

Islamic Administration : A Quest for a Basis

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I. Introduction

The most immediate question that one may raise under the title of this paper is : Can there be an administration which may be called Islamic, when so much has been said and written about administration both as an art and science – the art or science of getting something done or carrying out a policy of a government - when administration has been traced back to the recorded history of human civilization and when administration whether an art or science transcends all nations and their customs and creeds (Bhagwan and Bhushan, 1974) ? The question has the additional connotation that administration both as an art and science has universal applicability, and thus it is a value free art and science. Understood in this sense, it would be difficult to accept Islamic administration as a subject of study, let alone give it a theoretical basis. However, this should not discourage one to explore the possibilities of having a discipline to be called Islamic administration for the simple reason that today the study of neither pure science nor social science is absolutely value free or objective. Even in pure science some theories are established and accepted after successful laboratory testing and which are drastically modified or eventually abandoned by the development of new theories. This only means that what is taken to be true today by human reasoning and scientific explanation and experiment is not the eternal truth. This also means that human knowledge advances by continuous reasoning and experiment

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because what one has established to be true today becomes untrue tomorrow. The acceptance of imperfection of human knowledge is the true scientific realisation.

II. Modern Scientific Reasoning and Dialectical Thinking

The Western scientific reasoning, which is synonymous with modern scientific knowledge, began with the revolt against the medicine man who had the dogma-the written religious authority-against which nothing could be said or done. To the medicine man the dogma was the only valid knowledge and, as such, there was no scope for human reasoning. Dogma was the only truth for human being. This was the priesthood of Western society which inhibited scientific thinking-the process of accepting a hypothesis to be true by experimenting it in a lab situation or by empirical study for centuries (Best, 1978). It was Francis Bacon who was the first philosopher of modern science. It was he who made a synthesis of deductive reasoning of Aristotle and the inductive reasoning that a hypothesis can be substantiated to be true if it was tested in a lab situation or empirically verified to be true. Judged in such terms, science is a state of reason.

But today science as the only valid organization of knowledge, particularly in view of its large-scale use by technology, in view of its dominance over politics, and finally, in view of its involvement in or its contributions to crime and violence in society has been challenged by many. In other words, it is not enough that man should continue advancing his knowledge by scientific experiment and thus establish new truths. Science as a state of reason is not value free and it cannot be value free. Today, therefore, one can probably go back to Aristotle's deductive reasoning-the first systematic approach to reasoning. It should not, however, be taken to mean that this is a plea for returning to pre-scientific era. Modern scientific reasoning is indispensable and hence accepted. But today man is in dire necessity of a human science to make him humane.

However, in this short discourse on reasoning it is necessary to add the dialectical thinking of Marx, Lenin and Mao Tse-tung. The dialectical thinking has been acclaimed by its followers as the acme of human knowledge for which Karl Marx unravelled history. Marx gave a materialist interpretation of history based on his

theory of class struggle, which was based on another theory called the theory of contradiction. Marx, a philosopher, sociologist and a revolutionary, saw man as a producer and it was in the production process in all societies that he found the class struggle-one class of people dominating another class-one class of people exploiting another class. To end this exploitation of man by man, Marx enunciated his theory of class struggle by which the proletariat (the exploited class) will capture the state power and establish socialism in the first instance and then establish communism in a distant future in which man will produce "according to the laws of beauty" and not to exploit others (Tucker, 1970). Lenin, Marx's follower, established socialism in Russia after Marx's death through a bloody revolution. Lenin discovered a universality of contradiction and he illustrated it as follows¹.

In mathematics : differential and integral.

In mechanics : action and reaction.

In physics : positive and negative electricity.

In chemistry : the combination and dissociation of atoms.

In social science : the class struggle.

According to Mao, the contradictory aspects of dialectical thinking can be found in the development of all things and in all human thought, and this process of contradiction can be both simple and complex. This process of contradiction in development of things and human thought has been clearly explained by Mao in the parlance of common man. Mao writes,

"Without life, there would be no death ; without death, there would be no life. Without "above", there could be no "below", without "below" there would be no "above". Without misfortune, there would be no good fortune ; without good fortune, there would be no misfortune. Without facility, there would be no difficulty, without difficulty, there would be no facility. Without landlords, there would be no tenant-peasants ; without tenant-peasants, there would be no landlords. Without the bourgeoisie, there would be no proletariat ; without the proletariat, there would be no bourgeoisie. Without imperialist oppression of nations, there

1 . Mao Tse-tung, Five Essays on Philosophy, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1977, p. 32.

would be no colonies or semi-colonies, without colonies or semi-colonies there would be no imperialist oppression of nations. It is so with all opposites.²

Marxism, Leninism and Maoism have developed most comprehensively the theory of contradiction. The followers of this theory probably do not know that they are in a sense captives of their own theory. According to the theory of contradiction, all things and thought processes are a unity of two or more than two opposites. These opposites may undergo both qualitative and quantitative changes but these changes will only bring about the unity of new opposites. Thus, one may conclude that the contradiction of class struggle has not ended in the communist countries. It has only undergone quantitative and qualitative changes for better or worse results. One should also note that Marx predicted a distant future when socialism will so humanize the human beings that they will produce according to the "laws of beauty" and there will be no contradictions between man and man. History of socialism does not indicate any such development. The only thing that is accepted here from dialectical thinking is the theory of contradiction in all things and human thoughts but not their disappearance.

The short discourse on reasoning may be concluded as follows, and it is from these conclusions that an attempt will be made to see if there could be an administration to be called Islamic administration :

1. Systematic and unbiased reasoning to establish a hypothesis is science. So, science is a state of reason.
2. This reasoning may be carried out in a laboratory by testing material objects in case of pure sciences. In the case of social sciences, it may be an opinion survey or observation and recording of some social activities. It may be a historical research of some particular human activities. This reasoning is done to arrive at some truth and to predict some future happenings.
3. Over centuries of scientific reasoning and advancement of sciences, it has been realized that human reasoning is not

2. Ibid, p. 61.

value free and is only partially true, partially because what is true today becomes untrue or partially true tomorrow. And then, all sciences and conclusions arrived at by human reasoning, even though correct, are not always good for mankind. As such, some sciences and conclusions have contributed to the sorrows and miseries of people.

4. So, only those reasonings which do good to mankind are true science, normatively.

III. Islam and State of Reason

In this part an attempt will be made to see how far Islam is a state of reason (science). Islam is not science in terms of modern scientific reasoning which is carried out within a frame of limits - the limit of a hypothesis to be tested empirically or in a lab situation. But Islam emerges as perfect state of reason if it is interpreted in terms of dialectical thinking and for that it is necessary only to extend Mao's explanation or examples of the unity of opposites in the theory of contradiction as quoted earlier. Before an attempt is made to extend Mao's examples of the unity of opposites it is necessary to define Islam.

For the Muslims Islam is the Koran, and the Koran is the infallible word of Allah as revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SM) by the Angel Gabriel. Revealed more than fourteen hundred years ago, the Koran still provides the basic rules of conduct to the Muslim way of life. To date no part of the Koran has been proved false or unscientific. *Prima facie*, therefore, the Koran may be accepted as a book of truth. But it is necessary that such simplistic reasoning be avoided to examine the Koran in terms of scientific reasoning. As pointed out earlier, this researcher would accept dialectical reasoning and extend it to its logical end.

The dialectical thinking based on the theory of contradictions is at the root of all scientific enquiries and it is the unity of opposites which keeps all things in balance. This unity of opposites means that there is nothing that exists without another which is its exact opposite (thesis and antithesis). And it is from this premise that we may examine the validity of some of the fundamentals of Islam. According to the Koran, Allah sent many Apostles and Prophets to peoples who had gone astray and who had denied the oneness of

Allah. Allah sent Apostles and Prophets to bring back such peoples to the right path and to assert His oneness. The Koran is the final word of Allah to mankind and Prophet Muhammad (SM) is the last Prophet of Allah. Let us see if these two fundamentals of Islam can be proved in terms of the theory of contradiction or the theory of opposites (the major premise).

Allah was always there and He will always be there. This fundamental of Islam may be explained as follows : Because Allah was always there, there came the universe according to His wish. It is also because there cannot be anything unless it is created and nothing creates nothing. And if everything is created there must be a mighty Creator. And if there were more than one creator, contradictions among creators would have destroyed the orderliness in the universe. And if there will be no creator, one day there will be no universe. It is inconceivable to see a future when the universe will be reduced to a void. So, there is an Almighty Creator who was always there and who will always be there. He is one Allah. He is above all limitations. He is one and has no partner. And it is the acceptance of this one Allah of Islam that makes the theory of contradiction based on the theory of the unity of opposites acceptable.

The oneness of Allah may be established by citing many examples of the unity of opposites : If everyone dies one day, there is some one who will never die - if everyone falls asleep after some interval, there is someone who never falls asleep - if everyone was born, there is someone who was not born (was already there) - if everyone feels hungry and thirsty, there is some one who never feels hungry and thirsty. Many more such examples may be cited to establish the oneness of Allah. Indeed, the Koran has repeated these qualities of Allah to stress the distinctiveness of the Creator.

The finality of prophethood of Islam may also be established in terms of the unity of opposites. If everything has a beginning, it also has an end - if all systems start at some points, they also end at some other points. Islam is not a new religion, it is the culmination of a process. Whenever any people had gone astray and denied the oneness of Allah, Allah sent his Apostle or a Prophet to bring them back to the right path and assert His oneness. The Koran says, "We have sent forth other prophets before you and given them wives and children. Yet none of them would work miracles except by the will of Allah. Every age has its

scripture. Allah confirms and abrogates what He pleases. This is the Eternal Book" ³. Islam is a chain of prophethood which came to an end with the coming of Prophet Muhammad (SM). There seems to be no problem in accepting this logically or dialectically. So it may be concluded here that, there is one Almighty Allah and Prophet Muhammad (SM) is the last of the Prophets, Allah has sent to mankind from time to time. So, Islam is not only a belief but it is also a state of reason called science.

There is another fundamental of Islam which must be established to be true. This fundamental is : There is another world hereafter. The theory of unity of opposites would accept this by its own logic. If birth is followed by death, this world will be followed by the world hereafter. As indicated earlier, all things and human thoughts as unity of opposites undergo both qualitative and quantitative changes. The Koran speaks of this and Allah, the One, the Almighty as, "On the day when the earth is changed into a different earth and the heavens into new heavens, mankind shall stand before Allah, the One, Almighty".⁴ But it is not enough until it is established that it is a good science and only then can it be taken as perfect science. This issue has been taken up for the reason that science or truth by itself is not good enough unless it does good to mankind.

The Koran is the final revealed religious book. Woven with irrefutable logic, reason and unsurpassed literary excellence, the Koran very meticulously gives guidance to lead an ideal life on this earth. One of the fundamental beliefs in Islam is the world hereafter where men will be raised to life again and where they will be rewarded for their good works and punished for their misdeeds in this world. The Koran says, "You shall surely die hereafter, and be restored to life on the Day of Resurrection. We have created seven heavens above you ; of Our creation we are never heedless"⁵. And man does not know even the hidden thoughts of men, but Allah knows everything. The Koran says, "Allah knows the mysteries of heaven and earth. He knows the hidden thoughts of men".⁶ So, if Allah has created men to live a

3. Dawood, N.J. (Translated), The Koran, Penguin Books, 1975, pp. 146-147, Sura : Al-Raid.

4. Ibid, p. 104, Sura : Ibrahim.

5. Ibid, p. 220, Sura : Al Mu'minin.

6. Ibid, p. 181, Sura : Al-Fatir.

life on this earth and another life in the world hereafter where they will be rewarded and punished according to their deeds, it is only commonsense that they be told what is good and what is bad ; what is right and what is wrong ; what they should do and what they should not do on this earth. And this is exactly what the Koran is all about.

The Koran takes a total view of human life on this earth and tells mankind how this life should be fashioned and modelled. The Koran takes a full view of the universe and those who live in the universe. The Koran says, "All who dwell in heaven and earth beseech Him. Each day some new task employs Him. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny".⁷ And then Allah who created man in his own image, asks mankind to discover the mysteries of the universe. The Koran says, "Mankind and Jinn, if you have power to penetrate the confines of heaven and earth, then penetrate them. But this you shall not do except with our own authority. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?"⁸ So, it can be concluded that Islam is not only a science but also a perfect science-perfect because it is a science that says what is good and what is bad for mankind, not only in this world but also in the world to come.

IV. Islamic Public Administration

For the Muslims, Islam is the Koran which is the infallible word of Allah as revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SM) by the Angel Gabriel. But in practice Islam also includes the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (SM) called *Sunnah*, and in no case and circumstances the two, that is, the Koran and *Sunnah* can be mixed together and given the same weightage. But why then should *Sunnah* be brought in the fold of Islam? There is only one reason for that. Prophet Muhammad (SM) not only preached Islam but also perfectly followed Islam by his sayings and deeds.

Prophet Muhammad (SM) was the man to be emulated by all men for all time to come. As an orphan, he grew up under the care of his grandfather and uncle, in his early youth he earned the title

7. Ibid, p. 20, sura : Al-Rahman.

8. Ibid, p. 20.

of Al-Amin (one who is truthful) and made business trips to neighbouring countries. He was the most distinguished war general and most successful head of the state the history has ever produced. So, if we have to have any public administration to be called Islamic Public Administration it must conform to the Koran and *Sunnah*. Islamic Public Administration, notwithstanding the general theories, principles and techniques of administration, must conform to the dictates of the Koran and *Sunnah*.

Even though the study of modern public administration embraces a period of over one hundred years, the history of public administration is as old as the institution of government. It can be traced back to the Sumerians (5000 B.C.) who had a script and knew how to keep records of transactions. After the Sumerians, different peoples and different civilizations made significant contributions towards the evolution of administrative and management practices. Two of such civilizations are the Chinese and Egyptian civilizations. The modern public administration crept into the minds of academicians in the beginning of the twentieth century and acquired the status of a university discipline by the first quarter of this century. As of today, however, this discipline has received different emphases from different quarters. Bureaucratic management based on scientific and technological advancements represents the traditional public administration. As the postulates of bureaucratic administration proved inadequate to meet the challenges of the mass society, a new school appeared in public administration theories in the 1970s which stressed the social equity and clientele participation in administration and called itself the "New Public Administration".

It now appears that the focus of the "New Public Administration" is on social equity, that is, the public officials should drop the facade of neutrality and use their discretion in administering social and other programmes to protect and advance the interests of the less privileged groups in society (Nigro and Nigro, 1984). It also means that it is not enough that the public officials should execute public policies efficiently and economically as has been emphasized in traditional public administration norms, but the public policies themselves should be good enough to all. All this new thinking in public administration has brought into the forefront the need for a science called "Policy Sciences." Laswell was the inventor of this science. According to Laswell this new

science is an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to policy analysis and policy making (Lewin and Shakun, 1975). But fortunately or unfortunately, even in policy analysis reason and ethics have made their appearance. Dunn (1981) says, "The systematic, reasoned and critical examination of values is an essential element of policy analysis. He further added that all forms of policy analysis should be treated as potentially "ideological", in the sense that the methods of policy analysis may conceal the real values of analysts.

The attempt to eradicate biases by trying to keep out the valuations themselves is a hopeless and misdirected venture. There is other device for excluding biases in the social sciences than to face the valuations and to introduce them as explicitly stated, specific, and sufficiently concretized value premises (Myrdal, 1944). In policy analysis, the best way to make values explicit is to include them as part of a reasoned ethical argument or debate. So, Islam may now be safely brought in the arena of public administration. And if this meant Islamization of public administration, possibly it would not be wrong, either. All individual and social actions can be ethically right, and if Islam can decide on that there is no reason why we should not accept Islamic ethics.

As it was noted earlier, public administration is as old as human civilization. In the present age, public administration may be defined as a course of action carried out by the public officials in a society which has an independent government - the resultant of a political process. Understood in this sense, it may be said that, irrespective of political processes, in any society where the followers of Islam are a majority and who have an independent and sovereign government, there is an Islamic public administration. This public administration may not be a perfect Islamic public administration but even then it is Islamic public administration for the reason that the Koran provides the basic rules of conduct fundamental to the Islamic way of life in such administration. To achieve efficiency and economy in the administration of public affairs, Islamic public administration must have as its part all the elements of modern scientific administration and management to obtain the most wanted social equity. Zakat, officially collected and disbursed, may be one example of approximating social equity.

Since this paper is an attempt to establish a rational basis of Islamic administration, it is not necessary to go into the details of Islam and *Sunnah*. So, what follows next is a general presentation of Islamic administration. First, it is unthinkable that there is no Islamic administration when the writers on administration find elements of administration even in the tribal and most primitive societies. Secondly, Prophet Muhammad (SM) provided the principles and precepts on which an Islamic administration can be established. The Islamic state established by Prophet Muhammad (SM) had a written constitution. The Prophet's closest companions could be viewed as his ministers and other officials and judge. The first four Caliphs of Islam expanded the territories of the Islamic state upon the principles propounded by Prophet Muhammad (SM) and with it the scope of Islamic administration further expanded.

One of the most important documents of Islamic administration is Hazrat Ali's letter to the Governor-designate of Egypt, Malik al-Ashter. This is a classic administrative policy letter- "an Instrument of Instruction issued by Ali (RA) Ibn Abu Talib, to Malik Ibn Haris Ashter on latter's appointment as Governor of Egypt. He is ordered to improve the conditions of the inhabitants, bring prosperity, work for the welfare of the people, do justice, collect revenues, fight the aggressors and establish peace among the people."⁹ This is a long letter, because it is a comprehensive letter. One of the most important points touched upon in this letter is *Rights of the Poor*. A part of this letter reads as follows :

"I want to caution you about the poor. Fear Almighty Allah and be mindful about the condition of the poor and your own attitude towards them. These people have no riches, no opportunities ; they have no support either. This class is composed of destitutes, poor beggars, the sick, the crippled and the helpless who are either resigned to their fate or compelled to live on beggary. Some of them do not resort to begging due to self-respect, but their distress, destitution and sufferings are worse. Malik, for the sake of Allah, you must protect them and secure their rights, this being your responsibility as administrator and fixed by Allah".¹⁰

9. Ali, Hazrat (RA), A Classic Administration Policy Letter to Malik Ibn Haris Ashter, Shamsul Alam (ed.), Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh, 1982.

10. Ibid, p. 23.

About Hazrat Ali's letter to Malik al-Ashter, a famous Arab Christian Abdul Maseeh Antaki who died at the beginning of the twentieth century wrote as follows : "It (Caliph Ali's letter) is a far superior to and better code than the ones handed down by Moses and Hammurabi ; it explains what a humane administration should be like, and how it is to be carried out and it justifies the claim of Muslims that Islam wants to introduce a Godly administration of the people for the people and by the people, and it wants a ruler should rule not to please himself but to bring happiness to the ruled and no religion before Islam tried to achieve this end" (Al-Buraey, 1985).

Probably, Antaki's comment on Hazrat Ali's letter to his Governor designate is the one which the social scientists and public administrators are looking for to establish social equity in society. Finally, it may be noted that wherever the Muslims ruled over a society according to the injunctions of the Koran and *Sunnah*, they received universal acclaim. The contributions of Islam towards the rescue of world civilization from extinction has been universally accepted. It must not mean that the Caliphs or the Governors never erred. What it means is that wherever the Muslims ruled over a society they had left marks of Islamic administration.

V. Conclusions

It may be argued that religion is based on faith and not logic or invincible evidence, and as such, use of dialectics to prove God's unity or the greatness of the Koran cannot be accepted. In the same manner it may be argued that if we have to have a religion, it must be acceptable by reasoning. Answer to reason should be reason only. It is from this dictum that an attempt has been made to establish that Islam, besides being a religion, is also a perfect state of reason (science). From this premise it has been further explained that administration, a secular science, can also have a kind of public administration to be called Islamic administration.

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