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Al-Ghadir and its Relevance to Islamic Unity

The distinguished book entitled “*al-Ghadir*” has raised a huge wave in the world of Islam. Islamic thinkers shed light on the book in different perspectives; in literature, history, theology, tradition, *tafsir*, and sociology. From the social perspective we can deal with the Islamic unity. In this review the Islamic unity has been dealt with from a social point of view.

Contemporary Muslim thinkers and reformists are of the view that unity and solidarity of Muslims are the most imperative Islamic exigencies at the present juncture when the enemies have made extensive inroads upon the Islamic community and have tried to resort to different ways and means to spread the old differences and create new ones.

We are aware that Islamic unity and fraternity is the focus of attention of the Holy Legislator of Islam and is actually the major objective pursued by this Divine religion as firmed by the Qur'an, the “Sunnah”, and the history of Islam.

For this reason, some people have been faced with this question: Wouldn't the compilation and publication of a book such as “*al-Ghadir*” which deals with the oldest issue of differences among the Muslims– create a barrier in the way of the sublime and lofty objective of the Islamic unity?

To answer this question, it is necessary first to elucidate the essence of this issue, that is, the Islamic unity, and then proceed to examine the role of the magnum opus entitled “*al-Ghadir*” and its eminent compiler 'Allamah Amini in bringing about Islamic unity.

Islamic Unity

What is meant by the Islamic unity? Does it mean that one Islamic school of thought should be unanimously followed and others be set aside? Or does it mean that the commonalties of all Islamic schools of thought should be taken up and their differences be put away to make up a new denomination which is not completely the same as the previous ones?

Or does it mean that Islamic unity is in no way related to the unity of the different schools of *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) but signifies the unity of the Muslims and the unity of the followers of different schools of *Fiqh*, with their different religious ideas and views, vis-à-vis the aliens?

To give an illogical and impractical meaning to the issue of the Islamic unity, the opponents of the issue have called it to be the formation of a single Madhhab, so as to defeat it in the very first step. Without doubt, by the term Islamic unity, the intellectual Islamic '*Ulama*' (scholars) do not mean that all denominations should give in to one denomination or that the commonalties should be taken up and the different views and ideas be set aside, as these are neither rational and logical nor favorable and practical. By the Islamic unity these scholars mean that all Muslims should unite in one line against their common enemies.

These scholars slate that Muslims have many things in common, which can serve as the foundations of a firm unity. All Muslims worship the One Almighty and believe in the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet (s).

The Qur'an is the Book of all Muslims and Ka'abah is their "*qiblah*" (direction of prayer). They go to "*hajj*" pilgrimage with each other and perform the "*hajj*" rites and rituals like one another. They say the daily prayers and fast like each other. They establish families and engage in transactions like one another. They have similar ways of bringing up their children and burying their dead. Apart from minor affairs, they share similarities in all the aforementioned cases. Muslims also share one kind of world view, one common culture, and one grand, glorious, and long-standing civilization.

Unity in the world view, in culture, in the civilization, in insight and disposition, in religious beliefs, in acts of worship and prayers, in social rites and customs can well turn the Muslim into a unified nation to serve as a massive and dominant power before which the big global powers would have to bow down.

This is especially true in view of the stress laid by Islam on this principle. According to the explicit wording of the Qur'an, the Muslims are brothers, and special rights and duties link them together. So, why shouldn't the Muslims use all these extensive facilities accorded to them as the blessing of Islam?

This group of '*Ulama*' are of the view that there is no need for the Muslims to make any compromise on the primary or secondary principles of their religion for the sake of Islamic unity. Also it is not necessary for the Muslims to avoid engaging in discussions and reasons and writing books on primary and secondary principles about which they have differences.

The only consideration for Islamic unity in this case is that the Muslims– in order to avoid the emergence or accentuation of vengeance – preserve their possession, avoid insulting and accusing each other and uttering fabrications, abandon ridiculing the logic of one another, and finally abstain from hurting one another and going beyond the borders of logic and reasoning. In fact, they should, at least, observe the limits which Islam has set forth for inviting non-Muslims to embrace it:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner... “(16: 125)

Some people are of the view that those schools of *fiqh*, such as, Shafi'i and Hanafi which have no differences in principle should establish brotherhood and stand in one line. They believe that denominations which have differences in the principles can in no way be brothers. This group view the religious principles as an interconnected set as termed by scholars of *Usul*, as an interrelated and interdependent set; any damage to one principle harms all principles.

As a result, those who believe in this principle are of the view that when, for instance, the principle of *“imamah”* is damaged and victimized, unity and fraternity will bear no meaning and for this reason the Shi'ah and the Sunnis cannot shake hands as two Muslim brothers and be in the same rank, no matter who their enemy is.

The first group answers this group by saying: “There is no reason for us to consider the principles as an interrelated set and follow the principle of “all or none”. Imam 'Ali ('a) chose a very logical and reasonable approach. He left no stone unturned to retrieve his right. He used everything within his power to restore the principle of *“imamah”*, but he never adhered to the motto of “all or none”. 'Ali ('a) did not rise up for his right, and that was not compulsory.

On the contrary, it was a calculated and chosen approach. He did not fear death. Why didn't he rise up? There could have been nothing above martyrdom. Being killed for the cause of the Almighty was his ultimate desire. He was more intimate with martyrdom than a child is with his mother's breast. But in his sound calculations, Imam 'Ali ('a) had reached the conclusion that under the existing conditions it was to the interest of Islam to foster collaboration and cooperation among the Muslims and give up revolt. He repeatedly stressed this point.

In one of his letters (to Malik al-Ashtar, he wrote the following:

“First I pulled back my hand until I realized that a group of people converted from Islam and invited the people toward annihilating the religion of Muhammad(s). So I feared that if I did not rush to help Islam and the Muslims, I would see gaps or destruction which calamity would be far worse than the several-day-long demise of caliphate.”¹

In the six-man council, after appointment of 'Uthman by 'Abdul-Rahman ibn 'Awf, 'Ali ('a) set forth his objection as well as his readiness for collaboration as follows:”

You well know that I am more deserving than others for caliphate. But now by Allah, so long as the affairs of the Muslims are in order and my rivals suffice with setting me aside and only I am alone subjected to oppression, I will not oppose (the move) and will give in (to it).”²

These indicate that in this issue 'Ali ('a) condemned the principle of “all or none”. There is no need to

further elaborate the approach taken by 'Ali ('a) toward this issue. There are ample historical proofs and reasons in this regard.

'Allamah Amini

Now it is time to see to which group the eminent 'Allamah, Ayatullah Amini – the distinguished compiler of the “*al-Ghadir*” – belonged and how he thought. Did he approve of the unity of the Muslims only within the light of Shi'ism? Or did he consider Islamic fraternity to be broader? Did he believe that Islam which is embraced by uttering the “*shahadatayn*” (the Muslim creed) would willy–nilly create some rights for the Muslims and that the brotherhood and fraternity set forth in the Qur'an exists among all Muslims?

'Allamah Amini personally considered this point – i.e. the need to elucidate his viewpoint on this subject and elaborate whether “*al-Ghadir*” has a positive or a negative role in (the establishment of) Islamic unity. In order not to be subject to abuse by his opponent – be they among the pros and cons – he has repeatedly explained and elucidated his views.

'Allamah Amini supported Islamic unity and viewed an open mind and clear insight. On different occasions, he set forth this matter in various volumes of the “*al-Ghadir*”. Reference will be made to some of them below:

In the preface to volume I, he briefly mentions the role of “*al-Ghadir*” in the world of Islam. He states: “And we consider all this as service to religion, sublimation of the word of the truth, and restoration of the Islamic '*ummah*' (community).”

In volume 3 (page 77), after quoting the fabrications of Ibn Taymiyah, Alusi, and Qasimi to the effect that Shi 'ism is hostile to some of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Household of the Prophet) such as Zayd bin 'Ali bin al-Huseyn, he notes the following under the title of “Criticism and Correction”:

“These fabrications and accusations sow the seeds of corruption, stir hostilities among the '*ummah*', create discord among the Islamic community, divide the '*ummah*', and clash with the public interests of the Muslims.

Again in volume 3 (page 268), he quotes the accusation leveled on the Shi'ahs by Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida to the effect that “Shi'ahs are pleased with any defeat incurred by Muslims, so much as they celebrated the victory of the Russians over the Muslims.” Then he says:

“These falsehoods are fabricated by persons like Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida. The Shi'ahs of Iran and Iraq against whom this accusation is leveled, as well as the orientalist, tourists, envoys of Islamic countries, and those who traveled and still travel to Iran and Iraq, have no information about this trend. Shi'ahs, without exception, respect the lives, blood, reputation, and property of the Muslims be they Shi'ahs or Sunnis.

Whenever a calamity has befallen the Islamic community anywhere, in any region, and for any sects, the Shi'ahs have shared their sorrow. The Shi'ahs have never been confined to the Shi'ah world, the (concept of) Islamic brotherhood which has been set forth in the Qur'an and the '*sunna*' (the Prophet's sayings and actions), and in this respect, no discrimination has been made between the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis."

Also at the close of volume 3, he criticizes several books penned by the ancients such as "*Iqd al-Farid*" by Ibn Abd al-Rabbih, "*al-Intisar*" by Abu al-Husayn Khayyat al-Mu'tazili, "*al Farq bayn al-Firaq*" by Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi, "*al-Fasl*" by Ibn Hazm al-Andulusi, "*al-Milal wa al-Nihal*" by Muhammad ibn Abdul-Karim al-Shahristani "*Minhaj al-Sunnah*" by Ibn Taymiah and "*al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*" by Ibn Kathir and several by the later writers such as "*Tarikh al-Umam al-Islamiyyah*" by Shaykh Muhammad Khizri, "*Fajr al Islam*" by Ahmad Amin, "*al-Jawlat fi Rubu al-Sharq al-Adna*" by Muhammad Thabit al-Mesri, "*al-Sira Bayn al-Islam wa al-Wathaniyah*" by Qasimi, and "*al- Washi'ah*" by Musa Jarallah. Then he states the following:

"By quoting and criticizing these books, we aim at warning and awakening the Islamic '*umma*' (to the fact) that these books create the greatest danger for the Islamic community, they destabilize the Islamic unity and scatter the Muslim lines. In fact nothing can disrupt the ranks of the Muslims, destroy their unity, and tear their Islamic fraternity more severely than these books."

'Allamah Amini, in the preface to volume 5, under title of "*Nazariyah Karimah*" on the occasion of a plaque of honor forwarded from Egypt for "*al-Ghadir*", clearly sets forth his view on this issue and leaves no room for any doubt. He remarks:

"People are free to express views and ideas on religion. These (views and ideas) will never tear apart the bond of Islamic brotherhood to which the holy Qur'an has referred by stating that 'surely the believers are brethren'; even though academic discussion and theological and religious debates reach a peak. This has been the style of the predecessors, and of the '*sahaba*' and the '*tabi'un*', at the head of them.

"Notwithstanding all the differences that we have in the primary and secondary principles, we, the compilers and writers in nooks and corners of the world of Islam, share a common point and that is belief in the Almighty and His Prophet. A single spirit and one (form of) sentiment exists in all our bodies, and that is the spirit of Islam and the term '*ikhlas*,'"

"We, the Muslim compilers, all live under the banner of truth and carry out our duties under the guidance of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Mission of the Holy Prophet (s). The message of all of us is

'Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam ... (3:18)'

and the slogan of all of us is 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.' Indeed, we are (the members of) the party of Allah and the supporters of his religion.

In the preface to volume 8, under the title of “*al-Ghadir Yowahhad al-Sufuf fil-Mila al-Islami*”, 'Allamah Amini directly makes researches into the role of “*Al-Ghadir*” in (the establishment of) Islamic unity. In this discussion, this great scholar categorically rejects the accusations leveled by those who said: ‘*Al-Ghadir*’ causes greater discord among the Muslims.

He proves that, on the contrary, “*Al-Ghadir*” removes many misunderstandings and brings the Muslims closer to one another. Then he brings evidence by mentioning the confessions of the non-Shi'i Islamic scholars. At the close, he quotes the letter of Shaykh Muhammad Saeed Dahduh written in this connection.

To avoid prolongation of this article, we will not quote and translate the entire statements of 'Allamah Amini in explaining the positive role of “*al-Ghadir*” in (establishing) Islamic unity, since what has already been mentioned sufficiently proves this fact.

The positive role of “*al-Ghadir*” is established by the facts that it firstly clarifies the proven logic of the Shi'ahs and proves that the inclination of Muslims to Shi'ism – notwithstanding the poisonous publicity of some people – is not due to political, ethnic, or other trends and considerations. It also verifies that a powerful logic based on the Qur'an and the “*sunnah*” has given rise to this tendency.

Secondly, it reflects that some accusations leveled on Shi'ism – which have made other Muslims distanced from the Shi'ah– are totally baseless and false. Examples of these accusations are the notion that the Shi'ites prefer the non-Muslims to the non-Shi'i Muslims, rejoice at the defeat of non-Shi'ite Muslims at the hands of non-Muslims, and other accusations such as the idea that instead of going to *hajj* pilgrimage, the Shi'ahs go on pilgrimage to shrines of the Imams, or have particular rites in prayers and in temporary marriage.

Thirdly, it introduces to the world of Islam the eminent Commander of the faithful 'Ali ('a) who is the most oppressed and the least praised grand Islamic personality and who could be the leader of all Muslims, as well as his pure offspring.

Other Comments on “*al-Ghadir*”

Many unbiased non-Shia Muslims interpret the “*al-Ghadir*” in the same way that has already been mentioned.

Muhammad Abdul-Ghani Hasan al-Mesri, in his foreword on “*al-Ghadir*”, which has been published in the preface to volume I, second edition, states:

“I call on the Almighty to make your limpid brook (in Arabic, '*Ghadir*' means brook) the cause of peace and cordiality between the Shia and Sunni brothers to cooperate with one another in building the Islamic “*ummah*.”

'Adil Ghadban, the managing editor of the Egyptian magazine entitled "*al-Kitab*", said the following in the preface to volume 3:

"This book clarifies the Shi'ite logic. The Sunnis can correctly learn about the Shi'i through this book. Correct recognition of the Shi'ahs brings the views of the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis closer, and they can make a unified rank".

In his foreword to the "*al-Ghadir*" which was published in the *preface to volume 4*, Dr. Muhammad Ghallab, professor of philosophy at the Faculty of Religious Studies al-Azhar University said:

"I got hold of your book at a very opportune time, because right now I am busy collecting and compiling a book on the lives of the Muslims from various perspectives. Therefore, I am *highly avid* for obtaining sound information about 'Imamiyah' Shi'ism. Your book will help me. And I will not make mistakes about the Shi'ahs as others have".

In this foreword published in the *preface to volume 4* of the "*al-Ghadir*", Dr. 'Abdul-Rahman Kiali Halabi says the following after referring to the decline of the Muslims in the present age and the factors which can lead to the Muslims' salvation, one of which is the sound recognition of the successor of the Holy Prophet (s):

"The book entitled "*al-Ghadir*" and its rich content deserves to be known by every Muslim to learn how historians have been negligent and see where the truth lies. Through this means, we should compensate for the past, and by striving to foster the unity of the Muslims, we should try to gain the due rewards".

These were the views of 'Allamah Amini about the important social issues of our age and such were his sound reflections in the world of Islam. Peace be upon him.

1. "Nahj al Balaghah", letter n. 62.

2. From Sermon 72, "Nahj al- Balaghah"

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