

# The essential link

Islam  
Dawn  
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## Friday feature

THE view that religion cannot be separated from the state in a Muslim country is being increasingly criticized these days. It is cited as the main reason behind the backwardness of Muslim states that are actually acting on this concept. It is claimed that the notion of the inseparability of religion from the state is more of a theoretical rather than a scriptural injunction.

It is true that Muslim countries, where affairs are administered on the basis of the concept of inseparability of religion from the state, are either altogether backward or at least in some respects. But, if we examine the causes of such backwardness in a more objective way, it will appear that the main factor responsible for this is not religion but the perception of Islamic polity being influenced more by the form rather than the true spirit and essence of religious teachings and values that once enabled the Muslim *ummah* to lead the world.

The Quran says, "(they are) those who when We give them power in the land, establish regular prayers, and give regular charity and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" (22:41). The words "power in the land" have a clear reference to the existence of the state. The rest of the verse lays down the charter for those in power in the state which, among other things, gives credence to the concept of inseparability of religion from the state.

Conforming to the two guidelines, namely, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, would, according to another Quranic verse (3:104), mean inviting all that is good, the outcome whereof, according to the same verse, could be the attainment of felicity. This has been further explained by Abdullah Yusuf Ali as the attainment of happiness in this life and in the next: success, prosperity, freedom from anxiety, care or a disturbed state of mind which by all standards could be the normal outcome of advancement in the modern sense. The attainment of even some of these forms of felicity cannot be possible without the requisite degree of advancement in the socio-economic field.

From the above guidelines, those wielding power in Muslim states concentrate more on forbidding what is wrong, and that too in a coercive manner. Likewise, they interpret the guideline "enjoining what is right" in the most narrow sense of the expression, as something closely connected with personal conduct, and not in the broader sense of doing good which could benefit everyone.

This preoccupation with prohibitions and the harbouring of narrow views of that which should be enjoined serve as the main stumbling block in the way of attaining progress and advancement.

In order to prove the viability and true worth of the concept of inseparability of religion and the state, the rulers of Islamic states, who claim to be ruling their people on the basis of this concept, must conform more to the spirit than to the form of Islamic teachings and values in managing the affairs of their states. For example, the Quran not only tells us to do that which is good (2:195) but also exhorts us to excel in doing all that is good (2:148). It means that Muslim rulers

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should, among other things, not only do things that bring happiness and prosperity to their people but should excel in all such actions within the limits of divine guidance.

Likewise, the Quran says, "He has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and in the earth, all from Himself. There are many signs in this for those who reflect" (45:13) which spells out motivation for unlimited scientific and economic progress. In matters of prohibitions, the focus should be more on reformation than coercion. The Quran also tells us to repel evil with goodness (28:54).

The Quran not only tells us to excel in doing all that is good but also guides us in that by laying emphasis on three things. One is the acquisition of more and more knowledge (20:114). The acquisition of knowledge is the sine qua non for progress and advancement in any walk of life. The Prophet (PBUH) emphasized the acquisition of knowledge from cradle to grave. The other is reliance on one's own efforts when it says there is nothing for man except what he has striven for (53:39). The verse emphasizes making both mental and physical efforts for achieving the desired objectives.

The third is the need for appropriate change. This guidance is of special significance as there cannot be any advancement without change. The Quran tells us that if we want to bring any favourable change in our outer condition, there has to be first an

appropriate change in our inner condition (13:11). It means that there has to be first an awareness or realization about the necessity of bringing the change followed by its acceptance and mental preparedness for it, which should among other things, include the acquisition of the requisite knowledge and know-how, and then commitment to its achievement.

Almost all developed countries have passed through this process while achieving the desired degree of advancement in the socio-economic field. The march towards advancement will naturally unfold new vistas concerning various aspects of life which have to be properly addressed and responded to. The Quran and Sunnah provide us with detailed guidance in respect of numerous matters and situations. They provide guidance in broad terms for all matters but allow

the working out of details through the process of *ijma* and *ijtihad* and within the limits of such guidance. Thus, unless the rulers of Muslim states take recourse to *ijma* and *ijtihad* while responding to or meeting the requirements of new or changed situations, their states will not be able to attain the desired degree of advancement.

Equal treatment in respect of basic rights at least and the provision of equal opportunities are those components of

human rights on which there is great emphasis in the present context. Both these rights are clearly spelled out by the Quran (49:13). Explaining the relevant verse on the occasion of *Hajjat-al-Waqaa*, the Prophet said, "In the light of this Quranic verse, no Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab nor does any non-Arab have superiority over an Arab. Black is not superior to white nor is white superior to black. Of course, if there is any criterion of superiority and respectability it is *taqwa* (righteousness)."

The verse, as may be seen, highlights not only the idea of equality but also spells out the concept of equal opportunities. *Taqwa*, which is the only criterion of honour before Allah, is a standard that is within the reach of everyone. Each one of us has an opportunity to become righteous. The rulers of Muslim states should, therefore, ensure due compliance with the spirit of this guidance, where possible, for entitlement in respect of various matters and rights. Also, the giving of charity as emphasized by verse 22:41 does not mean merely giving alms but implies a practical demonstration of love and goodwill towards all.

Thus, the only appropriate answer to the criticism on the doctrine of inseparability of religion from the state lies in due compliance with the true spirit of relevant Islamic teachings and values by those who claim to be ruling their states on the basis of this concept.