

Some Essential Human Freedoms in Light of *Seerah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

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Abstract

Freedom is need of every individual to identify his individuality, to speak his mind and heart, to convey his ideas and thoughts for the goodness of mankind and to serve the society in a right direction. Similarly, Islam as a divine religion and its divinity guarantees the basic freedom for all mankind. Allah sent His last Prophet ﷺ as mercy for all mankind to liberate them from all kinds of chains which are very harmful for human dignity and values. In Islam freedom is considered as a gift of Allah for whole mankind and as such human beings need to make full use of this divine gift without harming and being harmed by others. Islam says that every man has the basic right to freedom throughout his life and without this freedom he cannot utilize his divinely gifted capacities and talents. In Islamic terminology freedom consists of all aspects as freedom of religion, freedom of life, freedom of expression, freedom of justice etc.

The present paper will focus on all these aspects and will analyse the concept of freedom as per the tenants of Islam. It will further focus on how these could be implemented in the present day multi religious societies for the betterment of human beings.

Keywords: freedom, goodness, harmful, gifted, terminology, expression, liberate, gift.

Introduction

Islam offers a definite rule of freedom with accountability. Quran says, “So, whoever does good equal to the weight of an atom shall see it. And whoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom shall see it.”¹ The real freedom cannot be enjoyed or achieved without sacrifice of individuals for the development of a good society without practicing justice. Allah gave Adam (AS) liberty of free choice between right or wrong. It is in the same reference that Allah almighty says in the Holy Quran: Then He showed him what is wrong for him and what is right for him.² The Satanic approach to freedom is to deprive others from their right to freedoms, while the angelic obedience is a model of peace-loving. Islam is clear on the principle of freedom. The notion of right to freedom is primarily based on many verses in the *Qur'an* and the *Ahadith* of the Prophet ﷺ which guide human civilization for the better purpose in this world as well as in hereafter. Over the past few decades, the issue of basic human freedom has been an area of interest among scholars and is situated at the intersections of human rights, i.e., right to freedom of life, security, expression, gender discrimination, punishment and apostasy etc. In this brief article we will discuss some basic human freedoms in the light of Qur'an and Ahadith.

Rights in Islam

1. Right to Freedom of Life

Right to freedom of life is the supreme human right and a base for other human rights, as none of the other rights would have any value or utility without it. If there is no life, there is nothing left to human dignity. Only when life exists can we be concerned with how to make it worth living and prevent it from being undermined by various acts and omissions that endanger it. The protection of life is therefore, an essential pre-requisite to the full enjoyment of all other human rights. In short, the protection of human rights cannot be achieved without respect for the right to life and the dignity of a person. In other words, we can say that the term 'life' does not mean only the right of animal existence. It has many dimensions including the right to the safety of life, right to a basic standard of life. This may also cover the right not to be injured or degraded, the right to his privacy, the right not to treat unjustly or with cruelty; all this depends on the existence of rights. Every person has right to survive, which means right to live, i.e., every person has the right to have home for shelter, food to eat, approach to all basic necessities of life and protection to one's life. Life is among the biggest bounty granted by Allah. The existence of life itself is a trust for every human being to utilize it, and it is the basis of rights and duties, for there is no liability born by a dead body or thing. That is why life is so much regarded and protected from being interrupted or discontinued by human intervention.

2. Right to Freedom of Personal Security and Safety

Everyone has the right to life and security. No one shall be held for slavery or for servitude. No one shall be subjected to torture or cruelty. No one shall be meted out with inhuman or degrading treatment. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest detention or exile. There is a compendium of economic, social and cultural rights; the right to work, the right to a fair wage, the right to leisure, the right to social security, the right to found a family and much besides. The Holy Qur'an says:

*Because of that We ordained the children of Israel that if any one killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land; it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.*³

In the Farewell Pilgrim, the Prophet ﷺ declared that lives and properties and honour of a person are sacred to one another. The Messenger ﷺ on another occasion said:

*The blood, property and honour of a Muslim are as sacred to every Muslim as this day, this month and this country.*⁴

3. Right to Freedom of Privacy

The right to privacy means to seclude oneself selectively in front of others. The boundaries and content of what is considered private differ among cultures and individuals, but share basic common themes. Privacy is sometimes related to anonymity, the wish to remain unnoticed or unidentified in the public realm. When something is private to a person, it usually means there is something within them that is considered inherently special or personally sensitive. The degree, to which private information is exposed therefore, depends on how the public will receive this information, which differs between place and time. Privacy can

be seen as an aspect of security; one in which trade-offs between the interests of one group and another can become particularly clear.

The right against unsanctioned invasion of privacy by the government, corporations or individuals is part of many countries privacy laws. Almost all countries have laws which in some way limit privacy; an example of this would be law concerning taxation, which normally requires the sharing of information about personal income or earnings. In some countries individual privacy may conflict with freedom of speech laws and some laws may require public disclosure of information which would be considered private in other countries and cultures.

Privacy may be voluntarily sacrificed, normally in exchange for perceived benefits and very often with specific dangers and losses, although this is a very strategic view of human relationships. Academics who are economists, evolutionary theorists, and research psychologists describe revealing privacy as a 'voluntary sacrifice', where sweepstakes or competitions are involved. In the business world, a person may give personal details often for advertising purposes in order to enter a gamble of winning a prize. Information voluntarily shared and later stolen or misused may lead to identity theft. Right of privacy is also ensured by Islam. The word used in the Qur'an is 'Tajassus'. It covers all aspects of privacy like peeping into other's house, reading someone's letter without permission, investigating someone's financial, private and family affairs, etc.

In the Quran it is said that:

*O, you who believe! do not enter houses other than your own until you have asked permission and saluted the dwellers therein; that is best for you, Allah admonishes you, so that you may heed.*⁵

Instructions to enter the houses of relatives and friends are given in the Quran as:

*O, you who believe: Let your servants and those of your children who have not yet come of age ask your permission before coming into your rooms on three occasions: before the morning prayer; at noon when you take off your clothes in the noontday heat; and after the night prayer. These are your three times of privacy. There is no sin for you nor for them if they come without permission at other times than these, for, you have to visit one another for various purposes. Thus does Allah make His Commands clear to you, for He is All-Knowing, All Wise.*⁶

*There is no sin for such elderly women as are past the age of marriage, if they lay aside their outer garments, provided they do not wantonly display their beauty. Nevertheless, it is best for them if they behave modestly.*⁷

There are also many *Ahadith* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, wherein emphasis is on caring the privacy of others. Some of the *Ahadith* in this regard are of worth mentioning.

*You who have accepted Islam with your tongues but whose hearts have not been reached by faith, do not misbehave with Muslims, nor revile them, nor seek out their faults; for he who seeks out the fault of his Muslim brother will have, his fault sought out by Allah, and he whose faults are sought out by Allah will be exposed by Him even though he is in the privacy of his house.*⁸

Hadhrat Abdullah bin Busr (Allah be pleased with him) said that when Allah's Messenger (SAW) came to any one's door he did not face it squarely, (but faced the right or left corner) and stand with the wall, (that

was because there were no curtains on the doors of the houses at that time) asking permission and if he got it enter (the home) otherwise left.⁹

Hadhrat Abu Umamah (Allah be pleased with him) has related Allah's Messenger ﷺ said:

There are three persons for whom Allah is guarantee. Allah suffices for them during their life and after their death. Their place is in Paradise.

(1) *One who entered his house after having saluted, then Allah is his guarantee.*

(2) *One who went towards the mosque (for saying prayer), then Allah is his guarantee.*

(3) *One who left for Jihad in the way of Allah, then Allah is his guarantee.¹⁰*

Hadhrat Ati bin Yasir (Allah be pleased with him) told that a man asked Allah's Messenger (SAW) whether he should ask permission to go in where his mother was and he replied that he should. The man said that he lived along with her in the house, but Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied, "Ask her permission." The man said he was her servant but Allah's Messenger ﷺ replied, "Ask her permission. Do you want to see her naked?" He did not, he replied, "Well, ask her permission."¹¹

4. Right to Freedom of Speeches

Islam allows complete freedom of thought and expression, provided that it does not involve spreading that which is harmful to individuals and the society at large. For example, the use of abusive or offensive language in the name of criticism is not allowed. In the days of the Prophet, the Muslims used to ask him about certain matters. If he had received no revelation on that particular issue, they were free to express their personal opinions. According to the *Qur'an*, the ultimate goal of all speech is to promote the discovery of truth and to uphold human dignity. One of God's attributes is *al-Haqq* (True and Right One), and all Muslims must endeavour to emulate this attribute by forwarding the cause of truth; tell the truth, even if it be unpleasant. Therefore, restrictions on freedom of speech and expression necessarily inhibit the discovery of truth and thus save the humanity from degradation. For example:

...So what would you love after discarding the truth except error...? ¹²

This last verse signifies the one major restriction on freedom of speech, namely, when it is unseemly. Speech is unseemly or evil when it is obscene, immoral or hurtful. Evil speech interferes with the discovery of truth and thus violates human dignity. Therefore, restricting evil speech is justifiable= (capable of being justified; excusable) on freedom of expression.

Allah likes not the uttering of unseemly speech in public, except on the part of one who is being wronged....

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Islam also instructs us as to the manner of how to exercise one's freedom of expression and speech. The manner in which free expression is exercised is through the concepts of *hisbah* and *naseehah*.¹⁴

And let there be among you a body of men who should invite to goodness, and enjoin equity and forbid evil. And it is they who shall prosper.¹⁵

Note that "Let there be" (Arabic: "*waltakun*") conveys a command or obligation upon the Muslims. *And the believers, men and women, are friends one of another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and observe Prayer and pay the Zakat (alms to the poor) and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is these on whom Allah will have mercy....*¹⁶

As stated, *naseehah*, which means to give sincere advice, friendly admonition= (a criticism or warning about behaviour) or friendly reminder, is best understood by distinguishing it from the concept of *tawbikh* (reprimand= to speak in an angry, and critical way to; to reprove sharply or censure formally usually from a position of authority). *Tawbikh* is public and tactless and is associated with ridicule and belittlement, while, by contrast, *naseehah* is private and courteous= (very polite in a way that shows respect; marked by respect for and consideration of others).

...*And speak to men kindly...*¹⁷

Islam advocates that when one has to give advice to his brother, he should be isolated from company of others which means that he should be advised separately not in front of others. Muslims are further instructed in the Holy Qur'an regarding the manner in which to engage in *hisbah* and *naseehah*:

*Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in a way that is best.*¹⁸

*And argue not with the People of the Book except with what is best; but argue not at all with such of them as are unjust. And say, 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to you; and our God and your God is one; and to Him we submit...'*¹⁹

In Islam, freedom of expression is restrained only where the failure to do so would result in harming the cause of truth. According to many Muslim scholars, the primary offence which justifies such a curtailment of free expression is blasphemy. However, as the discussion below will demonstrate, even this type of speech is not curtailed in Islam.

Conclusion

The *Seerah* of Prophet ﷺ the primary and practical source of Islam. As has been illustrated in the foregoing pages, the source strongly affirm and uphold fundamental human rights. It follows, therefore, that these rights must be acknowledged and protected in all Muslim societies and, vindicate the trust of being God's vicegerent (*Khalifah*) upon the earth, and transform this world from its present sorry state into a virtual paradise where men, women and children and all people of the world, live together in justice and peace. In the sight of Allah, the life of man as well as other creatures is considered very precious and any human being murdered is considered the murder of whole humanity. Islam clearly insists upon freedom of belief for all human beings. On the basis of this concept, the Islamic verdict itself guarantees freedom of worship for its non-Muslim subjects too. Man has an obligation to choose the path of righteousness, as well as to safeguard his freedom and that of others. Freedom of thought defines the freedom of speech and they both are now universally recognized as a basic right of an individual. Islam encourages basic freedom for all humans, but at the same time is concerned with duties. It emphasised that, while enjoying one's rights, others rights must not be diluted and violated.

Endnotes:

- ¹ *Al-Qur'an*, 97: 7-8
- ² *Al-Qur'an*, 91: 8
- ³ *Al-Qur'an*, 2: 47
- ⁴ Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, Tr. Abdus-Salam M. Harun, al-Falah Foundation Publication and Distribution, Cairo, 1421/2000, p. 270
- ⁵ *Al-Qur'an*, 24: 41
- ⁶ *Al-Quran*, 24: 29
- ⁷ *Al-Qur'an*, 24: 31
- ⁸ Al-Bukhari, Muhammad Ismail, *Shahi*, Hadith no 1322
- ⁹ Muslim, Imam Abul Hussain Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, *Shahi*, Hadith no 761
- ¹⁰ Ibn Majjah, *Sunnan*, Hadith no 984
- ¹¹ Al-Bukhari, Muhammad Ismail, *Shahi*, Hadith no 1431; Hadith no 543,
- ¹² *Al-Qur'an*, 10: 33
- ¹³ *Al-Qur'an*, 4: 49
- ¹⁴ *Hisbah*, a term coined by Hadhrat 'Umar (RA), the second Khalifa of Islam, encapsulates the duty to advocate good and advice against evil referred to in the Holy Qur'an. *Naseehah* refers to the manner in which *hisbah* must be conducted, namely, the requirement that Muslims practise *hisbah* by giving sincere and friendly advice and counsel.
- ¹⁵ *Al-Qur'an*, 3: 105
- ¹⁶ *Al-Qur'an*, 9: 71
- ¹⁷ *Al-Qur'an*, 2: 84
- ¹⁸ *Al-Qur'an*, 16: 126
- ¹⁹ *Al-Qur'an*, 29: 47

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