

1. Islam and Nationalism

Tonight, I will discuss about nationalism, as opposed to Islamic ideology or adherence to the school of thought of Islam. First, let us discuss nationalism, its meaning and aspects which can be accepted or rejected by a believer who strictly adheres to Islamic ideology. Why does a man committed to the Islamic school of thought oppose national ideology?

The word "*mellat*" (nation) was originally an Arabic word meaning 'religion'. Today, however, unlike the Quran which has preserved its original meaning, it is no longer used in the same context in the Persian language. Since we do not intend to indulge in lengthy literary and lexical discussions at present, we will not bother ourselves with the original meaning of the word.

In today's culture and modern Persian, the word "*mellat*" is a translation of the European term "nation". The same word has been translated as "qowm" in Arabic. Arabs use "*qowmiyat*" for 'nationalism' and "*unsoriyat*" for 'racism'. We (in Iran) however, use a different Arabic word to convey the same meaning: This semantic variation is quite an acceptable practice. People all over the world are free to use different words for the same idea or concept. In Iran, today, the political linguistic equivalent of the word "*mellat*" is 'nation' and (its inflectional conjugate) "*melligerai*" is translated as 'nationalism'. The word actually has a relatively synoptic etymological root which may somehow seem a bit confusing to others.

Now, let us find out what ideology nationalism pursues.

In ancient times, the people of each "qowm" or tribe were always of a common descent. Each member was referred to by others as a fellow tribesman. This same expression is quite commonly used in the Persian language today. We often refer to a relative as a "fellow tribesman". A qowm might be a family, a tribe, or even a dynasty whose descendants are of the same blood, and thus are related to one another by consanguinity and common ancestry. The people related by such ties form a socio-political unit the parts of which cohere to a united principle, relationship and interest. So, by virtue of consanguinity, each tribe will involuntarily defend another against hostilities posed at the unit as a whole.

The formation of the Arab qowm or tribe was based on this type of relationship which was a significant social infrastructure in the olden times. Arab ancestry can be traced back to a certain Ya'rab ibn Qahtan,

a man to whom all Arabs attribute their genealogical origins. A glance at their history will show that all Arab tribes trace their pedigree back to the same Ya'rab ibn Qahtan. Through the centuries, the descendants of this ancestral lineage branched into various groups and tribes of Arab people who now number 300 million. But as you may have heard, these co-tribesmen have not always been friendly with one another. They would fight each other, sometimes for years, and at times, for a century or so.

Before the advent of the Holy Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.), there were two Arab tribes known as the Aws and Khasraj, both of whom descended from the Qahtan dynasty. They were regarded as relatives, yet they fought each other for decades, a conflict which proved tedious and costly to both parties who eventually sought ways to resolve it.

The reason why the fight persisted was simply rooted in the same issue of tribal and nationalistic feelings, the same feelings which had related the Aws, Khasraj, Quraysh and tens of other Arab tribes within the framework of a great entity, i.e., the Arab nation. This same national consciousness which granted Arabs certain de facto privileges over other races, also conferred superiority upon one Arab tribe against another. Thus, every tribe would claim to be of a more pure blood and ascribe more nobility to itself. This chronic tribal consciousness would at times result in clan conflicts that sparked wars lasting for decades. Actually, this enmity between tribes oozed out of the same feeling of affinity, consanguinity and nationalism.

If one asked a member of the Aws clan why he fought against the Khazraj, he would reply that being "a man of the noble Aws tribe", he could never tolerate any Khazraj dominance. The same reply would also be given by a Khazrajite. If they were reminded of their similar (Arab) race and were advised to desist from fighting one another owing to such affinity, they would possibly say, "Yes, it is true. But the Arab race is what we stress on while facing other races. Among ourselves, it is tribalism, and our clan affinity which actually matters. Here, it is Aws nationalism versus that of Khazraj." Even among family groups of each tribe one could sense the existence of the same sort of conflict and rivalry.

Such problems can be observed in our own country, Iran, as well. The Qashqa'i tribesmen (of south Iran), for instance, challenge the Boyer Ahmadis and Mamasanis, and will unfailingly defend one another when confronted by the latter. Yet, the clans within this big tribe are themselves in rivalry and are not united. Why is there such conflicts among the tribes and clans of Iran and other countries in the world? Probably you, too, have heard that in the United Kingdom there exist recalcitrant nationalistic sentiments which have persisted up to the present time. The Britons nurture their own national tendencies as opposed to Scottish nationalism, etc. Recently, in ceremonies which formally named the present crown prince of England as the heir apparent to the British throne, the Welsh people protested, saying that the prince was from England (the southern part of the British Peninsula) and thus, they, in Wales (center of western region) do not accept him as their king. This opposition is a clear proof of the confrontation of nationalistic feelings: Welsh vis-a-vis English.

A few years ago, similar national sentiments erupted into conflicts in Belgium which is divided into two

major national factions. These two groups speak different languages. The country's official language is French. The conflict began when one of these ethnic groups protested against the use of French as the medium of teaching in their universities. They demanded that it should be replaced by their own ethnic and national language. In Germany, too, there are still some rival ethnic groups competing with one another.

These sectarian conflicts can be found everywhere, in and among countries which regard themselves as having superior civilization and culture. Today the language spoken in the south of Germany is German. Austria's official language is also German. The people in the north of Germany also speak German. But when an announcer for Radio broadcasting from South Germany Munich was chosen, I saw in a magazine that the people in that part of the country had protested, requiring the appointed announcer to be replaced. The reason: his accent was disagreeable to them. The announcer spoke with a northern accent unacceptable to the people of the South. This kind of conflict will inevitably arise whenever tribal tendencies and nationalistic feelings become the basis for judgment. Nationalistic sentiments will most likely give rise to rivalry even between members of the same nation.

Today, the world faces a new type of nationalism known as geographical nationalism which cannot be defined or justified in terms of consanguinity. You must be familiar with Switzerland. A small country subscribing to Swiss nationality, its heterogeneous population is divided into three major groups. The people living in the region close to the Italian border speak Italian, while those in areas bordering France speak French and the people living close to Germany and Austria speak German. This small odd million nation which speaks three different languages claim to be the Swiss nation. How can this kind of nationalism be explained?

A great deal of strenuous exertion has already been taken to explain and justify the basis for the Swiss type of nationalism but, so far it has not met with any success. If common genealogy is counted as a basis for affinity and if people are regarded as one great race descending from Adam, then there will be no racial difference and the whole world will be considered as one nation.

But racial homogeneity is not the base on which the Swiss people have built a nation. Nor is it their language which has brought them together because, as was mentioned, there are three languages spoken in the country. It would be quite natural for the French speaking people of Switzerland to form a nation with France. But how come they, along with German and Italian speaking people, comprise the Swiss nation?

It is not then genealogical relation and common language that have brought this people together. Nor is it their religion that made one nation out of them, because the nation also consists of Catholics, Protestants and probably Jews and other sects. What then is held in common by the Swiss people? They will unanimously say it is "common culture" that binds them together. Where did this common culture originate? This is a complicated sociological issue the answer to which has not yet been formulated by analysts and experts.

Swiss customs, manners and traditions vary from region to region. But the people cling to a certain 'common culture' the essence of which is not yet known. It can then be concluded that in recent centuries a certain geographical nationalism has emerged in the world community quite distinct from national consciousness arising from consanguinity. It is based neither on a common ideology, nor a common language, custom or tradition. Even those who advocate and adhere to this 'common culture' are baffled and unable to clearly define it.

Assuming that a vivid explanation has been set forth based on this assumption, we would like to ask the following: Should man, this perfect creature of God, who is to delve into endless depths of divine perfection, confine himself to the constrained framework of nationalism which is limited by consanguinity, common language and culture? How can man, this sublime being, imprison himself in a realm bounded by "national unity and feelings"?

Since we cannot discuss the views of other ideologies on this matter in this short speech, let us now talk about the view held by our own school of thought, Islam. What does the Holy Quran say about the framework in which people can establish a powerful socio-political unity? What sort of human beings can form an integrated base, for unity?

In Surah al-Hujurat, the Holy Quran says:

"O ye mankind! Verily, We created you from one male (Adam), one female (Eve) and grouped you into nations and tribes in order (that you) distinguish yourselves (from each other)..."(49: 13)

We are all Adam's progeny: but of course, only the cultures which consider mankind Adam's offspring can profess such a statement. Cultures which regard man as the evolutionary descendant of the apes (i.e. materialistic ideologies) categorically shun such statements.

So, according to the Quran, we are all children of Adam and Eve and therefore, have the same blood circulating in our veins. If we are divided into groups and tribes, so says the Quran, it is only to provide us a means to identify each other in our social relations.

In our own rural areas, people are identified by their father's names following their own. The same practice is customary among Arabs who always refer to a man as the "son of so and so." A family name also functions in the same way, that is, to distinguish people from one another. We can then conclude that the Quranic reference to the value of tribal and group relations is meant merely to facilitate a trivial social need, namely individual identification. Sublime values which render one human being superior to another, says the Quran, are achieved only through piety, virtue and fear of God (which keep man from committing sins.)

The Holy Book strictly forbids separation from one another because of tribal and nationalistic tendencies. The Islamic worldview prohibits segregation and enmity resulting from the establishment of sectarian and politico-national entities. According to the Quran:

"And the faithful men and faithful women are guardians one of another: urge they (each other) to good deeds and hold (each other) back from evil...."(9:71)

What then in the Quranic view is the factor that can bring about a great powerful political, economic, social and military union among men? The answer is faith, faith in the school of Islam. From the viewpoint of a Muslim, all Muslims as a whole form the Islamic Ummah which evolves around the axis of Islam.

In the scope of the Islamic worldview and faith, Muslims are all brothers who are bound to each other by common political, social and economic beliefs and must, therefore, function as a coherent entity. Hence, as a Muslim, I cannot draw any distinction between an Arab brother from Khuzistan, or a Persian speaking brother of mine from Tehran. Both are my Muslim brothers and therefore equal in my view. All of us, regardless of origin, dialect or language, whether from Kurdistan or Azerbaijan, Baluchistan, Gilan or Lorestan are Muslim brothers forming one and the same community.

We as a whole constitute an Islamic nation and are citizens of the Islamic Republic. So, the axis around which we can establish military, economic and social unity is our Islamic faith. Can it then be called national unity or is it one based on a common school of thought? It certainly is of the latter type.

Now, I would like to call on our Kurdish and Arab brothers and those in Baluchistan, Azerbaijan, Turkman Sabra and others across the country to hearken to the fact that it is only the enemy who is trying to separate us and is sowing seeds of discord. We are all Muslims and thus, brothers in faith who are inseparable because of our Islamic convictions. We want to be a world community. This fraternity goes beyond our borders. We have Muslim brothers who speak Urdu, Hindi, Indonesian and other languages. To them, too, we are bound by the Islamic faith. While at present we do not have many English, German and French speaking brothers, we still wish there will come a day when they too will become a considerable part of the Islamic Ummah.

All Muslims form one nation and this Islamic Revolution of ours should advance towards the objective crystallization of a powerful Islamic Ummah, one billion strong. This is exactly what the enemy is afraid of. That is why our enemy insists on referring to this Islamic Revolution as purely Iranian in its desperate bid to mar and ignore its universal dimension.

Another issue that needs to be clarified is the question often asked of us: "Should our Kurdish minority and other ethnic group forego the use of their own language and speak Persian because of the Islamic characteristic of the Revolution, and this Republic? Certainly not. When did we ever say any such thing? Islam does not have a particular language. The holy Quran says in surah al-Rum:

"And of His signs is the creation of heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Lo! Here in indeed are portents for men of knowledge. "(30:22)

One is therefore free to speak one's own language. No group should give up its way of dressing and

traditional clothes. Nor should anybody be compelled to wear certain clothes because of his Islamic faith. Islam does not have a special costume. Islam simply asks people to dress neatly, modestly and honorably. The styles of dress and the choice of a particular costume or ethnic garments are discretionary factors left to popular judgment. People are free in choosing their apparel, in speaking their languages and observing their local traditions and customs. We are not against nationalistic inclinations as long as they are confined to such issues. But, if one's nationalism and nationalistic feeling urges one to incite every ethnic group to establish an independent socio-political state, separate from other brothers in this country, then it becomes a dangerous thing and we certainly oppose it.

Some Kurdish brothers have asked us whether they can teach the Kurdish language in their schools. The same question has been brought up by Arab brothers and sisters in Khuzistan. They have also asked whether they can have Arabic newspapers and magazines or speak Arabic on the local radio station, etc. I address them here and say: By all means you are absolutely free and have all rights for these things. They are among your natural rights. You are free to recite your local lyrical odes and ballads and promote your own art in conformity with Islamic codes. You have also the right to follow your own traditional architectural designs in building premises. Islam does not impose any particular form of clothing, language, custom, art, etc. on people. Man is totally free in this regard and so are you.

Now, I have a question to ask you. Would you rather be an easy prey for the predatory wolves of the world by disunity in the name of Kurdistan, Baluchistan, Turkman Sahra, etc, or enjoy all freedoms? Do you not wish to unite with your Persian, Turkish, Baluchi, Gilani, Turkman brothers to form a great powerful Ummah that will petrify the enemies? Your power will discourage them from investing any hope in you as tools to aggravate dissension in the Islamic Republic. Which one do you prefer? Choose and give me your answer.

Another point I would like to make reference to, is the hue and cry the opposition group raised on the changing of the name "National Consultative Assembly" to "Islamic Consultative Assembly!" In the first place, the legislative body must have been named "Islamic" right at the time the constitution was ratified. Why was it not called that was due to a minor mistake on the part of our representatives who simply overlooked the issue. A lot of purposeful hubbub has been made on this. Opposition groups accused us of antagonism towards nationalism, the Iranian culture and language when we changed the assembly's name from 'national' to 'Islamic.' These statements are blatant lies! Who on earth has ever opposed the Persian language? Why are these mendacities about us being disseminated?

We only say that the solidarity of this nation can be best preserved through faith in Allah and His messenger, Hadhrat Muhammad (S), His book (the Quran) and in Islam, His Divine religion. Factors other than the ones mentioned above can only be instrumental in unifying a small number of people within a certain group which also means separation from the other groups. Hence, if the Persian language becomes the basis for unity, the Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, etc. will have all the right to protest, contending that Persian is not their language. It then becomes clear that the Persian language cannot be

a basic criterion for unity. This language may bring together those who speak it but will simultaneously separate them from the Kurds, Turks, Baluchis, Arab, Turkmans and others.

What factor can then bring about world unity? It is faith in Islam, this divine religion which has no boundary. Just look around yourself. There are not even 200 million Persian speaking people in the world, not even 100 or 50 million of them. The same is true with other languages like Kurdish. We will not find 15 or even 10 million people who speak it. But how many Muslims are there in the World? One billion! It is true that three billion out of the world's four billion population are not Muslims and Islam has not yet given birth to a worldwide community. But a unity based on Islamic faith still surpasses other unities in dimension and power. Unities founded on Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, and other ethnic or sectarian bases are inferior.

Why is Islam a more sublime and powerful base for unity? It is because Islam is a religion of "*fitrat*" (Divine nature of man). It is a religion made compatible by God with man's nature. This religion has harnessed common human "*fitrat*", bringing about a great powerful global entity of men with awakened "*fitrat*", rooted in the very being of man. It is then only natural that such a unity is vested with a tremendous potential for worldwide expansion.

Now let us compare adherence to Islamic thought with nationalistic tendencies and find out which is greater and more logical, which is more compatible with man's *fitrat* and nature?

If nationalistic feelings based on consanguinity, common language or a 'common national culture' become the foundation for unity, the most they can bring about is petty unions of small number of people, nothing more. We do not oppose these unions as long as they operate within limits already set, namely common language, traditions, customs, literature, mode of dressing, etc. All nations can by virtue of their natural rights observe and preserve these aspects of nationalism. No one objects to it, neither does Islam.

What Islam categorically opposes is the replacement of a great ideological and faith based unity by nationalism in the creation of political, social, economic, and military institutions. Islam cannot allow nationalistic tendencies to supersede political, military, economic, social, ideological and religious unities. Muslims should form a united world community and anyone who makes a bid to supplant a comprehensive ideological and religious world unity based on Islam, has indeed deviated from Islamic principles.

On my way here (to the south of the country) a question was hurled at me, the answer to which I like to share with you. Someone asked my opinion about the soldiers and military personnel fighting against the (Iraqi) aggressors to defend the Iranian territory. He said that the (Iranian) armed forces fight because of their devotion to their country and not because of Islam and religious faith. They fight defying death because their patriotic zeal does not let them sit still when a foreign enemy has attacked their motherland. The question was whether

I opposed such feelings and nationalistic tendencies. In reply I said that no one ever opposed such sentiments. We certainly prefer such zealous and brave soldiers and officers to those who cowardly refuse to go to the fronts fearing death. We appreciate and admire such people as we attach great value to freedom. But what if a brave officer who fights and defends his country looks at the issue from a more sublime point of view to fight and defend the religion of God? What if he defends Iran because it has become the land of Islam? Is such an officer not fighting for a loftier cause than the one fighting merely for the soil?

The former defends the soil for the sake of its Exalted Creator. Quite convinced, the one who asked the question agreed that a man who fights and gets killed defending Iran as his Islamic native land and the land of the Islamic Revolution is, by all means, much more exalted than the one who fights merely for the country.

We respect both types of fighter the former as a brave and self-sacrificing man who fights for honor and dignity and does not bow down to humiliation and the latter for the same thing plus his love for the most magnificent and excellent cause, Almighty God. The Islamic culture considers an honest, generous and kind non-Muslim a much more respectable individual than another non-Muslim who is a liar and a greedy person and causes all kinds of trouble in the society. The reason is quite obvious, Islam is a religion of values. It attaches value to honest individuals whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

Righteousness, chastity, honor and faithfulness are always considered of great value regardless of one's beliefs or religion. However, a Muslim endowed with such qualities hewed out of his Islamic faith and self-purification along with the loftiest of virtues, namely, servitude to God, is definitely far better than a non-Muslim having the same qualities. I reminded those brothers who asked me that question how we, as Muslims invoke the name of our great Prophet (S) in our daily prayers saying "**I testify that Muhammad is a servant of God and His messenger**".

With this statement we are actually praising Hadhrat Muhammad by recalling his servitude to God. This shows the great value of man's servitude in relation to God when he communes with the Divine Almighty. In our prayers we first praise the Prophet as a servant and then glorify him as His messenger. This is our culture and ideology.

One can conclusively and clearly infer from the above that one's tendency to a school of thought (Islam) never negates human values that may be found among non-Muslims. One who underrates adherence to the Islamic school of thought and makes efforts to de-popularize it, can never say that the tendency of this school is tantamount to negation of sublime humane characteristics that may be found, although rarely, in non-Muslims and also that having faith in Islam means a departure from science and specialization. Who has uttered such a big lie? Where does such baseless statements originate? In this short speech I do not intend to go into details. I hope, however, to present the issue more meticulously in another speech.

My brothers and sisters, tendency to the Islamic school of thought never negates the value of specialization. We want you to know that Islam and our Islamic Revolution aims at training faithful specialists and experts. This is not a crime, nor is it a defect nor a sin on our part. If we stress on Islam as our school of thought, it is only to say that the very foundation of our revolutionary society is based on Islam, and evolves out of Islam alone.

I hope that the issue concerning nationalism is now clarified. I also hope that it is now quite clear what you brothers and sisters of the Muslim Iranian nation say in your slogans regarding these two kinds of tendencies.

May Allah's Blessings and Grace be upon you all.

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