

Khalifa Abu Bakr - Abu Bakr in History

Unification of Arabia under the Holy Prophet

Dr. Shoufani's thesis is that, at the time of the death of the Holy Prophet, Arabia was far from being unified, and many people had not accepted Islam. It is accordingly argued that where the people had not accepted Islam, the question of apostasy did not arise. There is fallacy in this thesis as the following arguments would show: The society in Arabia was tribal in character. The tribes sent representative delegations to Madina and these delegations accepted Islam for their tribes. Regular agreements were drawn up, and it cannot be said that only some persons accepted Islam, and most of them did not. As a matter of fact all the tribes who sent delegations accepted Islam. It is on record that all tribes had sent their delegations. It, therefore, follows that all the people in Arabia, other than those like the Christians of Najran with whom there was an agreement to the contrary, had accepted Islam. When the Sura "Al-Bara'ah" was proclaimed on the occasion of the pilgrimage in 631 C.E., the "declaration of discharge" signified in specific terms that Arabia had been unified under Islam, for unless there was unification there could be no discharge. When in 632 C.E. over one hundred thousand Muslims assembled on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, it was a proof positive of the unification of Arabia. On this occasion the Holy Prophet declared in unequivocal terms that two religions were not to be tolerated in Arabia, and that Islam alone was to prevail. How could the Holy Prophet make such a declaration, if Arabia was not unified? On the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage God revealed that God had completed the religion and chosen Islam for them. That clearly means that by the time of the revelation Arabia had been unified under Islam.

In view of the testimony of the Holy Quran, the view of the western writers that Arabia had not been unified under Islam during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet cannot be accepted.

Leadership in Madina. The view that the Riddah was a break with the leadership in Madina, and not with Islam qua religion is fallacious and cannot be accepted for the following reasons: There is no authority in support of the point that any tribe ever raised the issue of non-recognizing the leadership of Madina. The western scholars are apt to view things in the light of the separation of the church and the state, and have failed to realize that there is no such separation in Islam and as such any defiance of the authority at Madina which was the custodian of Islam had a religious connotation. The western scholars are under the impression that Zakat is a tax. Zakat is in fact not a tax; it is a religious obligation. Any refusal to pay Zakat was the refusal to follow a basic injunction of Islam, and as such this refusal was not a mere repudiation of a fiscal obligation; it meant refusal to accept a fundamental injunction of Islam. Any attempt to enforce such obligation was religious and not merely political in character. It is on record that Abu Bakr laid down in specific terms that before fighting any tribe, it was to be given the option to accept Islam, and where it accepted Islam, no action was to be taken against it. It was further laid down that where a tribe responded by calling the "Adhan" it was to be presumed that the tribe followed Islam. No Riddah war was fought against any party which responded by "Adhan" and professed to be Muslim. The tribes against whom punitive action was taken definitely repudiated Islam. It is therefore absolutely wrong to hold that the Riddah was a break with the leadership in Madina, and not with Islam qua religion.

Significance of apostasy. The question that has been posed is that where the majority of the people did not accept Islam, the question of their apostasy did not arise, and hence, any campaign undertaken against them could not be an apostasy campaign. In the first instance it is not correct that the majority of the people had not accepted Islam. When delegations went to Makkah, and undertook to accept Islam on behalf of their tribes this implied that by agreement the entire tribe had accepted Islam. The position on the ground was that these tribes had accepted Islam, but when false prophets rose in their midst they transferred allegiance to them. The very process of offering allegiance to false prophets was apostasy pure and simple, and when the Muslims took action against the false prophets and their followers, such campaign was an apostasy campaign even though any of the followers might not have formally accepted

Islam previously. After the revelation of Sura al-Bara'ah it was proclaimed that no religion other than Islam was to be tolerated in Arabia. This meant that if any attempt was made to enforce any new religion the Muslims could take up arms to suppress such religion and such a campaign taken in the name of religion would be an apostasy campaign.

Analysis of Montgomery Watt. Among the western scholars, Montgomery Watt has understood the position correctly. His analysis of the situation is as follows: "Moreover, as in the movement towards Islam, so in the Riddah, religion and political factors were inseparably mixed with one another. The Muslim historians were therefore right in regarding it as a religious movement; it was European scholars who erred by taking religion in a European, and not in an Arabic sense. The Riddah was a movement away from the religious, social, economic, and political system of Islam, and so was anti-Islamic".

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