

## Freedom and Its Concept in Islam

Abdul Hai Madani

Assistant professor, NED University of Engineering and Technology Karachi, Pakistan  
dr.madni67@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The concept of freedom has been limited by the democratic mindfulness according to certain schools of thoughts. Freedom is a gift of ALLAH for mankind and mankind needs to make full use of this divine without harming and being harmed by others. Every man has the basic right to freedom throughout his life. Freedom is a 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 way. The term freedom includes all its aspects as freedom of religion, expression, justice, political achievements and all what can be considered of to be under its umbrella. Islam recognizes right of both men and women to the freedom equally without acknowledging the superiority of color, geographical boundaries, religious beliefs, social norms and ritual practices and also being harmless to other individuals of the society.

**Keywords:** definition, history in west and Islam, concept of freedom in Islam, some basic kinds

### 1. Introduction :

#### 1.1. The Definition of Freedom

The freedom is defined in dictionaries as: 1-The condition of being free.2- Political independence.3-Faculty of motion, 4- Frankness.5-Unrestricted use of access. [1]

The real freedom cannot be enjoyed or achieved without sacrifice of individuals for the development of a good society without practicing justice. In other words, we can define freedom as a mental condition or a condition of the spirit. "Freedom is control of self." [2]

##### 1.1.1. The brief History of freedom in the West:

The first freedom in the west was freedom in religion and its speech, conscience and association. This changed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as consequent upon a thirty year long religious war (1618-1648) sparked by the Protestant Reformation and ended in the shape of Peace of Westphalia a peace treaty that Granted a kind of religious freedom, although entirely limited but allowed Catholicism and Protestantism to coexist peacefully only as the established religions of the different states, not within each state. Initially this degree of religious freedom was accepted more or less as a practical necessity than as the ideal which establishes religious unity.

In England the concept of religious freedom emerged as a freedom of the individual. England had its own religious wars during this period that were rather a political struggle between the King and the Parliament for constitutional authority in 1689, following the 'Glorious Revolution' which assured the ascendancy of Parliament and its religion whereas the religion must be free. [3]

##### 1.1.2. The History of freedom in Islam:

Allah gave Adam liberty of free choice between right and wrong. It is in the same reference that Allah almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

Then He showed him what is wrong for him and what is right for him [4]

This verse reflects that freedom is equally a shared goal of mankind, wherewith none violates freedom of other individuals. The Satanic approach to freedom is to deprive others from their right to freedom while the angelic obedience is a model of peace-loving. Pharaoh misused his right to freedom

and enslaved the Israelites. Moses (peace be upon him) stood against him using his same right to freedom as a common goal and shared value.

### **1.1.3. The Concept of Freedom in Islam:**

The freedom in Islam is like allowance of movement to a horse tied with a rope. It is like authority which implies responsibility and accountability and provides the justification for the day of judgement. This is the clear message of Islam to whole mankind on earth and under the sun: There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is hence forth different from error. [5]

Never did the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) deny any human-being his right to freedom of expression. Both the believers of Islam and non-believers could freely speak their minds in front of him. He gave full liberty of thought even to the Jews despite of their dirty politics.

In Islam there is no freedom without justice and these two values freedom and justice have been the inspiration and motivator of the great revolutions in the world, be they *political, economic* or *social*.

According to some writers, there seems to have been a little trace of freedom in the Muslim collective consciousness and that is because of two reasons – epistemological and political. [6]

The epistemological reason is that the term “freedom” is not mentioned in its literal sense in the Qur’an, the only reference being to the abomination of slavery. The phrase “freeing a slave” appears five times in its Suras 4, 5 and 58. It also appears once in the following verse: O you who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in case of those who are murdered: the free for the free, the slave for the slave. [7]

In Hadith Literature, we find the term *itq* (the emancipation of a slave) which is the antonym of *riqq* or “*slavery*”. [8]

However, there is no mention of the term “freedom”. In fact, some Hadith, such as that of Huzaiyfah bin al-Yamani, clearly opposes the value of freedom that is not integrated to society’s peace, well-being and loyalty for the Islamic government to avoid any wrong and harm to the unity of Muslim nation and activities of treason.

Allah almighty says: Had it not been for the Word that was sent forth from your Lord, their differences would have been settled between them? [9]

The other pinching matter is the case of turning against the rule of law or challenges the writ of Islamic government.

If a person chooses to live as a good peace-loving citizen within the Islamic countries and is not involved in the activities against the government, he enjoys all the rightful freedom but if he turns against the rule of law or challenges the writ, he will be killed because of his dirty politics against Islamic government and not for changing his religion. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) received this revelation in regard to the same issue.

Remind them, for thou art but a remembrance. Thou art not at all a warder over them. But whoso is averse and disbelieved. [10]

So the capital punishment is for those who turn against Islamic State and stand in denial of its legal domain. Hence there remains no myth in Islam in regard to the capital punishment and freedom of religion. This saying of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) in the same context is the practical enforcement of this command of Allah almighty: Whosoever changes his religion, you kill him. [11]

Islam holds its rulers responsible for their conduct and accountable before the whole Ummah.

A Muslim ruler himself is keenly interested in the welfare of Ummah. In the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) our Islamic history gifted us with the right to freedom for the human society to maintain sacred moral values and clean it from every wrong and bad conduct.

## **2. Some Kinds of Freedom**

Not only is Freedom an act of emancipation of human beings from slavery , it is also a liberty of thought, liberty of expression, liberty of speech and liberty of religion.

### **2.1. Freedom of Thought**

Freedom of thought is the freedom of an individual to hold or consider a fact, a view-point, a thought or an opinion independent of others' view-points. It is closely related to, yet distinct from, the concept of freedom of thought. Such ideas regarding freedom of thought, as developed over time, ultimately became a vital part of international human rights law already introduced by Islam in 626 A.D.

### **2.2. Freedom of Religion**

Freedom of religion is of course a fundamental human right accepted by Islam in the history of mankind. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion that includes freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance either in public or private. Islam gives its followers freedom of choice to religion but after one becomes a Muslim, he does not have the liberty to leave Islam provided that his reversion causes a threat to the unity of Ummah.

### **2.3. Freedom in political system**

Islam preceded man-made law in this freedom also for it has stipulated 'enjoining the good' and 'forbidding the bad', 'guiding the ignorant' and 'alerting the heedless' and 'advising the Muslim leaders' and the fact is that the human being is not free to exercise his right to freedom in those matters that are islamically or socially forbidden. Political freedom is obviously a part of these aforementioned matters. This includes the right of the individual to express rightful opposition having the right to oppose the state by demonstration in a civilized manner without vandalizing.

The Qur'an reads as: And whoso opposed the messenger after the guidance hath been manifested unto him, and followed other than the believer's way, we appoint for him that unto which he himself hath turned, and expose him unto hell- a hapless journey' end. [12]

Islam in fact does not recognize artificial geographical borders, psychological barriers, or racial differences but rather Muslims are one community and all are part of one brotherhood. Allah the Exalted has said: Verily the believers are one brotherhood. [13]

In many of the world's laws, we find that the people have the right to bring down a ruler or a government with wrong governance. Islam has preceded man-made law in this regard as a religious duty whereby if the ruler does not act according to Islamic law or becomes incompetent then his overthrow and removal becomes mandatory. Allah says: And their affairs are a matter of (collective) counsel. (14)

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was also advised by Allah as: "And consult them upon the conduct of affairs. And when thou are resolved, then put thy trust in Allah". [15].

### **2.4. Freedom and Maintaining Human Rights**

Islam preceded man-made laws in making it incumbent upon the state to uphold vital rights for every human being. These rights being the right to life as of a free man and not a slave, the right of personal freedom to hold personal property and so on.

The first right Allah has said: Whosoever kills a human-being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind and whoso saved the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. [16]

As for the right of the human-being to his personal freedom, he must be assured of his freedom and that he would not be imprisoned or detained or be confined in a certain place without any legal reason.

The blood, property and honor of a Muslim are sacred for another Muslim. [17]

### **2.5. Women's freedom**

The women are free in economic, political, social, educational and all other affairs except the men are one step higher because they earn for them and fulfill their basic needs as food, clothing, dwelling and other needs like medical treatment etc. Allah has said in the Holy Qur'an: “. . . And they have rights similar to those rights of men over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Might, Wise. [18]

There are many other Qur'anic verses and traditions that highlight the equality of men and women in all matters with the exception of the following one purely as an issue of administration. "Men are caretakers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property. So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. Jurisdictions of both the sexes have been defined and none is allowed to go beyond that area. This is real just too both the sexes, men and women and not inequality or inequity. Other than these particular rulings men and women are equal in every walk of life. Women used to attend the Prophet's mosque (peace be upon him) during almost all congregational prayers as well as his speeches. It is clear from various traditions that the Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered certain women to lead other women in prayers as for example he ordered Umm-e-Waraqah to lead the women in prayers. [19]

The basic principle of this right is accepted as:”*The freedom of a person ends where the freedom of other persons begins*”.

Islam gave women the right to decide their fate on their own. If a woman is not feeling comfortable with her husband or she has been married against her will, she has full right to go and knock at the doors of judiciary for divorce, if she prefers. An Ansari woman Khansa was married without her will and was unhappy. She reported her matter to Muhammad (peace be upon him) and he cancelled her marriage [19].

## **2.6. Freedom of Expression**

The right of expression and information cannot be separated from right to think and believe. The right to express and to be informed should, therefore, be secured by all who respect humanity and are grateful to God. Indeed, if one is allowed to think and believe, but not to communicate with others or to exchange views, one's freedom of thought and belief is actually restricted. This is internationally accepted that freedom of thought and freedom of expression are intertwined and the human-beings as super-beings cannot live life of isolation and solitude.

According to Islam, freedom of expression and information is a basic human right. Islam condemns spreading lies and false stories as well as passiveness and reluctance when the truth should be spoken and be highlighted...

“Confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth”. [20]

Islam always discourages false reporting and spreading bad news about any member of the human society as this behavior is against the basic right to freedom as a human-being. Every individual must think well about others.

Freedom of expression in the assemblies and public meetings sharing information constitutes both a right and a duty for every believer. Muslims - men and women, rulers and the ruled all are equally entrusted with authority to ensure such freedom.

The right to freedom is a blessing and fundamental need of every individual to live as useful member of human society. None is allowed to misuse his right to freedom when especially the freedom of other individuals is harmed. The western concept of freedom is to allow human-beings to live as they wish and even persuades others to free themselves from all social, moral and religious bindings. The most dangerous aspect of such freedom is freedom of sexuality that is never ever acceptable to any sensible person of any religion. No religion including Islam does allow unlimited freedom of sexuality.

## **3. Conclusion**

- Every one lived in an atmosphere of social justice and harmony. 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 as we have discussed in previous pages in details.
- After freedom of belief there comes the freedom of will. Allah has granted man free will, which allows him to choose his course of life. Every person is answerable to Allah for his actions as they illustrate the quality of will whether it is good or evil, whether the man follows truth, goodness and justice or whether he is corruptible by his own desires. Islam allows him to express this freedom and to practice it within the limits of commitment and responsibility and self control.
- Man has an obligation to choose the path of righteousness, and 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 freedoms for all humans, but teaches us that an individual's freedom is nothing without the sense of responsibility and commitment.
- Hope of liberty can be achieved only by using the right to freedom without harming any individual of the society and it is Islam that has laid down the principle of justice, equality and freedom for the whole mankind.

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