Mutazila-Heresy; Theological and Rationalist Mutazila; Al-mamun, Abbasid Caliph; Al-mutawakkil, Abbasid Caliph; The Traditionalists

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Abstract: Mutazila were declared heretic by the Traditionalists and political elite because they did not conform to the traditional religious beliefs and practices. They posed threat to the religious and political authority of the Traditionalist ulama and theologians, as well as the authority of the ruling elite. The present study discusses the Mutazila heresy during the early Abbasid period from 750 to 850. The study tries to explore the origin and etymology of Mutazila and describes its theological doctrines based on rationalism. It also explains religio-philosophical doctrine of Mutazila and Mutazila's rationalization of faith. The study traces the socio-political and economic causes of the Mutazila heresy.

Key words:

INTRODUCTION

Mutazila was a theological, philosophical and rationalistic school of thought. It was also a religious movement founded at Basra during the first half of the eighth century. Mutazila enjoyed religious, political and social status during the Caliphate of al-Mamun, al-Mutasim (r. 833-842) and al-Wathiq (r. 842-847) while they were prosecuted and persecuted as heretics during the Caliphate of al-Mutawakkil ( ) and his predecessors.

The Qadariyya school of thought was forerunner of the Mutazila movement. Qadariyya believed in the freedom of human will. They were the people who rejected the notion of *jabr*, i.e. predeterminism of human action by God. After establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate in 750, Qadariyya school of thought, which had became a political threat during the last decades of Umayyad Caliphate, began to get theological character under Mutazila [1]. Qadariyya's doctrine of human free will was important point of Mutazilas' theological doctrines [2]. The Mutazila did not only discuss religious matters but they also tried in other fields like philosophy and rationalism. They saw every branch of knowledge through the eyes of reason. According to W. Montgomery Watt, they enormously contributed to Islamic theology [3]. The Mutazila started

a philosophical and rationalist movement and defined religious dogma through reason and rationalism. They gave wide scope to intellectual spectrum of the contemporary life and also enjoyed freedom but at the same time they were not ready to tolerate the views of their dissenter and tried to force their rationalist, particularly the createdness of the Quran on the opponents [4]. The Mutazila persecuted the Traditionalists on the issue of createdness of the Quran when they got political control under Caliph Mamun, Caliph Mutasim and Caliph Wathiq. When al-Mutawakkil became Caliph, the Mutazila were persecuted as heretics by the state.

Origin and Etymology of the Mutazila: Mutazila originated at the time when Muslim community was divided into different sects and schools of thought. Mutazila school of thought emerged during the Umayyad Caliphate in the environment of religious, social and political disturbance and flourished during the early Abbasid era. The philosophical minds wanted to know who was responsible for chaos and bloodshed, God or man. If man was responsible then what would be the punishment for him [5]. It was in this atmosphere of confusion and chaos that Mutazila school of thought emerged. According to Shahrastani, one day a man came to Hasan al-Basri and said:

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O Imam! There are some today who say that grave sinners are unbelievers. For them grave sin is unbelief by which one is cast out of the community. This group is Waidiya section of the Kharijis. On the other hand, there are others who defer judgment on grave sinners. For them grave sin does not adversely affect a person as long as he has faith. . . . These are the *Murji'a* (the Postponers) [6].

The man asked the opinion of the Imam about this important issue. Before Hasan al-Basri could give an answer, a man, Wasil ibn Ata (d. 748), among the pupils of the Hasan al-Basri, said: "I do not regard the grave sinner as a believer in an absolute sense, not yet an unbeliever in an absolute sense; he is, in my opinion, in an intermediate position, neither believer nor unbeliever." [6]. Wasil broke away from the circle of Hasan al-Basri and started preaching his own doctrine at the other place in the mosque, where Amr ibn Ubayd (d. 761) also followed him. Owing to their separation from the circle of Hasan al-Basri, Wasil ibn Ata and his followers came to be known as Mutazila (the Separatists) [6, 7].

Ibn-Nadim has also narrated the same story in his book *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*. According to ibn-Nadim, grave sinners were called hypocrites by Hasan al-Barsi and his followers [8]. The Mutazila called themselves 'People of Unity and Justice' (*ahl al-tauhid w-al-'adl*). They denied plurality of divine attributes. They believed in the unity of God [9]. According to Shahrastani, they were also called Qadariyya and Adliyya. The Mutazila did not like to be called Qadariyya. They argued that the term Qadariyya should be used for those who believed in *qadar* or predetermination. Shahrastani maintains that the Mutazila believed in the divine justice and unity [6]. They opposed the beliefs of the Traditionalists that all good and bad actions of humankind had been decreed by God almighty. Goldziher tries to trace the roots of Mutazila in ascetic lifestyle of those who said farewell to the material life [5]. According to Ahmad Amin, it was name of a Jewish theological school which bore similar ideas. The term *pharisees* was used for the Jewish theological school. In Hebrew, *pharisees* means 'to recede.' [2]. According to Nallino, *itizal* means to take neutral position in any matter between the two opposing groups. He maintains that during the first civil war (the Battle of the Camel in 656) between the forces of Ali and Aisha (d. 678), those companions (*sahaba*) who took the neutral position and did not participate in the war from the either side were called Mutazila. The later development of Mutazila as a theological school of thought by Wasil ibn Ata was a

continuation of that group. Scholars have traced the origin of Mutazila from different sources but the story stated by Shahrastani looks correct as most of the scholars accepted this.

The Mutazila got influence from Greek philosophy. They used rationalism and philosophy to develop a theological system. They attained knowledge from the works of Greek and Alexandrian writers and developed a new science which was called *Ilm al-kalam*, the science of reason [10]. They benefitted directly from the rationalism of the Fatimid School, founded by the early Shii Imams in Medina and indirectly from Greek and Alexandrian wisdom [10]. Mutazilas were the first who defended Islam against Manichaeans or dualists on theological grounds. During the debate with these Manichaeans, Mutazila learned about the Greek philosophy and rationalism [1]. The Mutazila were the first to use these ideas in theological matters [11]. When Abbasid took over Caliphate from the Umayyad, many books of Greek philosophy and logic, Christian religion and of Indian wisdom were translated. These translations brought new terminologies and ideas for Muslim intellectuals.

At the early stage of the development of Mutazila, there was no uniformity among them. This was a group of heterogeneous individuals belonging to different schools of thought. Amr ibn Ubayd, a class-mate of Wasil ibn Ata, bravely propagated Mutazila ideology. He was a close friend of Caliph al-Mansur [2]. During the Caliphate of al-Mahdi, Mutazila remained inactive as Mahdi was against *zanadiqa*, rationalists and preachers of free will. During the Caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, they strived to get power and to dominate theological scene [2]. The change of the dynasty from the Umayyad to Abbasid also changed the relationship of religious schools of thought and sects with the state, particularly in respect of the Qadariyya school of thought. Now they were treated bitterly [3]. The new political and intellectual environment gave opportunity to Mutazila to consolidate their position.

Theological Doctrines of the Mutazila: Mutazila school of thought used philosophical and rationalistic approach to interpret religion. At the early stage, Mutazila were not united on a single doctrine. The man who put forward five points, which were called theological doctrines of Mutazila, was Abu l-Hudhayl Muhammad ibn al-Hudhayl al-Allaf al-Abdi, died between 840 and 850. All the Mutazilas were united on these theological doctrines. These five common points of Mutazila were; *Tawhid*

(unity of God), *Adl* (Divine justice), *wad* and *waid*, (promises and admonitions), intermediate position (*al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn*) and lastly about the vitality of morality (*al-amr bi-l-maruf*) [7]. The most important points were the first two, the unity of God and justice of God. Montgomery Watt in his book *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* states that there were great names of Mutazila who contributed much in the doctrinal development of Mutazila school of thought. Among them the most prominent were Abu-l-Hudhayl, Abu-Ishaq Ibrahim ibn-Sayyar an-Nazzam (d. 836 or 845), Muhammar ibn-Abbad as-Sulami (d. 830), Abu-Usman Amr ibn-Bahr (d. 869), know as al-Jahiz, Abu-Sahl Bishr ibn-al-Mutamir al-Hilali and Abu-Man Thumama ibn-Ashras an-Numayri (d. 828) [3].

Theological doctrine of Mutazila got so much importance that on the questions of Uniqueness of God and Justice of God a controversy started between Mutazila and Traditionalists. The Mutazila were declared heretic on the ground of these question. It would be very useful to shed some light on theological doctrines of Mutazila.

Uniqueness of God (*Al-Tawhid*): Mutazila did not believe in the eternal attributes of God. They believed that

> God is knowing by his essence, powerful by his essence, living by his essence: not by knowledge or power or life considered as eternal attributes or entities, *ma'ani*, subsisting in Him. … Speech of God is temporal and created in a place … They are unanimous in denying that God can be seen by the eyes in Paradise. They also denied the possibility of any description of Him in anthropomorphic terms, such as assigning him direction, place, form, body, abode, movement, transition, change or emotion [6].

The God of Mutazila was out of the boundaries of space and time. According to Annemarie Schimmel, Mutazila's concept of God was beyond the literal, anthropomorphic interpretation of God by the Traditionalists. For the Mutazila, there was no similarity, at all, between Creator and the creation [12].

The great theological debate culminated in a single issue of createdness or uncreatedness of the Quran, i.e. whether it is the work of God or word of God [13]. Traditionalists believed in the uncreatedness of Quran, i.e. the words of God. According to the Traditionalists, there was no need of any rationalist interpretation of the words of God [13]. Mutazila believed in the createdness of

Quran, while the Traditionalists believed in the uncreatedness and eternity of the Quran. For the Traditionalists, the Quran had existed before the creation of the world. Mutazila hold that the Quran had not existed before creation of the world. They believed that Quran was not eternal because eternity was only for God and it would be wrong to believe in the eternity of the Quran [5]. In respect of the controversy of the attributes of God, the Traditionalists, *hadith* scholars, Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal (d. 855) and Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (d. 870) were at the forefront to refute the idea of createdness of Quran of Mutazila [14]. They firmly believed in the uniqueness of God. They were not ready to accept any attribute of God.

Justice of God (*al-Adl*): The most important and basic doctrine of Mutazila was Justice of God and the will of God to do only good for His people. Ashari school of thought believed that God was above all rules and laws, because rules and laws were only for human beings. God does what He wants. Contrary to this, the Mutazila put forward the idea that God is bound by some rules. It would be injustice on the part of God if He does not obey the rules made by Him. Mutazila argued that it would be injustice of God if He has already predetermined all actions of human beings. Again, according to Mutazila, it would be justice of God to leave his people to become believer or unbeliever. God only does good for His creation because God is just. If God does anything evil, it would be against His Justice. It is the justice of God to demand from his people according to their capacity [9]. According to Isutsu, "the thesis of divine justice was put forward with the intention of shifting from God to man the burden of the responsibility for the evil acts of Man." [15]. According to Mutazila, there would be no use of any judgment of good and evil actions of humanity if things are already shaped and consequently, there would be no use of giving reward and punishment on the Day of Judgment on the basis of human effort.

The Promise and the Threat (*Al-Wa'd Wa 'L-Waid*): The third point of Mutazila theological doctrine was more or less part of the second point, i.e. Justice of God. The Mutazila believed that human beings would be rewarded or punished on the ground of their good or bad actions. They believed that it would be injustice to make God responsible for the wrong-doings and sins of human beings. God is wise so God does only that is good and just for humanity [6]. Only those who deserve God's reward would be rewarded and those who deserve His punishment would be punished. There is no doubt that

God has the ability to pardon and punish but according to Mutazila, the punishment or reward by the God Almighty would be on merit.

Intermediate State (Al-*Manzla Bayna 'L-manzilatayn*): The most important question that gave emergence to the Mutazila school of thought was the question about the status of the grave sinner. Kharijis believed that grave sinner was unbeliever, i.e. *kafir* and would be in the Hell forever, while Murjia were of the opinion that the grave sinner was a Muslim but he would be punished for his or her sin after the death. The Mutazila adopted the middle way about the status of grave sinner. They were of the opinion that the grave sinner was a *fasiq*, i.e. an intermediate rank between a believer and non-believer [6].

Command the Good and Forbid the Evil (*Amr Bil Maruf Wa Nahi an Al-Munkar*): Among the essentials of Islam, one of the important points is enjoining good and forbiding from evil. This point is also one of the five doctrinal points of Mutazila. They argued that it was not just *Sharia* law which defined good and evil but human being was capable through his reasoning ability to differentiate between good and evil. This point was important in respect of the involvement of Muslims in the state affairs. Mutazila themselves participated in the religious and political debates of that age. They backed the *mihna* [16] or inquisition of al-Mamun to force the *ulama* to accept the doctrine of createdness of the Quran.

Mutazila theological doctrines were based on rationalism. They tried to interpret God, Islamic beliefs and practices and the questions of reward and punishment after death on rational and philosophical grounds. They fell under the banner of heresy during the time of Caliph Mutawakkil because they did not recognize the prevailing theological interpretations of the traditional *ulama*.

Rationalization of Faith by the Mutazila: Rationalism and free will were hallmark of the Mutazila. They were the first who used human reason to interpret the religious dogma in Islam. Mir Valiuddin argues that the Mutazila were the staunch rationalists. They believed that revealed knowledge could be interpreted through reason [9]. Abu 'l-Hudhail, the great Mutazila scholar, argued that human being was bound to use reason, to understand God in the presence of revelation. Those who failed in this respect would be punished. It is prime duty of humanity to seek good and to avoid evil [6]. Mutazila were of the opinion that human being was capable of separating good from

evil on the basis of his or her rationalism. They argue that God loves welfare of humanity through the agency of human reason [17]. They opined that God had showered great blessings on humanity by giving them the ability of reason. Through that power of reason human being is capable of separating good from bad [10]. Mutazila scholars maintained that reason helps greatly in knowing God and also it proves beneficial for humanity as the decisions based on rationalism are good for humanity.

The Mutazila believed in infinite justice of God, but the Traditionalists were severely against this idea. The Traditionalists believed in God who is all powerful, beyond the boundaries of justice. According to them, applying human reason to justice of God would restrict God. This debate of metaphysical nature turned into a theological debate and the two opposing schools of thought got help from Quranic verses in their defense [1]. The Traditionalists argued that free will and rationalism give power to human being over the creation of his or her actions, while God is the sole Creator of all actions [18]. Mutazila were not ready to accept the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) without judging through reason. They were also called Batinites (*al-batiniyya*) from *batin*, meaning inner, as opposed to the literalists, Zahirites, (*al-zahiriyya*) from *zahir*, meaning outer [11]. The Traditionalists severely opposed the religious ideas of Mutazila based on rationalism as the former were against the rationalist interpretation of the Quran.

C.H. Becker mistakenly assumes that Mutazila got the view of free will from Christianity. According to him, in Islam, there is no idea of free will. He insisted that Islam is a religion of deterministic doctrine and human free will is a Christian doctrine [19]. George F. Hourani states that ethical rationalism of Mutazila is based on objectivity and rationality of values, human control over his choice of good and evil and the doctrine of everlasting reward and punishment. The Islamic ethical rationalism of Mutazila was not influenced by the Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. It was developed by the Mutazila, based on the Quran. It is very difficult to trace non-Islamic effect on the ethical doctrine of Mutazila [19]. Though there is a similarity of some of the Mutazila doctrines with other religions but Mutazila got very little influence from the ethical values of other religions.

The Mutazila were of the opinion that human being is free in respect of rationalization of his acts based on faith. They were preacher of freedom of thought. According to Shafique Ali Khan, God has the only real freedom as the Creator of this world. God has created human being on his own image. Man has been given

freedom as he is the vicegerent of God on earth. God has given the ability to human beings to know the limitation of his freedom, the real essence. When human being worships his freedom without knowing the boundaries of freedom he fell from the grace and become slave of other human beings [4]. According to Spinoza, the mastery of human being over his freedom lies in his ability to differentiate between good and better for himself. He becomes master of freedom only when he make himself free form following emotions. He maintains that when human beings fail to check the excessive desires than he fall victim of bondage. Spinoza argues that the real freedom lies in pursuing freedom through reason and limiting desires through reason [4].

Mutazila tried to comprehend everything on the basis of reason. It is a fact that every human faculty has its limits as Russel states that complete rationality is impossible [20]. In the words of Iqbal, "At the dawn of Life the Angel said to me: Do not make thy heart a mere slave to reason." [9]. Asghar Ali Engineer states in his article that faith and reason are not antagonistic. The Quran has emphasized to adopt the middle way for success. Both reason and faith are necessary for success as "reason alone can make us skeptical and faith alone can make many superstitious." [21]. Rationalists were branded as heretic and were persecuted by the 'organized religion' when they crossed limits in respect of reason and when they completely depended on reason and completely ignored faith [21]. The Mutazila tried to rationalize faith. They were of the opinion that rationalization of faith would greatly benefit the humanity as reason is one of the blessings of God.

Religio-Philosophical Doctrines of the Mutazila: Mutazila not only has a distinguished place in the intellectual history of Muslims, but they contributed greatly in the history of philosophy as well [7]. Sartre once said about human free will that it was possible only with atheism. Mutazila tried to reconcile the idea of human free will with theism [5]. The Mutazila tried to harmonize or reconcile religion with philosophy. They were of the view that that the things were not good and bad because God had made them so, but God made distinction between good things and bad things for the good of His people [9]. It is within capacity of human being to differentiate between good and evil things on the basis of his or her intellect.

The Mutazila are of the opinion that there are some acts that are just good in themselves and these must be done without keeping in mind any return. There are people who do good and keep themselves away from evil,

for them it is the beauty of goodness of the action which is more important than any reward in this world or life hereafter. They avoid doing evil owing to the badness of the evil action. The Mutazila gave preference to reason over *Shariah* (the revealed law). For them things which are declared good through reason also become good in *Shariah*. Contrary to this, the orthodox Sunni *ulama* believe that *Shariah* is the only criterion to separate good from evil. *Shariah* law is above reason and ratioanalism [21]. The orthodox sections of society believed in the single universal moral standard on the basis of their own interpretations of the religious doctrines.

During the early era of the Abbasid Caliphate, some of the philosophers were also branded as heretics. Abu Ishaq al-Warraq (d. 860), a ninth century philosopher, was declared heretic and was accused of professing Manichaeism, dualism and atheism [22]. He belonged to the Mutazila school of thought. Later on, when he left Mutazila school of thought, he was branded as heretic by his Mutazila opponents. He also had Shia tendencies [22]. Al-Warraq was accused of heresy owing to his connection with Shia and also as a Manichaean. According to the modern scholars, it is difficult to find any proof that al-Warraq was a Manichaean by faith [23]. So it was a false allegation against him. The contribution of Mutazila to philosophy was great, but in the present study only those philosophical ideas are discussed that were closely linked with the theological philosophy of Mutazila school of thought.

According to Shafique Ali Khan, Mutazila failed to utilize the opportunity given to them by the nature and they misused their political and intellectual powers to harass their political opponents. Khan maintains that, no doubt, they contributed much to the intellectual debates of their time but at the same time, they helped in creating differences among the Muslims, resultantly the emergence of different religious schools of thought and sects. They became reason of disrupting the integrity of the Muslim *Ummah*. They started inquisition against the Traditionalists to force their philosophy and rationalism, particularly, on the issue of createdness of the Quran. The Mutazila did not compromise on their philosophical and rationalist approach to Islam [4].

The Mutazila were true Muslims. They tried to rationalize faith, which was according to them the real essence of religion. Their effort to interpret religion on philosophical grounds greatly benefited the later intellectual generation. Their philosophical interpretation was aimed to benefit the humanity. They stuck to the basic teachings of Islam but they went far in respect of

their efforts to rationalize faith that was why they were opposed vehemently by the Traditionalists and were persecuted as heretics during the Caliphate of al-Mutawakkil.

Ilm Al-Kalam as an Expression of Heresy: *Kalam* or *Ilm al-Kalam* is a theological debate in Islam, relating to the belief and faith. It deals with "speculative theology." [14]. Literally, *kalam* means "speech," "talk," or "words." *Yatakallam fi* means to discuss a subject. The origin of the use of the word *kalam* goes back to the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when the Prophet found a group of Muslims who talked about the predestination, *yatakallamuna fi'l-qadar*, the opposite of which is *sakata'an*, to keep silent about a subject or matter. Until the development of *kalam* as a special branch to discuss theological issues, it can be found in different traditions and its use continued in discussing the matter of predestination. Those people who were engaged in such discussion were called *mutakallimun*. The science of *kalam* was a development of Muslim throught and there is no trace of any sign that this science was derived from Christian, Greek or Syriac sources [23]. The Quran deals with *kalam* with such importance that it is certain that *kalam* was the original product of Muslim intellectual milieu. The Quran stress the importance of *kalam* discussions in a number of ways. It discusses the issues like belief in God and prophethood on rational grounds. It also discusses the beliefs and thoughts of other religions and it stresses the importance of *takfir*, thought as duty of the Muslims [23]. In the Muslim orthodox literature, Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 745) is considered as the founder of *kalam* [14]. It developed when scholars strived to find out the answers of the questions such as existence of God, prophethood and revelation, the use of the religious doctrines and life after death through the agency of reason.

The *mutakallimun* tried to interpret the Quranic verses relating to the attributes of God on rational and logical grounds. They denied God's attributes. They were vehemently opposed by the Traditionalists who believed on the eternal attributes of God and on the literal meanings of the verses of the Quran without any question [14]. There was strong reaction from the Traditionalist sections of community, which considered it unlawful to search for the answers of these questions through reason [24]. *Mutakallimun* or the experts of *Ilm al-Kalam* were declared heretics during the Abbasid Caliphate, when *kalam* was widely used in discussing theological matters and the influence of Greek philosophy on Muslim intellectuals was gaining grounds [14].

There were many opponents of *Kalam*. The Hanafite judge, Abu Yusuf (d. 798), was so much against the *kalam* that he declared all those as *zindiq* who tried to acquire knowledge through *kalam* [3] Dirar ibn Amr (d. 815), a *mutakallim*, who contributed much in the development of Islamic thought, was declared *zindiq* by a Qazi [3]. Bishr al-Marisi (d. 833) was a theologian. His attempt to politicize his theological ideas made him a very important figure among the *mutakallimun*. He was threatened by Caliph Harun al-Rashid because he stated that the Quran was the created word of God [3]. Thumama ibn Ashras Abu Man al-Numayri (d. 828), a Mutazila *Mutakallim*, was imprisoned by the orders of Caliph Harun al-Rashid. People dubbed him as a *zindiq* [25]. He was among the leaders of Qadariyya during the Caliphate of Harun al-Rashid [9]. Those *Mutakallimun* who were in favour of using reason and rationalism to interpret the religious doctrines were branded as heretics and were prosecuted and persecuted.

Mutazila as a Heretical Movement: The Mutazila were branded heretics by the Traditionalists. Their rationalistic interpretation of revealed doctrines and the notion of free will became the cause of their heresy. There were issues of religious and social privileges of the Traditionalists and their political authority that were also important in respect of branding the Mutazila as heretics.

These were the Mutazila who came forward first to counter *zandaqa*. They very bravely and consistently, countered these external attacks by *zindiq*s and declared the doctrines of *zindiq*s as false doctrines and dangerous to Islam [26]. They were successful in their battle against the dualists. In the words of Zaman, "it was ironic that the Mutazila, who had been active in combating the Manichaean and other perceived challenges to Islam, were themselves denounced, by Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855) and others among the *ashab al-hadith*, as Magians and *zandaqa*." [27]. The Traditionalists vehemently opposed the Mutazila as their standing in the society was jeopardized. They were also suspicious of the argumentative and disputational characteristics of Mutazila and *mutakallimun*. Reasons of this suspicion were not merely religious or theological in nature; the rationalists "were also suspect, it seems, as potential means of questioning and undermining the authority of the *ulama*, even of defeating them in argument and humiliating them." [26].

Zaman also argues that Traditionalists also perceived *mihna* as a threat to their authority, as guardians of religious beliefs and doctrines [26]. Richard Lim argues that debates over the issues of religious doctrines in late

antiquity "were seen not just to undermine religious beliefs, but to also threaten the social order." [26]. The same was the case with the Traditionalists during the early Abbasid Caliphate, as they understood these public debates over religious beliefs and doctrines harmful for the religion and for the society as well. The inquisition of Caliph al-Mamun and the extreme attitude of the Mutazila, during their dominance in political and religious affairs of the Empire, also went against them when Caliph al-Mutawakkil became Caliph. This was a sort of revenge by the Traditionalists when the Mutazila were prosecuted and persecuted during the orthodox Caliphate of al-Mutawakkil and his predecessors. The Traditionalists have always disregarded logic, philosophy and rationalism, as Gibb argues "even in the service of orthodoxy philosophy and logic were suspect …" [1]. The Mutazila were declared heretics by the Traditionalists because they relied mainly on logic, philosophy and rationalism.

Religion has always very deeply affected human mind in respect of beliefs and practices. It has always been difficult to get rid of the old beliefs and practices when converting to the new religion. When people accepted Islam in the newly conquered areas, they brought with them their old religious beliefs and traditions because it was difficult for them to altogether give up their old traditions and religious practices at once. Most of the time, they had not brought these ideas intentionally. The presence of these old traditions and religious beliefs played an important role in accusing these people as heretics [2]. In the case of the Mutazila, most of them were not Arabs. They were Persian *mawali*. These Persians when accepted Islam, were accused of not accepting Islam from their heart [2] so they were accused of heresy.

The Mutazila were also declared as freethinkers of Islam which is not correct. They were thoroughly religious in respect of using reason in theological matters. They used reason fairly to interpret the theological doctrines. As far as the question of ethics is concerned, they subscribed to the Qadariyya doctrine of human volition and human responsibility for good or evil actions [12]. According to Von Grunebaum, the Mutazila was a distinctive theological school of thought in Muslim history. They followed the teachings of the Quran and preached the unity of God. "They were in no way freethinkers or men of the enlightenment, they disciplined the methods of thought, concerned themselves with clear theological concepts and, one might say, humanized the teaching in that they raised up *ratio* (*'aql*) to the decisive criterion of truth as an element which joined God and man in a kind of pre-stabilized harmony." [28].

Caliph al-Mutawakkil was aware of the failure of the official inquisition, *mihna* and stiff resistance from the *ulama* against it. He supported the Traditionalists to win their favour. He tried to get their support to assure the authority of the Caliphate when he abolished *mihna* and adopted orthodoxy as official religion of the state [27]. During the Caliphate of al-Mutawakkil, the Mutazila were declared heretics owing to their conceptions relating to morality, God's justice, human free will and the role of God in this universe. They believed in human free will. They believed that God had created the universe and now God has no role in its functioning; it functions according to its rational laws [29]. All these ideas were not acceptable to the *ulama* and the ruling elite.

For the *ulama* or Traditionalists, it was against the literal interpretation of the revealed laws and a challenge to their social status connected with their religious hegemony. These ideas were also not tolerable for the political establishment because this ideology would encourage people to question the wrong acts of the ruling elite. Caliph al-Mutawakil was so much against the Mutazila that he declared them *murdar* or the 'dead ones.' [2]. The Mutazila tried to fill the gap between Hellenistic rationalism and 'Medinian piety,' which was the Traditionalists' approach to the religion. The Qadariyya were declared heretic and persecuted when they tried to fill this gap during the Umayyad Caliphate. Later on, Mutazila were also branded heretics when they tried to fill this gap with theological rationalism. Their sincere effort got respect only from the learned Arabs [1].

CONCLUSION

The Mutazila strived to interpret religious doctrines and beliefs through rationalism and logic but at the same time they were Muslims. They presented philosophical, logical and rational understanding of God, revealed knowledge, justice of God and human free will. Their philosophical and rational interpretations were only welcomed in the literate circles of the society. The interpretations of religious beliefs and practices of Mutazila went against the dominant religious group, Traditionalists. Thus they were branded as heretics by the Traditionalists. Over the most important issue of human free will and predestination, the Mutazila were clearly on the side of human free will. This ideology of Mutazila became the reason of declaring them as heretics. They were declared heretics on the issue of createdness of the Quran because they were in favour of the rationalist interpretation of the revealed message which would give importance to the questions of human responsibility.

This was not acceptable to the orthodox Traditionalists as they enjoyed social status being the custodians of religious authority. These were the Traditionalists ulama and the ruling Umayyad Caliphs who perceived threat to their religious, social, political and economic privileges from the Mitazila movement. The Mutazila ideology which went against the dominant religious views in Muslim society. Mutazila scholars were branded as heretics by the Traditionalists with the support of the Caliphs having orthodox tendencies.

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