



RESEARCH PAPER

Islam and Rationalism: A Comprehensive Analysis from the Quran and Sunnah

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ABSTRACT

The research paper in hand addresses the very phenomenon of rationalism in the light of Islamic injunctions as a whole and its prime significance regarding promotion of body of knowledge in order to clarify a number of misconceptions especially in the backdrop of Islam-West dialectics. Moreover; the glorious past of Islam suggests that the modern day wisdom and vision is not apart from the centuries old historical process in the light of illustrations from the life and times of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). As the study is based on qualitative research, the discussion revolves around argument and analysis augmented with illustrations from the annals of Islamic History. Hence; it helps to reach a sold conclusion that logic and reasoning is the true base of Islamic research as well as functioning as a religion as the Holy Prophet (PBUH) not only encouraged to question but also asserted on logic and reasoning which is the real essence of today's rationalism.

Introduction

Most of our orthodox Muslim scholars do not know how to understand, evaluate, and respond to an argument. For this reason, the level of dialogues in Muslim communities is very low. Instead of responding to logical merit, cogency, and soundness of a position or argument, generally they respond emotionally by restoring to name-calling, prejudices, and other kinds of petty bickering which, show their intensions more towards their ego than the reality. These are no doubt embarrassing for Muslims because Islam does not emphasize on such illogical and irrational approaches. Unfortunately, most of our current orthodox Muslim scholars do not have much information about the achievements of their ancestors. The Muslims in the past have done a great job in *Tafsir*, *Fiqh*, *Usul*, *Aqida*, *Hadith*, and *Tasawwuf*. In *Fiqh*, they have four *Sunni* schools.(Haqiqatjou, n.d.) All of these

schools have preserved their logical structure, basic ontology and unique terminology for centuries that include millions of scholars, texts and commentaries. This is a colossal achievement in human history. But what is disappointing for current Muslim scholars is that many of them are doubtful about rational identity of Islam, as if it is foreign concept that has corrupted Islamic actuality. In such substandard environment, it is duty of the broadminded Muslim intellectuals to take all of them towards true Islamic philosophy. It can only be done through rationalism. It is, actually, a method to communicate with people through reason; and if someone does not acknowledge it as central to Islamic sciences, and Muslims' faith, how can we make ourselves able to understand our rivals about the reality of Islam. It is rather the method, that teaches us how to address a 'valid argument,' a 'sound argument,' and other logical delusions (Haqiqatjou, n.d.). These are universal topographies of a mature human discourse; and having its information will take us to the clarity of thought. Hence, it cannot be un-Islamic; and the Quran and Sunnah both endorse this statement. In the following, we will discuss how the Holy Quran and Sunnah of Holy Prophet (PBUH) speak in favor of Islamic rationalism.

Islamic Rationalism in the light of Quran

The entire Holy Quran is full of wisdom. Its every single verse describes the story of insight and intelligence. At various occasions, it advises to the whole mankind to ponder into the universe through using cognition. It is rather the only religion in the entire globe that talks about discovery of God than acknowledging Him through a blind faith. It is the largest evidence of Islamic rationalism. But unfortunately the modern Muslims have left the way of acquiring knowledge through the Holy Quran. They have adopted a materialistic approach to handle even religious matters. This particular approach caused a severe damage to the identity of Islam. As a result of it, the critics who were already there to disparage Islam have gotten a terrific chance to defame Islam on the basis of its irrational attitude. (Khan, 2008) In such a challenging environment, the hour demands reconciliation of Islamic injunctions on rational grounds. For such a sacred cause, the Holy Quran provides a conclusive and trustworthy company. Here, we discuss how Quran argues in favor of Islamic rationalism.

1). Islam is a religion of nature. There are more than 500 verses in the Holy Quran which discuss the natural phenomena. In other words, Allah invites man to ponder into His 'signs' present around him in the universe, which in itself is 'wonders of the wonder'. He also challenges man to find any systematic folly in it. He also challenges to leave time and space if possible and again challenges that it is not possible without His permission. On the other hand, He never said to human beings to have a blind faith on Him. He always guided them to discover Him through pondering into the universe. He invites Man's pondering through a verse of *Sura An-Nahal* thereby saying that all the crops, fruits, trees etc are caused to grow by him, and surely these are signs for those who think and ponder. (*The Holy Quran*, 16:11, n.d.)

Allah's selection of Palm Tree as an illustration in the above-mentioned Surah is in itself a wonder as this miraculous tree is ultra-lengthy and massive and produces fruit in hundreds of kilograms of weight. The need of this seed is just the usage of ingredients from the soil and water to grow and nourish, and here a natural question arises how does a seed know to grow? And what is the source of its 'intelligence' to grow on a specific plan without missing any requisite and predestined details? How it behaves like an entity having 'wisdom', 'memory' and functioning capability like an artificial intelligence based gadget? Moreover; who decides the color, shape, length, girth and weight of the seed, fruit and tree? These questions surely compel thinking minds about the 'real creator' behind the universe as well as the natural phenomena on the Earth.(Khan, 2016) Thus a thinking mind reaches to an awesome conclusion that a seed is wiser than a silicon chip and this tiny seed is one of the little glimpses of the Almighty's existence and power, and pondering into this vast and enormous universe will surely leave one in oceans of wonders.

2). Islam is one of the very few religions all over the world that encourages reasoning and dialogues. One most classical example of former statement is Hazrat Ibrahim's (AS) historical dialogue with King Nimrod, son of Canaan. Nimrod claimed that he was able to give life and death to the people. For illustration, he killed an innocent person while forgave a prisoner who was sentenced to death earlier. To refute his false claim, Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) asked him to make the Sun rise from the opposite direction. At such an arduous demand, Nimrod got puzzled. The Holy Quran describes this particular dialogue in a remarkable manner in Surah al-Baqrah, and invites both believers and unbelievers equally to think about the powers of the Almighty who, in turn, pose nothing except are left flabbergasted and humbled, and those who show injustice in thinking never seek guidance from Him (The Holy Quran, 2:258).

It is quite evident from the great transitory dialogue between Messenger of Allah and the tyrant king that Islam adores the environment of reasoning and dialogue. The beloved messenger of Allah talked to the tyrant king in such a logical and wise manner that he could ultimately refute him by going back to the fundamentals. The dialogue further teaches a vital lesson that Allah should have been thanked for His countless blessings not to take them as means for impiety, conceit and insurgence, "faith to man is as vivacious as the vivacity of drink, food and air", sturdy faith in the outright Might of Allah does not avert a believer(Khan, 2011, pp. 33-34) from taking the necessary measures, and if a man of Almighty disobeys and becomes evildoer, he will be deprived of Allah's guidance.

3). Islam claims to be an eternal religion. Such claim always offers people to judge its validity on historical bases. If latter day history validates to its claim, it stands ratified, otherwise it should have been rejected. Rejection of the theory of historical determination of Karl Marx in 20th century is a sound and clear evidence of such historical phenomenon. In this theory, he says that the modern industrial capitalism bore within it's the germs of its obliteration. According to his observation,

an antithesis would emerge to destroy it and a new synthesis would be emerged. But opposite to his prediction, industrial capitalism has not only persisted but is evolving immensely. Thus, the historical events have buried Marxist theory. Accordingly, Hitler claimed that the Germans were the “master race” and born to rule over the entire Europe; but they had to put paid all such claims at the end of World War II. However, the case of Islam is quite different. Even after a long epoch of one thousand and five hundred years, Islam did not suffer any erosion with respect to its validity (Khan, 2011). Edward Gibbon, a famous British writer and M.N. Roy, an Indian historian; both have a consensus on everlasting character of Islam. Michael Heart, an American writer, has also written in his famous book “The 100” about the predictions of Holy Prophet (PBUH) which he described before start of his mission and proved 100% true latterly. The Holy Quran also predicted successful completion of Prophetic mission and authority of his sacred assignment over all other assignments in a delicate manner. It says in *SuraAs-Saff*, that all the wishes and efforts of non-believers in order to extinguish Allah Almighty’s light went in vain, and to the disliking and distaste of them, Allah’s Message through His Prophet (PBUH) accomplished in a triumphant manner (The Holy Quran, 61:8-9).

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) is the only personality in the human history whose predictions were fulfilled to the fullest extent. He along with his dedicated companions influenced the entire populated world of that era and succeeded in every walk of his mission. He, not only, conquered the Arabia but crushed two mighty powerful empires of their time i.e. the Roman and Sassanid. This marvelous epoch of Islam has been acknowledged throughout the biosphere by all well-known historians. The Holy Book of Muslims revealed prior to the modern age of knowledge, yet fourteen hundred years afore, it affirmed that the proof of its divine nature lay in its being in absolute accordance with historical facts and in its remaining consistent with modern discoveries (Khan, 2011) Any development in human knowledge will never contradict Quranic proclamations. The later day history has affirmed it at a great extent. When several statements enclosed in ancient books have been at loggerheads with the modern discoveries, the Holy Quran is exclusive in steering clear of all such contradictions. The Holy Quran states:

“Do they not ponder on the Quran? Had it been other than God, they would have definitely found therein much contradiction.”(The Holy Quran, 4:82)

Much has been written on this particular topic. Maurice Bucaille, the French scientist, quoted in his book “The Bible, the Quran and Modern Science” that the Quranic statements are perfectly in accordance with modern scientific knowledge. It shows that the Holy Quran completely comes up to the scientific standard. The advancement of human knowledge in favor of Quranic contents is no mere accident. It is one of the biggest proofs of Quranic rationality that it is a historical book whose knowledge is not bound by the restrictions of space and time. Therefore, Quran is an exceptional prediction to this effect:

“We shall show them Our evidence in the universe and in their souls until the truth of the Quran becomes manifest to them”(The Holy Quran, 41:53).

Maurice Bucaille admits that the data acquired from the modern scientific research is completely in accordance with Quranic knowledge. He pays tribute to the revealed knowledge after a deep comparative study of Quran and modern study. All these sources give enough detail to prove Islam a rational religion.

4) In Islam, it is clear bidding upon the believers to check the authenticity of the information they receive from any source, especially when it comes from evildoers, and the evidence for this act can be found from both Quran and Sunnah. In Surah Hujrat one can find a verse related to it, and the reason behind that revelation is available in Hadith literature which directs to an incident which happened after the victory of Muslims in Ghazwa Bani Mustalaq and subsequent embrace of Islam of the whole tribe after the tribal chief Haris bin Abi Zrar willingly embraced Islam on the Holy Prophet (PBUH)'s invitation (Shah, 1995) On orders of the Holy Prophet, he was asked to collect Zakat from his tribe which he willingly obeyed and went. However; his delay for some reason created an air that he was reluctant to pay Zakat and trying to wage a war against Medina. This rumor created a great fuss and confusion among the believers and resultantly Allah revealed the abovementioned verse to the Holy Prophet that information from any source must be counterchecked, especially when it came from evildoers, hypocrites, etc in order to avoid any possible harm to the believers unintentionally. (“Sura al-Hujrat, 49:6,”)

5). According to Islam, the existing world is not an eternal place of living. The Holy Quran clearly states that the man is employed here at temporary bases. The purpose of such employment is to test him regarding his obedience to Allah. He has been constantly realized in the Holy Quran about the mortality of this world; and that he will be died at one day. Death will end the testing period for every human being but will not end the existence of human. It means death is only a change of abode. Human soul never dies. It returns to realm whence it came; and waits for the arrival of the Day of Judgment. That realm is called ‘the world hereafter’ and it is forever. Hence, the human life is divided into two parts: a transitory stay in this mortal world and an eternal life hereafter. It is clear indication that the human beings are responsible for their actions and if they misuse their freedom, they will have to pay back for their actions (Khan, 2013)They are free to do whatever they want but they are not allowed to do whatever they want. They are only allowed to do which is just for humanity. If they will cross the limits, it would be harmful for him. It is because, the God is just and He likes justice. He announced a day for judgment in which the good will have been rewarded and bad will have been punished. If there were not a day, there would not be any justice. So, it was a demand of natural justice that there would be a day on which everyone is brought to book. The Holy Quran states clearly that whosoever follows the right path does so, (in reality) is for his own benefaction, (on the other hand), whosoever goes astray, (it is for his) own loss; and no one shall be made to bear another’s burden (The Holy Quran, 17:15)

The verse clearly indicates that everyone will be accountable for his own actions and no injustice will be done to anyone. When the time will come for last Reckoning, Almighty will destroy the world and replace it with an eternal and everlasting world. All the human beings will then be resurrected and brought before the God for scrutiny. On that particular day, everyone will stand alone before God; and there will be no commendatory but whom Allah will allow. All those persons who would have shown his obedience to God will be rewarded; and those who would not have shown such character will be chastise. It shows that the humans are now living in the world of test. The Holy Quran mentions that the process or system of life and subsequent death, created by Allah Almighty are meant to judge people's conduct ("The Holy Quran, 67:1,").

This shows the level of rationality Islam possesses. If there was not a day on which records are even, it would be injustice to most of the human beings. It is only the distinction of Islam that it never allowed violation of human rights; and if someone does so, he will have to pay back one day. The whole concept of accountability also tells us that human freedom is not unlimited. A man is only allowed to use his own freedom until it does not affect other's freedom. It is Islam that fulfils the complete requirements of justice and equality; and for such a sacred cause, it has introduced the concept of accountability on the Day of Judgment. This particular belief naturally has a great influence on the life of a believer. When he believes that God almighty is watching all his actions, he will show a responsible character. He will always endeavor to follow the right path; and will inevitably avoid any progression that will cause God's displeasure.

Islamic Rationalism in the light of Sunnah

The estimate of Holy Prophet's (PBUH) assertion on rationality can be made through the fact that the most rational book of the universe 'the Holy Quran' commands to follow the way of Holy Prophet (PBHU). In *Sura al-Ahzab*, God almighty says:

"Certainly, there is a very good example for you in the Prophet of Allah, for those who (bind) hope with Allah Almighty, and (believe in) the Day of Finality of Judgment, and remember Him repeatedly" (The Holy Quran, 33:21).

The entire history of Prophetic life is evident that he never forced even a single non-Muslim to embrace Islam. It is rather his rational arguments that enable people to see the truth of his sacred mission. He never gave up his rational attitude in his entire life as rationality was his strongest tool to convince people. When a deputation of some Christian intellectuals from *Najran* challenged him for a dialogue, he accepted it with big heart. He continued this particular dialogue with them for several days but the Christians were locked into their stubborn faith; and hence, they refused to acknowledge the reality. Allah, the almighty, then revealed a verse of Holy Quran and challenged them to contest a '*Mubahela*' if they think

themselves on truth (Rizvi, 2014, p.381). The Christians, first, agreed on it and accepted the challenge but abdicated later.

This audacity of Holy Prophet (PBUH) to counter his opponents with the power of logical arguments did not come in his personality after announcement of prophet-hood but he was genius, wise and prudent right from his birth. There are several incidents before the announcement the prophet-hood that shows his intellectual strength. When he was only thirty five and yet not announced his status as prophet of God, a situation arose in Mecca which called for tactful handling. The walls of *Kabah* were collapsed for some reason and rebuilt by Quraish tribe. In the process, an issue arose as to who should be given the privilege to lay the revered black stone in its apartment in the wall. As it was a matter of great stature, everyone wanted to be honored through this service. The issue continued for various days without there being any harmonious solution. Finally, all the concerned authorities of both the tribes agreed to accept the suggestion made by a person who will first enter in the *Kabah* in the next morning. When the subsequent morning came, both the parties saw the Prophet's entrance in the *Kabah* as the first one at that particular morning. At this, all of them chorused, "He is trustworthy one and we will acknowledge his decision." (Khan, 2013) The Holy Prophet (PBUH), on the appointed day, managed a piece of cloth and spread it on the ground, and then kept the black stone on it. Then he asked the people to hold the sheet by edges; and carried it to the wall of *Kabah*. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) then placed the black stone in the relevant apartment with his own hands. This act shows the wisdom and insight, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) possessed even before announcement of his prophet-hood.

This wisdom and insight intensified later when he received the Divine message to pronounce himself as a prophet. After announcement of prophet-hood, he lived almost thirteen years in Mecca where majority of non-believers opposed him severely. The total numbers of people who accepted his invitation and embraced Islam in Mecca were around two hundred. These Muslims constantly begged permission to fight against infidels of Mecca, who used to hurt Prophet's feelings throughout his mission. But the Holy Prophet (PBUH) never allowed them for such action; and exhorted them to exercise patience. Even when Hazrat Umar (RA) asked for his permission to fight against tyranny and oppression, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "O Umar, we are small in number." Despite being subjected to all types of injustice and cruelty for tenure of fifteen years, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) unilaterally adopted the method of patience and avoidance. On the occasion of the battle of Badar, for the first time, he decided to encounter the rivals. He took this step when he had been allowed to fight against them from his Lord, Who promised him for help with one thousand angels (Khan, 2015). This was a very wise tactic of Holy Prophet (PBUH) that indicates level of his rationality. He did not retaliate immediately but organized them-selves for retaliation. When he felt that the practical steps would yield positive results, he did so.

One another example of his rational mindset is adopting status quo until favorable environment is produced. It has been seen quite often in most of cases that

efforts of changing status quo through retaliation become futile. In such retaliation, many precious opportunities are also wasted and it is further loss. In such situations, the Holy Prophet's (PBUH) method was to accept status quo (Khan, 2015) The greatest benefit of such policy is that it gives one the respite to amalgamate one's energies. By keeping himself far from the controversy, one may strengthen himself so prominently that a time will come when eventually a balance of power will shift. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) demonstrated this wise strategy on the occasion of Treaty of *Hudaybiya*. When the people of Mecca heard that their rivals had gathered at *Hudaybiya*, they also reached there to stop Muslims from enhancing more. At that particular moment, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was on his way to Mecca to perform *Umra*. Hence, a state of deadlock came to be generated at *Hudaybiya*. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) did not resort to break it in order to move further. Instead he withdrew and came back to Medina. It was acknowledgement of status quo already established between the Muslims and their rivals. This wise tactic gave the Muslims a golden opportunity to consolidate further, that turned into a reality within a short period of two years (Khan, 2002). It was at that moment that the Holy Prophet's (PBUH) conquering entry into Mecca became a possibility.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was one kind of person, who's every single word, had touched the listener's heart. It was his wisdom that a number people who were astray came to the right path. Right after the victory in battle of *Hawazin*, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to distribute spoils of war amongst victorious participants. The newly converted Muslims were financially very poor; and for this reason the Holy Prophet (PBUH) gave them more privileged than *Ansars* (Khan, 2000). The *Ansars* did not acknowledge his decision whole heartedly and started raising objections on him. He Holy Prophet (PBUH) did not like their conduct and gathered them at a place to have some words with them. He said:

"No doubt you have supported me when people of Mecca forced me to leave the city. You have also provided me accommodation when people of Mecca gave me life threats. But it is also true that I became a source of your guidance when you were off track. You were enemies but I made you brothers. Did you want to give up your eternal destination for worldly things like goats and camels?" (Khan, 2000).

After hearing these words from the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the whole crowd started weeping and apologizing for their blunder. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) did not show any annoyance and forgave them straightaway. It was his charismatic reasoning that inspired everyone.

It is reported that the father of Imran Bin Hussain used to worship seven idols. Once several people came to him to him and said, "Control this person because he is cursing your idols." He took them with him and went to that person's door, who was actually Holy Prophet (PBUH). The Holy Prophet (PBUH) saw and immediately asked for making a space for him. Hussain asked from the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that why he was cursing their idols? The Holy Prophet (PBUH) asked him about the number of idols which were being worshipped. He answered

that they worship seven idols. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) then asked him, "Which idol is being called by you in hardships?" They replied that the God in the sky. (Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, 1982, p.166) The Holy Prophet (PBUH) instantly asked him, "How can you worship those idols with the solitary one who keeps you out from the hardships? Did you thank him through worshipping other with Him?" Hussain replied that he never acknowledged the two. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) then asked him to accept Islam. He replied that he will lose his prestige amongst his comrades. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said to him, "You should say to Allah: I beg your help for keeping me up, bestow me reason that benefits me."

Now, look at the vision and insight of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) when he asked for making a space for him. He was already aware of the fact that it would be difficult for Hussain to sacrifice his prestige and status. Hence, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) honored him with a new company of comrades that boosted his prestige. When Hussain came into the circle of Islam, his son Imran kissed his head, hands and feet (Khan, 1982). Eyeing the whole scenario, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) got emotional and said, "I wept due to Imran's response; Imran did not stand when his father came, nor did he look at him, but when he accepted Islam, he respected him. It made me emotional." This event shows that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had a rational mind. It was his rationality that he perceived the nature of Hussain and treated him accordingly.

Conclusion

These arguments are sufficient to rebut every kind of accusations that connects irrationality with Islam. There is nothing in Islam that cannot be rationalized; and Quran and Sunnah sanction this statement. If someone looks into the Quran, it is the only book in the universe whose every single verse has innate wisdom behind itself. Similarly, if someone rationalizes Sunnah, the sayings and actions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), he will find immense reason behind it. Moreover, these are the two prominent sources of Islam that strongly condemn all kinds of violence and coercion with insistence; and stressed upon reason based dialogues and discourses. The Holy Quran clearly states that there is no compulsion in the religion. It means those who attempt to convert non-Muslims with any mean of power are astray ones; and they do not follow actual Islamic dogmas. In this regard, the practice of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is best example, which never enforced Islam on any one in his whole life. The history is evident that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is the most rational personality of the globe who always used rational arguments to prove his stance accurate whenever he had been asked to do so during the campaign of Islam. His invitation to the non-Muslims for adoption of Islam is best demonstration of Quranic injunctions in which God asked to ponder into the universe for acquiring reality. The only purpose to describe Divine attributes in the Holy Quran is to realize all the human beings with the creator of the universe. It is one, gigantic evidence of Islamic rationalism. The universality of Islamic laws despite of passing fourteen hundred years also sanctions Islamic rationalism. It is also the Quran and Sunnah that open the doors of research in different walks of life.

Both the sources openly invite their critics to testify Islamic proclamations on rational grounds. For this particular reason, Islam is advancing towards world's largest religion in the next century. All these facts loudly speak that Islam is a rational religion.

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