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MUHAMMAD (PBUH) AS LIBERATOR

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MUHAMMAD (PBUH) AS LIBERATOR

Asghar Ali Engineer

This month we will be celebrating the birth day of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is celebrated by Muslims with great devotion and reverence. But often it has been seen that devotees do not reflect on the message of the person whom they so venerate. It just becomes a tradition rather than occasion for deep reflection. Muslims also refer to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as *Muhsin-e-Insaniyyat* i.e. the benefactor of humanity but hardly care to know in what respect he became benefactor?

In this limited space that I have at my disposal I would try to throw some light on revolutionary aspects of Muhammad's (PBUH) teachings and how Muslims should benefit from his teachings. Muhammad, all Muslims agree, was *ummi* i.e. did not know how to read and write and yet he ushered in great social and economic revolution that is as much useful today as it was then.

We can call him a liberator of humanity if we follow his teachings not so much from tangled web of hadith but from Qur'an. Qur'an indeed was his real miracle. Firstly, he emphasized importance of knowledge called *'ilm*. This word occurs in the Qur'an more than 800 times along with its various derivatives (word *jihad*, so controversial today occurs only 41 times).

Knowledge was so important to him that he required Muslims (both men and women) to seek it even if it is available in China, a distant land from Arabian Peninsula. Arabs who were quite averse to knowledge, especially in written form (there were only 17 people in Mecca during the Prophet's time who could read and write), became great precursors of various sciences and even West immensely benefited from it. West discovered treasures of Greek knowledge through Arabs.

Secondly, he brought about liberation of women from bondage and gave her equal rights and recognized her individuality as a human being. He gave her equal right in marriage and made marriage a contract. He made it obligatory for her too, to seek knowledge. "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for Muslim man and Muslim women", he said. The cause of her bondage to men was mainly her ignorance and now seeking knowledge became her right along with obligation. Knowledge, all thinkers agree, is real liberator.

Thirdly, Muhammad (PBUH) was greatly concerned with justice. Justice is so fundamental to Islam that it is one of the names of Allah (Adil). For him justice for weaker sections of society was of utmost importance. Allah, according to Qur'an, is on the side of the weak. And it is weak (*mustad'ifin*) who shall inherit the earth and who shall be the leaders. The powerful and arrogant (*mustakbirun*) shall be doomed.

Fourthly, for all the actions he made human individual responsible, not the collective unit, be it tribe or community, as responsible. Qur'an also declared that each individual carried his burden and no one else can carry it for others. For that time it was very revolutionary declaration. It was collectivity like tribe was everything and individual did not count for anything. Qur'an made

reward or punishment individual-centered, not tribe centered. This freed individual from the burden of tribal customs and superstitions, Collectivity is important but not at the cost of individual.

Fifthly, Muhammad also gave human individual rights and dignity along with responsibility. And human dignity was not circumscribed by any religion, tribe or ethnicity but included all children of Adam (*karramna bani Adam*). It indeed was a revolutionary declaration of human rights which preceded UN Charter of Human rights by more than 1400 years. Also, the Prophet said entire creation is family of Allah.

Sixthly, he gave concept of *Bayt al-maal* i.e. treasury to which all Muslims will contribute according to ones income. We can describe it as concept of welfare state in modern terms. Zakat was not a tax for the luxury of the rulers, as used to happen in those days. It was strictly meant for welfare of weaker sections, orphans, widows, poor, travelers and liberation of prisoners and slaves. It was unprecedented levy in those days.

He even declared land is only for tillers thus bringing down the oppressive and exploitative feudal system. Unfortunately within few decades of his death Muslim rulers established great empire based on exploitative system again. However, all this would appear unbelievable for many non-Muslims. Why? Muslims often paid verbal tributes to the Prophet (PBUH) but did just the opposite.

What is the condition of women in Muslim countries? Are Muslim states welfare states at all? Do their rulers live simple life like the Prophet did? Do they respect individual rights and human dignity? Do they practice justice at all costs? Do they respect human life as sacred creation of Allah? Answers may not be in affirmative? Muslims have to reflect seriously on their failure and recommit themselves to the Qur'anic value system.

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