the ‘mu’tazilah’ and Mamun’s campaign of the ‘creation of the Quran’. He underwent severe torture but persisted in his opinion. His followers were very strict in matter of shariat and during the Abbasid period they rioted in the different cities demanding the implementation of the rule of shariat. For example, they used to go to the bazaar of Baghdad and harass the shopkeepers for not observing religious rules. They destroyed wine shops and threatened people not to dance or sing. It was also common to attack opponents of their view. Those caliphs who did not care of their warning also became their victims. They publicly exhorted people to revolt against them.

Second important movement was of Ibn Taymmyia (d.1328). He belonged to the Hanbali school of jurisprudence and wanted that ulema should play effective role in political affairs. The main thrust of his movement was that instead of rulers, ulema should be given power to implement shariat. In India Mahdawi movement, which was started by Sayyid Mahdi Jaunpuri in the 15th century, wanted to purify Islam in India and establish an ideal Islamic society. In the 16th century, the movement became very popular in Gujarat but soon lost its popularity because of its extremism and finally was confined to its own da’ira or circle.

All such movements, which challenged the authority of Muslim rulers, were crushed with iron hand as no ruler tolerated any challenge against his power. Though such movements challenged the divine concept of kingship and his absolute power but at the same time they failed to win the support of people because of their fanatic attitude and ultimately collapsed without changing state structure.

III. The Wahabi model

In the second model of the state religion dominates politics and uses it for implementation of its practices. There were two types of religious dominations over politics:

- In one case, a ruler, in the interest of his rule and stability of his ruling dynasty, implement the shariat and allow ulema to play leading role in the state affairs.
- In the second category, ulema, after capturing political power, establish a religious state and force people to follow their religious agenda. Such religious states, wherever, they were founded in the West or in the East, basically believed that human being could be reformed only by coercion and control over his action. Therefore, to set up a purified society, strict and exemplary punishments were given on minor crimes. It was also believed that worldly rulers were corrupt and evil-minded, therefore, only religious scholars could rule with honesty and work for the welfare of people.

One of its examples is the city-state of Geneva that was established by the Christian reformer Calvin (d.1599). After acquiring political power, he was in a position to realize his religious ideals. First thing was done by him was an announcement that those who were not in favour of his religious ideas should leave the city. Those who stayed back faced his rigorous disciplinary action on different offences including excommunication from Christianity; exile from the city; imprisonment, and death penalty. On his order all hotels and guesthouses, which provided sexual facilities to the guests, were closed. Those traders and shopkeepers who were found involved in adulteration or weighing less were severely punished. Vulgar songs and playing cards were prohibited. Care was taken that Bible should be available on all-important places. Those who were found laughing during a sermon were reprimanded; it was obligatory for every citizen to thank God before eating. **As a result of these strenuous laws, every individual and family in Geneva was completely under the control and supervision of spiritual police of Calvin.** Punishments were severe and no consideration was made to exempt anybody. Once a child was beheaded on the

crime that he struck his father. It is said that during the period of 6 years 150 heretics were burnt alive. The result was that the citizens of Geneva were soon fed up of this system and ended it after expelling Calvin from the city.

In the Islamic world we could see this model in Najad and Hijaz where in the 18th century a religious movement erupted and soon engulfed the whole region. Its founder Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab (d.1792) launched the campaign to purify Islam from irreligious practices. Muhammad Ibn Saud, the founder of the Saudi ruling dynasty, was influenced by his teachings that made matrimonial alliances with his family. When one of the members of his dynasty, Saud (d.1814) defeated his rivals and established his rule he made the Wahabi religious ideas his state religion. As Wahabi believed in revivalism and purity of religion, they demolished tombs, took away religious relics which were kept there, and banned pilgrimage to shrines. On the one side, the Wahabis wanted to revive the ideal society of early Islam; on the other, they destroyed all historical monuments of the early Islamic history only because people were emotionally attached to them and regarded them as holy and sacred. They implemented strict rules and regulations for observation of religious practices as praying five times regularly and those who tried to avoid them were chased by the police (shurta) and forced them to go to mosques.

The Wahabi model inspired religious reformers in other Muslim countries and a number of movements emerged to capture power and reform society on the basis of their religious agenda. In India, the Jihad movement of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (d.1831) followed this pattern. To fulfil his mission, he migrated from North India to North Western Frontier in order to establish his Islamic state there. In 1827, he proclaimed himself as the caliph and Imam. He and his followers used all coercive methods to establish a pure and virtuous society in the frontier region. Mirza Hyrat Dehlavi, in his book Hyat-i-Tayyaba writes that Sayyid Sahib appointed many of his followers on important posts with the orders that they should force people to follow shariat. However, these officers misused their authority and sometimes forced young girls to marry them. It was also observed that some young holy warriors forcibly took away young ladies from bazaar and streets to mosque and married them without their consent. Those officers that were appointed to look after peasants also misused their power and arrogantly treated the commonfolk. The result was that poor and simple villagers were fed up of their presence. The officers, in order to assert power, declare anybody as kafir (unbeliever). If he found somebody's beard larger than his standard, the lips of person were cut off as punishment. If somebody was found

wearing tahmad (simple cloth to cover up lower body) below ankles, bones of his ankles were broken.

We have seen this model in Afghanistan during the rule of the Taliban and in some altered shape in the post revolutionary Iran. It is also using all coercive methods to implement its own version of the shariat.

IV. The colonialism period

In the 19th century, the Islamic world passed through a crisis of colonialism that engulfed it and gradually established political domination nearly in all Muslim countries. The colonial state introduced a new structure of legal system that was quite different than the shariat. Colonial state separated religion from politics. Under these circumstances, two types of movements emerged in the Islamic countries: revivalist movements which resisted colonial state and its hegemony and wanted to implement the shariat. Mahdi Sudani's movement in Sudan and Sannusi movement in Libya worked in this direction. Then there were religious movements whose interest was to create a strong sense of religious identity among the Muslims without involving in politics. They were not in favour of cooperating with the colonial state. Deoband was its example. In its early period it remained aloof from politics and concentrated on religious teachings and spiritual training of the Muslim community. The Brelvis specially confined their activities to religious rituals.

However, the colonial state and its institutions had great impact on the social, cultural and economic life of colonized society. Introduction of technology changed the structure of society and behaviour of the people. **New ideas of nationalism, socialism, Marxism,** and the concept of free market challenged the old customs, traditions and values. Religion was not in a position to respond to these new challenges; therefore, it adopted a defensive policy and failed to take part in creative process of modern civilization. When it became stagnant and lost energy and power to sustain opposition of modernity; it adopted an ideology of extremism and fundamentalism.

Another important feature of the colonial period was emergence of a European educated class whose model was Europe. They believed in separation of religion and politics. Subsequently religion became private matter of individual. Religious attitudes were further affected when there were political movements in the Islamic countries on the basis of nationalism. The character of

nationalism was either territorial, linguistic or ethnic. It united people of other religions under the banner of nationalism. For example, in the Arab nationalism, the Muslims and Christians were united on linguistic basis in which Arabic language became source of unity and brotherhood.

After decolonisation, when nation state was established in the former colonies, their constitutions treated all citizens equal irrespective of their colour and creed. State institutions played neutral role in politics and treated religion as a private matter of individuals. However, in the case of Pakistan situation was quite different. Attempts were made to transform the new state as Islamic and bring politics and economy under its domination. Religious nationalism excluded people of other religions from its domain and equality of citizenship was affected when the society was divided as the Muslims and non-Muslims. This deprived religious minorities of their basic rights. Religion as a dominant ideology interfered in all aspects of life whether it was economy, education or science and technology.

V. Conclusion

After analyzing the impact of different models, we can reach to the conclusion that what comes out when religion and politics integrate with each other; and what happens when politic dominates religion or religion subordinates politics. In case of this integration, an absolutist and dictatorial system emerges which saps all creative energies of society and reduces it to passivity. In case of conflict, both religion and politics use people and their resources in acquiring power and deprive them of social and cultural activities. For example, in today's Saudi Arabia, there is wealth and vast material resources that provide all sorts of comfort and luxury but there is no culture. Culturally, it is the most backward and barren society. It neither produced any musician, nor artist, writer, and filmmaker. It is a society of consumers and not of contributors.

However, whenever, religion relegates under the political, social, or economic pressure, society contributes in philosophy, art and literature, and music. In history such were the periods of the Abbasid rule whose caliph patronized men of letters and scientists. Akbar's period in the Mughal rule is significant because during this period new ideas were allowed to flourish. Society

becomes free when the hold of religion is weak; it becomes barren when religion dominates society and adopts hostility to all new changes. It reverts back society to old traditions and reduces the role of modernity.

Separation of religion from politics does not make it weak or vulnerable. Real strength of religion lies in the belief in its truthfulness and not in patronization and protection of state. History is evident that whenever, politics is called to help religion, it uses it for its interest and makes effort to subordinate it which subsequently weakens religion and its beliefs. Moreover, whenever, religion tries to interfere in economy or politics and cannot keep pace with changes, it becomes butt of criticism. It is evident that in the modern period there is rapid development in social and natural sciences and religion is not in a position to accommodate all these changes or to interpret them in religious terms, therefore, the best way is to separate it from politics, economy, and science and technology.