

Authority in Islamic Political Thought: A Study of Quranic Verses

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Abstract: Islamic political thought remains the most debatable field of knowledge in the present day world both in East and the West. Authority which is generally considered to be the central aspect of Islamic political thought remains more contentious field among the scholars both within and outside Muslim academia. The fact is that some out rightly deny it; some exploit their own intellect; some comparatively blend it with the modern thought and rational interpretations; and some exclusively intermingle it with Western political thought while discussing the concepts, characteristics, powers, appointment, location and other different components of authority in Islamic political thought. Consequently, this leads to the diversity of interpretations of the whole Islamic political thought especially its components of authority. In this connection the paper is a humble and preliminary effort to present the concept and components of authority in Islamic political thought in the light of Quranic verses which will reduce these diversified interpretations.

Key words: Islamic Political Thought • Sovereignty • Almighty Allah • Prophet (S.A.W) • *Khalīfah* • Obedience

INTRODUCTION

The nature of politics has its origin from the inception of human being itself. The universally accepted principle is that the human being cannot live in isolation because he is a social being. The day to day needs of the human being with regard to the care, security, cooperation and the management of other worldly affairs in a reasoned manner are directly related to the power and authority. This aspect of human life gradually developed an idea which came to be known as political thought. Political thought generally means the thoughts, theories and values which motivate policy and political behavior. Moreover, political thought includes the theories through which people attempt to explain each other's political behavior, the values by which they judge it and the mechanisms (such as law) whereby they attempt to control it [1].

Aristotle defined political thought as, "By 'political thought' I mean any form of reflection about the nature of human society and organization, about leadership and the state; about how society and the state should be managed and run and what possible alternative forms there are" [2]. In the Western political thought the main

focus is on the human needs and their rational utilization for the well being of the society. While as Islamic political thought is the synthesis of both revelation and rational utilization for the accomplishment of the worldly affairs of the collective community. There are so many aspects of Islamic political thought which includes: system of government, law (*Sharīah*) its deduction and execution, election of *Khalīfah*, functions of *Shūrā* (consultative body), maintenance of revenue, delegation of powers, judicial functions, public policies, international relations, rights of minorities etc. The fundamental and the basic source of all these aspects of Islamic political thought is authority, through which all such functions can be performed. Regarding the need and importance of authority in the human civilization, Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) a well known historian and sociologist of Islam asserted that people in any social organization must have someone who exercises a restraining influence and rules them and to whom recourse may be had. His (authority's) rule over them is sometimes based on a divinely revealed religious law. They are obliged to submit to it in view of their belief in reward and punishment in the other world (life after death). Sometimes, (his rule is based) upon rational

politics. People are obliged to submit to it in view of the reward they expect from the ruler after he has become acquainted with what is good for them. The first (type of rule) is useful for this world and for the other world, because the lawgiver knows the ultimate interest of the people and is concerned with the salvation of man in the other world. The second (type of rule) is useful only for this world [3]. While on the other side Alī Abdul Rāziq (1888-1966) an Egyptian scholar of Islam and the author of *'al Islam wa Usūl al Hukm'* repudiates the need and importance of power and authority in Islam. He argued that the *'Ulamā'* have been unable to produce a single verse of the *Qurān* in order to prove the thesis that the appointment of an *Imām* (leader) is a religious duty of the Muslims. He further added that if there had been any such verse in the *Qurān*, the *'Ulamā'* would not have hesitated to produce it before the world. But they sometimes take refuge in *Ijm'a*, sometimes in syllogisms of logic and sometimes in the dictates of reason [4].

Islamic Political Thought: Muslim political theorists believe that Prophet (S.A.W) established a form of political authority that reflected the basic components of a government. The state of Madinah included a territory, a community and a form of authority and sovereignty entrusted with managing the affairs of that community. The Prophet (S.A.W) maintained dual functions and exercised both religious and temporal authority. He performed many of the functions of a government. He acted as a ruler, judge and military commander and appointed *'Ummāl* (officials) to represent him to the far regions under his control. This model represented a clear intertwining of religious and political authorities [5]. Before the demise of Prophet (S.A.W), he did not make any proclamation regarding the appointment of his successor, but the companions thought that the systematic role of Prophet (S.A.W) in the Islamic history should be continued by maintaining the institution of *Khilāfah* in order to disseminate the Islamic teachings as well as to conduct the affairs of the Islamic state. The word *Khilāfah* is derived from the root word *'Khalaf'* which means "to be behind," "to succeed," or "replace" one. In political terminology, caliph signifies the person who succeeds Prophet (S.A.W) so as to protect the religion and to conduct worldly affairs pursuant to religious policy. Therefore caliphate merges two types of leadership, namely, religious and earthly [6].

Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914-1999) a well known Islamic scholar and reformer of Indian subcontinent quoted definition of a noted Islamic thinker

and political theorist of India named Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762) regarding *Khilāfah* as "*Khilāfah* is the leadership of people united in a commonwealth which comes into existence for the establishment of religion including revival of religious branches of learning, institution of Islamic ritual observances, organization of *Jihād* and making necessary arrangements for the same as, for example, marshalling an army, remunerating the combatants and distributing the booty among them, creating a judicial system and enforcing the laws, curbing of crimes and removing public grievances, commanding the good and forbidding the wrong etc. All these functions have to be performed by it as if it were deputizing and representing the Prophet (S.A.W)" [7].

Before going to the presentation of the concept and dimensions of authority in Islamic political thought, we must contemplate on the nature of creation of the Almighty Allah. Islam believes in the theory of creation, which means that Allah created each and every thing of the universe by His own Will. As *Qurān* Says:

Say: "(Allah) is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Supreme and Irresistible." (R'ad 16)

Among the different creations, He chooses man as the Crown of the Creation (*Ashraf al Makhlūqāt*). Putting an exhaustive glance at the nature of the creation of human being, we see His creation is composed of two different entities, one is earthly, that is soil and water; and the second is divine, that is soul. As Allah says in the *Qurān*:

"We created man from sounding clay, from mud molded into shape [8]. (Hijr 26)

"When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him" [9]. (Hijr 29)

By analyzing these verses we come to conclusion that the nourishment of the earthly entity takes place from the earth itself while as the nourishment of the divine entity is from divine scales. He (Creator) Himself made the arrangement for the divine entity by sending the prophets from time to time. Prophets are said to be the chosen vicegerents of Allah on earth in order to convey the divine message to the mankind for the attainment of success in this life and in Hereafter (*Ākhirah*). As Islam is believed to be the complete way of life, it produces the comprehensive thought for the human existence of collective form. The cooperation and coexistence of

human beings in a definite environment needs an organized system, which Islam provides in a reasoned way. The first and foremost principle of that very organized system is authority which can formulate the best structure for the human civilization. Islamic political system which solely based on the authority is having three dimensions according to the *Qurān*. The Quranic verse which discusses the dimensions of authority is as:

"O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger" [10]. (*Nisā'* 59)

Maulana Maududi (1903-1979) a well known theologian, Mufassir of Tafhīm al Qurān and Islamic political thinker of Indian subcontinent interpreted this verse as:

This verse is the cornerstone of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam. Allah alone is the focus of loyalty and obedience. Other claims to loyalty and obedience are acceptable only insofar as they remain secondary and subservient and do not compete with those owed to Allah. Obedience to prophets however is the only authentic means through which Allah communicates His injunctions and ordinances to men. Hence, we can obey Allah only if we obey a prophet. Those invested with authority (*ulu al amr*) include all those entrusted with directing Muslims in matters of common concern. Hence, persons 'invested with authority' include the intellectual and political leaders of the community, as well as administrative officials, judges of the courts, tribal chiefs and regional representatives [11].

In this verse, there are three components of authority, first one is of Allah; second is of Prophet (S.A.W) and the third is of *Khalīfah* of the time.

Authority of Almighty Allah: Allah is the First Guide, Master, Sustainer and Sovereign of the whole universe. Each and every thing belongs to Him, so He alone is the Real Master Who can devise the programme of conducting the affairs of His creation in an articulate manner. The aforementioned verse of the *Qurān* clearly discusses the nature, scope, importance, forms of authority and its implementation in the Islamic society. The commandments of Almighty Allah are to be obeyed in each and every aspect of the human life. As Allah is the Creator of the human being, He alone has authority to guide and command him. Each and every aspect of life

should be in accordance with His Will. So, the Absolute Sovereignty belongs to Him. Sovereignty of Allah is the fundamental principle of Islamic political thought. In several verses of the *Qurān*, the Sovereignty of Allah is discussed in detail. Some of them are:

"Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and is firmly established on the throne of authority): He draweth the night as a veil o'er the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds!" [12]. (*A'rāf* 54)

Say: "Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the earth? or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?" They will soon say, "(Allah)". Say, "Will ye not then show piety (to Him)?" [13]. (*Yūnus* 31)

"Whatever it be wherein ye differ, the decision thereof is with Allah. Such is Allah my Lord: In Him I trust and to Him I turn." [14]. (*Shurā'* 10)

"Follow (O men!) the revelation given unto you from your Lord and follow not, as friends or protectors, other than Him." [15]. (*A'rāf* 3)

"If not Him, ye worship nothing but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, - for which Allah hath sent down no authority: the command is for none but Allah. He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him: that is the right religion, but most men understand not." [16]. (*Yūsuf* 40)

The above verses of the *Qurān* clearly discuss the sovereign character of Almighty Allah. Everything of the universe is His creation and servant. No one is His partner in the creation. So no one is His partner in the Absolute Sovereignty or Ultimate Sovereignty (*Uluhiyat*). Islam takes away from mankind the right to make laws, because Allah is the Lawmaker. This is one of the most distinctive features of the Muslim society, because in a society in which the laws are made by Allah and the people are the slaves of Allah, it is not possible that this law could have any defects, shortcomings or elements of unfairness towards any class or group of people, because Allah is above favoring any group of people or class over others [17].

Masud al Hasan a Pakistani Professor and author of the books (History of Islam 2 vols., Reconstruction of Political Thought in Islam, Sayyid Abul ala Maududi and his Thought) had quoted several scholars of Islam regarding their views on the Sovereignty of Almighty Allah. According to him, Imam Ghazali is one among them who is said to have addressed the king in his book *Nasihah al Mulūk* (Counsel for Kings) as: "You should understand O king that you are a creature and that you have a creator who is the Creator of the universe and is Supreme" [18]. Again Prof. Masud al Hasan quoted Ibn Khaldun who asserted that the doctrine of sovereignty of Allah exercises a restraining influence on the people and keeps them apart from aggressiveness and injustice [19]. He further quoted Allama Iqbal who said, by the doctrine of the sovereignty of Allah, Islam demands loyalty to Allah, not to thrones and since Allah is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to Allah virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature [20].

Authority of the Prophet (S.A.W): The only way of conveying the commandments of Allah towards the mankind is the institution of prophet hood. Prophets were sent to each and every community of the mankind. They are the chosen vicegerents of Allah on earth. As *Qurān* mentions:

"Behold, thy Lord said to the angels; I will create a vicegerent on earth..." [21]. (*Baqara* 30)

At another place *Qurān* says:

"O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in truth (and justice)...." [22]. (*Sad* 26)

In these verses of the *Qurān*, the word 'Khalifah' occurs which denotes that Allah had sent prophets towards mankind in order to convey His message in a detailed manner and show them practically how to conduct the affairs of the life and how Allah's pleasure is obtained. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was bestowed with the reward that he completes the chain of the prophets. He is believed to be the final messenger of Islam and the *Qurān* which was revealed on him is declared to be the last divine guidance for humanity. He is the prophet for all times to come. As Masud al Hasan states, "The Prophet (S.A.W) was not merely the religious head; he was the head of the state as well. He did not merely

preach a religion, he showed the people the way to live and make best of their lives on earth. The political significance of the doctrine of finality of the prophet hood of Hadrat Muhammad (S.A.W), therefore, is that the Prophet was not merely the political leader and head of the state during his lifetime, he would continue to be the political leader and head of the state for all times" [23]. The importance of Prophet's authority is discussed by Dr. Tahir al Qadri (an Islamic scholar of Pakistan) in his book *Al Hukm al Shar'ī* as:

The Supremacy of Allah is an ideology and belief; it cannot be constitutionally implemented unless and until for the obedience of it the society is existed, where it is practically performed, because it is the people who show obedience. The presence of the proper model of authority and sensitive practical being at societal level is necessary, to which the people show obedience. If it is not there, then the authority of Allah remains a metaphysical and philosophical idea, which could not achieve the constitutional status. Thus the implementation of authority takes place in the society and for this, practical model {Prophet (S.A.W)} is necessary through which the manifestation of Absolute Sovereignty of Allah and its implementation takes place [24].

Regarding the status of Prophet (S.A.W), Prof. Masud al Hasan quoted Imam Ghazali who said, the Prophet (S.A.W) is above the general mass of the humanity in the same way as human beings are superior to animals. Prophethood is a benediction of Allah; it cannot be acquired by hard work, cultivation or education [25]. According to Maulana Maududi, the greatest achievement of the Prophet (S.A.W) of Islam is that he realized the human soul from its fetters and set man's intellectual faculties free from the bonds of subservience to false ideologies [26].

The authority of prophet is discussed in detail in the Quranic verses as:

"We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked Allah's forgiveness and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful." [27]. (*Nisā'* 64)

"But no, by the Lord, they can have no (real) Faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them and find in their souls no resistance against Thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction" [28]. (*Nisā'* 65)

There are several verses in the *Qurān* in which the obedience of Allah and His Prophet (S.A.W) is mentioned altogether. Some of them are as:

"He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah. But if any turn away, We have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds)" [29]. (Nisā' 80)

So obey Allah and obey His Messenger. But if ye turn back, the duty of Our Messenger is but to proclaim (the Message) clearly and openly [30]. (Tagaban 12)

What Allah has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships, - belongs to Allah, - to His Messenger and to kindred and orphans, the needy and the wayfarer; In order that it may not (merely) make a circuit between the wealthy among you. So take what the Messenger assigns to you and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you. And fear Allah. for Allah is strict in Punishment [31]. (Hashr 7)

Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. The Hand of Allah is over their hands: then anyone who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul and anyone who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah, - Allah will soon grant him a great Reward [32]. (Fath 10)

O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the messenger and make not vain your deeds! [33]. (Muhammad 33)

Say: "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger. But if ye turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and ye for that placed on you. If ye obey him, ye shall be on right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear (Message) [34]. (Nūr 54)

They ask thee concerning (things taken as) spoils of war. Say: "(such) spoils are at the disposal of Allah and the Messenger. So fear Allah and keep straight the relations between yourselves: Obey Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe" [35]. (Anfāl 1)

O ye who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger and turn not away from him when ye hear (him speak) [36]. (Anfal 20)

The above verses of the *Qurān* show it clearly that the obedience of the Prophet in each and every aspect of life is unconditional because he is the part of our faith. Moreover, he is the true and real representative of the legal sovereignty of Allah on earth. Thus, we can say that the decrees which prophet had already dispensed are binding on us and need not to be changed.

Authority of the KhalīFah: The word *Khalīfah* comes in the *Qurān* as the vicegerent of Allah on earth. As *Qurān* mentions:

"Behold, thy Lord said to the angels; I will create a vicegerent on earth..." [37]. (Baqara 30)

At another place *Qurān* says:

"O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in truth (and justice)...." [38]. (Sad 26)

In these verses of the *Qurān* the word *Khalīfah* is not used in the sense of a successor but as the vicegerent of Allah, that is the holder of the delegated power on earth in order to disseminate the divine message. The implication and enforcement of the divine commands is also the prerequisite of His vicegerent on earth. Here the responsibility of *Khilāfah* (vicegerency) is entrusted on the human being that means as he is the crown of the creation (*Ashraf ul Makhluqāt*), he can disseminate the commandments of Almighty Allah in an articulate manner. But in Islamic Political thought the institution of *Khilāfah* properly came into existence after the demise of Prophet (S.A.W). The Muslims developed the concept of political institution in accordance with the ideals and norms prescribed in the *Sharī'ah* and firmly confirmed that it must not be left vacant after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) because the collective affairs of the Muslim society are in the hands of the delegated authority. The fact is that the institution of prophet hood came to an end but the work done by Prophet (S.A.W) is entrusted on his successors, which was accomplished by the four pious caliphs and so on. So its vacancy means that someone is to be appointed as the head of the state with the principle task of regulating the affairs of the community in general.

Politically, the Islamic political institution is based on twofold vicegerencies, namely the vicegerency of Allah vests in the Muslims individually as well as collectively and the vicegerency of the Prophet (S.A.W) vesting in the caliph of the time. The vicegerency of Allah came to be known as "*Niabat*", while as the vicegerency of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) came to be called as "*Khilāfah*" [39]. *Khalīfah* is not the holder of the legislative power, but he should execute those laws which had already sanctioned in *Qurān* and *Hadīth*. He possesses the delegated authority. As the contemporary scholar of Islam discusses it as:

The authority in the Muslim society, no matter how it implements the laws, is not the source of legislation; rather it implements the Islamic *Sharī'ah* that is embodied in the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger. So its authority is executive, not legislative, because the authority of legislation in Islam belongs to Allah and His Messenger exclusively [40].

Allah promises those persons who believe and do good deeds with the grant of authority in the earth in order to preach the divine commandments and to do justice in accordance with His Will. Regarding the entrustment of the delegated power by Almighty Allah, *Qurān* says:

"Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion - the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me. 'If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked'" [41]. (Nūr 55)

According to this verse, every good Muslim is fit to hold the position of a caliph; it is this aspect of Islamic caliphate that distinguishes it from a kingship, an oligarchy and a theocracy [42]. Moreover this verse clearly indicates that there is the concept of popular vicegerency in Islam, instead of it West has developed the concept of popular sovereignty in which the supreme authority is the people itself. But in Islamic perspective *Ulil amr* (the people who are in authority) are restricted to the *Sharī'ah* that is the laws of Allah and the Prophet (S.A.W). The obedience of the caliph is conditional, because unless and until he remains in accordance with the principles laid down by Allah and His Prophet (S.A.W), he must not be acknowledged. If he transgresses the limits of *Sharī'ah*, then his commands are to be neglected.

Qurān clearly shows the characters which must be imbibed into the *Ulil amr* as:

"Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; And when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice..."[43]. (Nisā' 58)
"And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His

Face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; no obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds" [44]. (*Kahf* 28)

CONCLUSION

Islam is believed to be the complete way of life. It guides the humanity in each and every aspect of life. Politics is one and the main aspect of it. Islam structures its political system on the revealed laws and grants the ultimate and unconditional authority to Almighty Allah and His Prophet (S.A.W) for each and every aspect of life. Islamic system constitutes three types of authorities. The fundamental authority in Islamic political system is Almighty Allah, Whose obedience is unconditional for those who believe its ideology. The second authority is of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) who is the true representative of legal sovereignty of the Almighty. His authority too is unconditional, because he is directly guided and supervised by Allah. The third and the last authority is of *Khalīfah*, who if follows the *Sharī'ah* is acceptable and trustworthy but when he violates the teachings of the first two sources of authority, his claim to authority is forfeited. We may then say that the obedience of the *Khalīfah (Ulil amr)* is conditional.

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