GLOBALIZATION, CONFLICT AND RELIGION

INSTITUTE OF HAZRAT MOHAMMAD (SAW)

Author:
Rizwana Yusuf, Barrister at Law
Director Administration and Member Legal Department

**Tel: 0088 2 8860206, 8816478; Fax: 0088 2 8812679,
Email: ihmsaw@gmail.com; website: www.ihmsaw.org;
House no: 22, Road no: 27, Block K, Banani, Dhaka – 1213,Bangladesh**

Abstract

This paper will attempt to negate the claim that Islam cannot be in juxtaposition with the processes of globalization. In doing so, it will emphasize on the concepts of pluralism which in essence, is the intrinsic nature of Islam and upon which a viable system of justice and equality can be disseminated. Furthermore, it will discuss how Divine sources such as the Holy Quran are the foundation to a system that is in perfect synchronization with our Creator, Man and Nature. Finally, it will elaborate on foreseeable solutions within Islam that can counter the negative repercussions of globalization. Until and unless people of all religions practice their faith in the manner that is ordained by our Creator and His Holy scriptures, this perfect balance cannot be attained.

Preamble

The phenomena of globalization has transformed the world into a global village; a village that is so dependent on the processes of globalization, that it cannot choose to sustain without it. Perhaps the future will evaluate the globalization process and mark it as a pivotal point of radical changes. Just as history had marked transforming events such as the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, Colonialism, World War I & II etc. as movements that altered the direction of what would have been a natural development of history, society, culture and all the components of human civilization, similarly, globalization would be on the same par as a revolutionary movement that effected social, cultural, political, economical progression of these institutions.

Human civilization has developed these institutions. And with time, these institutions have constantly defined and re-defined themselves and have attempted to perfect and adapt itself to the context of its era. Nonetheless, these institutions have derived from Religion, Religious doctrines and the teachings of Prophets (Peace Be upon Them). In this context, Religion doctrines and these teachings have remained constant and absolute. This argument can be countered by the claim that the interpretation of religions have been reformed by Man to adapt with the unfolding of time, society and modernity. But the fact still remains that the Books remains true to its messages and these messages are from One Divine source for the benefit of humanity as a whole. Therefore, even if Man continues to be part of this constant evolving world of social, political and cultural disciplines, from which history is recorded, the message of our Creator remains omnipresent.

This paper will attempt to negate the claim that Islam cannot be in juxtaposition with the processes of globalization. In doing so, it will emphasize on the concepts of pluralism which in essence, is the intrinsic nature of Islam and upon which a viable system of justice and equality can be disseminated. Furthermore, it will discuss how Divine sources such as the Holy Quran are the foundation to a system that is in perfect synchronization with our Creator, Man and Nature. Finally, it will elaborate on foreseeable solutions within Islam that can counter the negative repercussions of globalization. Until and unless people of all religions practice their faith in the manner that is ordained by our Creator and His Holy scriptures, this perfect balance cannot be attained.

Globalization and its Relation to Religion

Globalization is but one of these systems that has evolved out of a process. The 'integration' of religions and its cultures took about a natural course with the merging of civilizations and their evolving trade routes, which ultimately led to the colonization of the Asia, Africa, Central and South America. Thus, here marks the pivotal point where religion becomes an integral part of globalization and vice-versa. Although it can be argued that globalization started with colonialism and trade centuries ago, it is more commonly characterized as a bi-product of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1990. Globalization has been defined as an umbrella term that refers to increasing global connectivity, integration, and interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural, political, and ecological spheres. It has also been referred as a process by which the experience of everyday life is becoming standardized around the world.

History has witnessed the unfolding of numerous political, cultural and social systems which have either embraced and advocated the institution of religion or have rejected it as a dogma that is inconsistent to its system. Whilst Communism fundamentally believed that "religion is the opiate of the people", the world's most powerful nation, the United States, is constituted on the terms "In God We Trust". Therefore, to claim that religion

cannot be in juxtaposition with the processes of globalization would be an oversimplified statement.

Pluralism in Islam

Referring to one of the most famous theories by Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" states that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principle conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle line of the future. Furthermore, since the end of the Cold war "the iron curtain of ideology" had been replaced by a "velvet curtain of culture". He singles out Islam as the main divisive force in global politics.

This hardliner view of Islam has raised many questions that have remained unanswered. First and foremost, this is an over-simplified generalization into the religion of Islam and its encompassing foundations of universalism. Muslims believe that Allah sent the Holy Qur'an to bring peace and harmony to humanity through submission to Allah. Prophet Mohammad (SAW)'s worldwide mission was to establish universal peace and to ensure security of the lives and property of non-Muslims.

Pluralism was advocated and practiced arduously by Prophet Mohammad (SAW). The most pivotal example of pluralism is reflected in the Charter of Medina whereby, it established: the security of the community, religious freedoms, the role of Medina as a sacred place (barring all violence and weapons), the security of women, stable tribal relations within Medina, a tax system for supporting the community in time of conflict, parameters for exogenous political alliances, a system for granting protection of individuals and a judicial system for resolving disputes. It gave the people of other faiths to live in peaceful co-existence with Muslims.

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Essentially, all religions teach these shared principles of love, patience, peace, justice and equality. The Unity of the Creator and mankind are the essence of all religions as sent through the Holy Prophets and messengers of Allah; from the first Man and Prophet, Adam (AH), to successive Prophets such as Prophets Noah (AH), Abraham (AH), David (AH), Moses (AH), Jesus (AH), and Prophet Mohammad (SAW), (Peace Be Upon Them), there has been a call for human understanding and peace. They have all carried the messages of Allah to bring forth a perfect equilibrium towards our existence on earth. They have shown us the way to achieve this harmony in the institutions of Marriage, Society, Education, Politics, Justice System, Economics/Trade and all the other remaining spheres of our lives.

Since the messages of of Islam and its preceding monothestic faiths are universal and similar, it is incumbent on all people to believe in all divine messages. This is why Prophet Mohammad (SAW) believed in the Prophethood of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (Peace Be Upon Them), for Allah's religion is indivisible and Prophethood is also indivisible. Indeed, the Prophet (SAW) declared that not only does he believe in the Torah and the Gospel but **"I believe in whateverBook Allah may have revealed" (42:15).** This is because Allah's guidance is univrsal and not restricted to any nation or nations: **"And there is no nation wherein a warner has not come" (35:24) and for every people a guide has been provided" (13:7).**

Pluralism is a key conception in Islam. This derives from the essence of Islam; the reality of Allah, the One, the Absolute and the Infinite, the Infinitely Good and All Merciful, the One Who is at once transcendent and immanent, greater than all we can conceive or imagine, yet, as the Holy Quran attests, closer to us than our jugular vein. Allah is the central reality of Islam in all of its facets, and attestations to this oneness, which is called *tawhid*, is the axis around which all that is Islamic revolves. He is the source of all existence and all cosmic and human qualities as well as the End to Whom all things

return. As the Holy Quran states, "We have never sent a messenger before thee except that we revealed to him saying, **"There is no Allah but I, so worship Me" (21:25)**

In the Islamic perspective, the oneness of Allah has as its consequence not the uniqueness of prophecy, but its multiplicity, since Allah as the Infinite created a world in which there is multiplicity and this includes, of course, the human order. Humanity according to the Holy Quran, was created from a single soul, but then diversified into races and tribes. The Holy Quran states, **"He created you [humanity] from a single soul" (39:6).** This implies that there is profound unity within diversity and therefore, religion is based on the message of Divine Oneness and so it cannot be for one segment of humanity.

Islam is a way of life; its practices are not restricted to particular allocated times of worship and nor is its values and teachings constrained to Muslims solely. It is a code of conduct set forth by Allah for humanity. There is no such thing as a societiless individual. Even the idea of being unjust to oneself, so that individuals and particularly societies are eventually destroyed, really means the destruction of the right to exist in a social and historical context.

 "There is No Allah but Allah" is the declaration of the Oneness of Allah and religion is the path to Allah. The central aim of the Holy Quran is to establish a viable social order on earth that will be just and ethically based. Therefore, that demands that we are responsible for our Allah's creations. Within the doctrines of Islam, social responsibility of the individual towards the collective and vice-versa is one of the focal points of a practicing Muslim.

Religion as A Solution to the Repercussions of Globalization

Similarly, globalization has also brought about a culture of pluralism, which is prevalent in all religious teachings. With globalization, we have seen the emergence of global

human rights and environmentalist groups that protect the interests of those often victimized by globalization. Furthermore, with the creation of Organizations such as the United Nation, World Health Organization and World Bank, etc., whether effective or not, has increased means of transparency and security. In this regard, the creation of a peaceful 'global village' has allowed the issues of poverty, war, and environment to have a global consensus and participation. But the inclusion of global consensus and participation doesn't necessary translate to equality. The economic divide has been systematically implemented by wealthy nations. That is not to say that pluralism doesn't exist in globalization, but it does so in a limited way to the advantage of some whilst excluding the majority of the world's population.

The absolute notion of pluralism as we understand it from a Divine perspective has actually been prevalent and deeply embedded in Islam and the Holy Quran. Although globalization has developed a "global village", it has failed to address the detrimental repercussions of inequality it has produced. Like all political and socio-economic systems so far, globalization does not offer a comprehensive solution that addresses the concerns of all elements of society. As established in the earlier part of the paper, only religious doctrines that are sources of Divine Revelation can offer a viable social order that is just.

As much globalization may have created channels of communication through multi-culturalism, diversity, free flow of communication, migration, and a global economy, it has been severely criticized for the vast inequalities it produced. Whilst, wealthy developed nations reap from the benefits of a structuralized and controlled political economic system that accommodate its own development and maintain its status quo, poorer countries face the repercussions of increasing poverty. This misuse of power acquired though economic dominance has been a pattern that has increased with globalization. The monopoly of Multi-National Companies and Foreign Direct Investment of first world nations in third world nations has given them a substantial level of authority which extends from economic control to shaping political policies. The consumer market economy does not in any way indicate any concern for welfare of the poor in particular. On the contrary, the economy assumes that the poor will get their share

of development and benefits along the normal course of development. This is a true exposition of a laissez- faire economy, where profit making gets priority over welfare and ethics. This is where there is a direct contradiction between Islam and capitalism/consumerism. These economic, political and cultural disparities are the growing repercussions of globalization.

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The Holy Quran's goal of an ethical, egalitarian social order is announced with severe denunciation of the economic disequilibrium and social inequalities prevalent in contemporary commercial Meccan society. The Holy Quran began by criticizing the gross socioeconomic disparities that perpetuated a pernicious divisiveness of mankind. Similarly, parallels can be made between the Meccan societies of that time to the present global context. Issues of increasing poverty, environmental concerns, violations of basic human rights and social inequality are all repercussions of globalization.

The inequalities produced by the processes of globalization such as economic and social injustices can see a foreseeable solution in Islamic practices. In the case of economic inequality, zakat is a way of reducing poverty. Islam has enjoined utmost importance on the concepts of Zakat and Islamic Finance. Broadly speaking Zakat is an obligation on the rich to distribute annually 2.5% of wealth to the poor and needy. The core concept of Islamic Finance is elimination of compound interest through a mechanism of profit sharing, thereby liberating the poor from the vicious shackles of usury. Zakat, Waqf and Islamic Finance are means for mobilization of economic resources from haves to have-nots with the goal of ensuring social and economic justice.

Islam advocates the importance of education. The Prophet Mohammad (SAW) had said regarding the topic of education, that one can travel great distances to attain education because education is a means of emancipating oneself. It is through education that issues of socio-economic differences can be overcome. Although education in the conventional sense is a means of self sustenance, in the broader sense, it serves to bridge the gap of difference in general. It is through education that the human mind can reconcile differences and love humanity as ordained by our Creator. Therefore, education must be the key solution towards social justice.

Islam gives rights to all beings and creations. If social justice is to be achieved, then no segment of society can be obliterated. Mass media and the general consensus towards Islam is that it oppresses women. Contrary to this notion that has conceptualized with rise of extremists and Islamic militancy, Prophet Mohammad (SAW) had emancipated women from their derogatory status and gave them rights which were considered revolutionary. Prostitution and slavery of women were very much prevalent in society at that time and therefore, women were not only given a certain code of conduct, but, also ceased men from taking advantage of women. The concept of "purdah" in Islam, whereby, women cover themselves has been suggested in Islam so that they are protected. Women in the media have been exploited and have been objectified; in this sense, the dress code given to women within religion is not only for their own dignity, empowerment, and rights, but to protect themselves from this sort of abuse.

Sayyed Hossein Nasr, in his book *The Heart of Islam, Enduring Values for Humanity*, writes that "the rapid destruction of both the natural environment and the social fabric of the most highly industrialized societies cannot but end in total disaster for the whole of humanity. Islam has a crucial role to play in bringing out the primacy of responsibilities over rights in accordance with its vision of the human being as a theomorphic being and its emphasis on the ontological reliance of human beings upon Allah." He suggests that Islam can be a major force to oppose process of the desacralization of both human beings

and nature, a process the result of which is the monumental crisis we now face. Furthermore, the participation on a global scale by Muslims in the creation of awareness of human responsibilities to compliment and precede human rights is itself a responsibility of primary order placed by Allah upon the shoulders of those Muslims endowed with sufficient knowledge combined with virtue to carry out such a task.

Furthermore, religious understanding can be one of the most essential means by which the foundation of peace and harmony can be achieved. By overlooking differences and uniting under the doctrines of our Creator, we can oversee that the functioning of global groups, strive towards humanitarian equality which is not just rhetoric but a reality.

Whereas the adoption of economic aspect of globalization overrules those of the spiritual needs of humanity, let religion be the principles by which we follow to fill the vacuum of inequality that is so often created by globalization of capitalist economies and free markets. The integrated economic, social, and political needs are subordinate to imperatives of faith and morality. If people of all Faiths truly practice and implement the principles of pluralism stated in their Religions, there can be a foreseeable solution to the ailments that we face presently.

Concluding Remarks

In the era in which the term globalization has been given concrete definitions by which most of the world and its diverse religions, cultures, languages are an integral part of its process, it is crucial that we look upon something that is more definite to unify us in a positive direction, By utilizing the free flow of communication easily available through advanced technology, religions should focus more on the humanitarian and pluralistic aspects of their teachings as a means to lessen the divide.

Faith as a whole should be seen as a collective unity of all religions, so that they may emancipate themselves from the negative consequences of globalization. Gloabalization is but one process of the development of human civilization. The notion of pluralism and

universalism is the centrality of all religions. To deny the Prophets (Peace Be Upon Them) of other religions is in essence a denial of Islam.

As stated in the Holy Quran and so eloquently practiced by Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in his roles as a spiritual guide, a head of state and leader of community, a supreme judge and arbitrator of dispute, a reformer of society; that we all descend from the religion of Prophet Abraham (AH) and we all look upon our Creator as the ultimate source of perfection and emancipation.

The source of religion is not to divide but to unite to bring upon this justice and equality in this world, whatever the challenges and adversaries may be. To conclude is a verse so beautifully reiterated from the Holy Quran that encompasses the very nature of plurality and unity set forth by Allah:

"The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His apostles. "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His apostles." And they say: "We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys." (The Holy Quran, Surah Bakhara: 285).

__Ameen__

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The Author is the Director Administration at the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW), a non-profit research think tank committed to peace and human development. Key focus areas of the Institute are human rights including rights of women, minorities and disabled persons, interfaith dialogues for conflict resolution and Islamic Finance for establishment of social and economic justice. The Institute is located in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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