

## ISLAMIC LAW: CAN IT BE APPLIED UPON THE NON-MUSLIM CITIZENS?

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### ABSTRACT

*Within a very short span of time, the tiny city state of Madīnah turned into a vast empire stretching from the coast of Atlantic to the western border of China: far larger than that of the Greeks and the Romans at their heights. Though the Muslims were the predominant population, the number of non-Muslims residing in this vast empire was also very significant. Each group had its own laws. In such a state the following questions are inevitable. Are the Muslim rulers duty-bound to adjudicate among the people of other faith? Would the whole set of Islamic law be applied upon the non-Muslim citizens? Simple and straightforward positive answer to both the questions leads to an absurd conclusion that Islam does not believe in freedom of religion and non-interference with others' faith. Negative answer also deprives Islam of its universality and turns it into a remnant of a tribal religion. The present article aims at solving this paradox by showing that though the Muslim rulers have been given, in certain cases, the option to refrain from adjudicating among the people of other faith, once they decide to adjudicate they are duty-bound to administer justice in accordance with the Revelation. And as Islam divides laws into private and public and gives freedom to the former while observing strict uniformity to the latter, the question of non-respect to freedom of religion becomes redundant.*

**Keywords:** *Jizyah, Dhimmī, Ahl al-Mu'āhadah, Shari'ah, Qur'an, Hadīth.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Divine instructions are not just beautiful necklace of words and phrases, nor are they merely designed to enchant the audience with an astonishing rhythm and melody; rather the prime purpose of revelation is to make the mankind aware of the dos and don'ts and to warn them of the evil consequences of their misdeeds. Prophets have been sent not to deliver sermons in wilderness, rather as the rulers of mankind; scriptures are but the manuals of their government. With regards to the objective of the revelation (Quṭub, 1972), several verses of the Qur'ān (e.g. 5: 44, 46-7, 48 and 50) unequivocally state that one of the basic objectives of revelation is to administer justice among mankind without being inclined to any custom or desire inconsistent with the revelation. But other verses have ensured freedom of religion and prohibited compulsion in accepting Islam. Now the question arises, "Are the non-Muslim citizens entitled to legislative and judicial autonomy as per the direction of the Qur'ān?"

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## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

This article is designed to solve the paradox of freedom of religion and applicability of Islamic law upon all the citizens by showing that though the Muslim rulers have been given, in certain cases, the option to refrain from adjudicating among the people of other faith, once they decide to adjudicate they are duty-bound to administer justice in accordance with the Revelation. And as Islam divides laws into private and public and gives freedom to the former while observing strict uniformity to the latter, the question of non-respect to freedom of religion becomes redundant.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

As this article deals with a theoretical question apparently arising from the Qur'ān, pure textual analysis method has been followed throughout the research. Supreme priority has been given to the verses of the Qur'ān. Prophetic traditions have been used as the living commentary of the Qur'ān. Relevant chapters of exegetical books and juristic masterpieces of last fourteen hundred years have also been extensively used to solve the apparent paradox.

## 4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In 1958, Antoine Fattal discussed elaborately the legal status of non-Muslim citizens within the Islamic state in his *Le Statut légal des non-Musulmans en pays d'Islam*. Few years earlier, Néophyte Edelby wrote an article titled "*L'Autonomie législative des Chrétiens en terre d'Islam*" in which he specifically dealt with legal autonomy of the Christians in Islamic framework. In recent years several Muslim scholars have opined that Islamic laws are applicable to the Muslim citizens only. Full legislative and judicial autonomy are to be given to the non-Muslims residing in a Muslim country. Unfortunately they seem to have used superficial reasoning without proper citations from the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. Therefore, attempt has been made, in this article, to clarify the issue purely on the basis of the primary sources of Islam.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Islamic Law upon the Non-Muslim: Is it Contrary to 'Freedom of Religion'?

Islam championed the concept of 'freedom of religion' through its unequivocal declaration i.e. "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith (The Qur'ān, 2: 256)." Superficial reading of this verse may lead to an apparent contradiction between 'freedom of religion' as enshrined in this verse and the proposition that the laws of Islam are binding upon all citizens of an Islamic state irrespective of their diversity of religious affiliation. In fact, there is no contradiction between them, because 2: 256 implies that nobody would be compelled to profess any faith, but that does not necessarily mean that the believers of other faith are immune from the liability arising out of the violation of public laws. Public laws are to be equally applied upon all citizens, no matter what religions they believe in. The people of all faith, and even of no faith, residing in the western nation states are subjects of the public laws of their respective states. 'Freedom of religion' or freedom of thought, conscience and speech does not provide any immunity to them vis-<sup>azza</sup>vis the law of the land. The same thing is applicable to public laws of Islam as well.

### 5.2 Non-Muslim Citizens are exempted from 'Faith-Based' Laws

Ibn Hazm (2005, 5: 716) writes, "This is a clear text that the whole corpus of the laws of Islam is binding upon the unbelievers the same way it is binding upon the believers, except that there are certain laws which are not acceptable from them unless they accept Islam, such as *ṣalāt* (formal prayer), *ṣiyām* (fasting) and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah)."

Some jurists (e.g. Al-Rāzī, nd., 2: 237) opine that only the ‘prohibitions (*al-nawāhī*)’ are to be applied upon the non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state; ‘commandments (*al-awāmīr*)’ are not applicable to them.

### 5.3 Adjudication of a Jewish Case by the Prophet (PBUH)

According to sūrah al-Nisā’ (4: 105) and al-Mā’idah (5: 49), the prime objective of the revelation of the Qur’ān is to adjudicate among mankind. It is to be noted that, in 4:105, the word for the parties in adjudication is *al-nās* (the mankind), not *al-mu’minūn* (the believers). Therefore, the laws of the Qur’ān are to be equally applied upon all the people of an Islamic state irrespective of the diversity of their religious affiliation. But confusion may arise from the *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Dāwūd (*ḥadīth* no. 4450) according to which the Prophet (PBUH) had ordered to stone two Jews to death. The fact, in brief, was that a Jewish man and woman committed adultery and consequently the issue was brought to the Prophet (PBUH) for adjudication. He asked the Jews, “What do you find in the *Tawrāt* about the one who commits adultery, if he is married?” They said: ‘His face is too blackened and he is to be paraded and flogged.’ A young man among them said: ‘By Allāh, we find stoning in the *Tawrāt*.’ The (PBUH) said: “I will judge according to the *Tawrāt*.” And he ordered that they be stoned.” These facts reveal that the case was among the Jewish people and the Prophet (PBUH) asked, before adjudication, about the legal provisions accepted by the community of the litigants and, at last, gave his verdict in accordance with their laws.

### 5.4 Did the Prophet (PBUH) Apply the Jewish Law?

On the basis of the above *ḥadīth*, some jurists tried to deduce the principle that only the Muslims of an Islamic state are to be governed by Islamic laws and the non-Muslim citizens are to be tried with their respective laws. But the majority of the jurists are of the opinion that ‘public laws’ of Islam are equally applicable to the Muslims and non-Muslims of an Islamic state. According to them, in the abovementioned *ḥadīth* the Prophet (PBUH), in fact, applied the Qur’ānic law which has just confirmed the law given to Moses (PBUH) before. Commenting on the above *ḥadīth*, al-Khattābī (1947, 4: 388) said that it is highly probable that the statement of the Prophet “I will judge according to the *Tawrāt*” was designed to advance it as an argument against them. In fact he gave his verdict in accordance with the laws revealed to him. *Tawrāt* was not the basis of that judgment. The noted Egyptian scholar Aḥmad Shākir has dealt with this question more elaborately in his commentary on the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal (7: 461-464.). He says,

“It is a grave mistake, ignorance and negligence to say that the Messenger of Allāh (PBUH) adjudicated among them (i.e. the Jews) with the ruling of the *Tawrāt* and, on that basis, to argue that it is lawful for a judge to adjudicate their cases in accordance with their laws!! Because, first of all this *ḥadīth* is weak (as we have told earlier and al-Khattābī and al-Mundhirī also said the same). Secondly, the Messenger of Allāh (PBUH) was, in fact, adjudicating among the Jews with the same laws with which he was adjudicating the affairs of the Muslims; and that was the laws sanctioned and revealed to him by Allāh. His Lord has ordered him to adjudicate with those laws and forbade him to follow their whims or to turn to them with regards to their laws. In this case (though this chain of narration in *Musnad* is weak, this incident has been proven true through other chain of narration) the Prophet (PBUH) turned them to the *Tawrāt* to establish a proof against them and to expose their playing with every religion including their own one. We have been ordered to follow this Messenger (PBUH) who has come to us with a Book that protects the remaining (truth) of the (previous) Books. He was neither subordinate to those Books, nor did he take anything from them. Just read the verses of *Sūrah al-Mā’idah* (to some of

which Imām al-Zuhrī has indicated at the end of this narration) and then read from verse 41 [*“O Messenger! Let not those who hurry to fall into disbelief grieve you”*] up to the end of verse 50 of the same *sūrah*, and you will find (that Allāh says): *“To Thee we sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that hath come to thee.”* and the statement of Allāh, the Most High, *“And so judge between them by what Allāh has revealed and follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they turn You far away from some of that which Allāh has sent down to you.”* Could there be any explanation after this?! So who thinks that it is lawful for a Muslim to adjudicate among ‘the People of the Book’ in accordance with their laws (and, in fact, they have no knowable laws except the whims of their different sects and classes), he has opposed the command of Allāh. No excuse will be accepted from him. If he remains persistent on that claim, certainly he gets out of (the periphery of) Islam. Whosoever intentionally and knowingly adjudicates with other than what Allāh has revealed is a rebel (or unbeliever) and whoever is satisfied with it and acknowledges (the justness of that) claim is also an unbeliever, no matter whether he has adjudicated with what is called ‘the laws of the People of the Book’ or with what is known as ‘man-made laws’! All this amounts to rebellion and getting out of the nation. May Allāh protect us from that.”

Some of the jurists are of the opinion that the Prophet (PBUH) had adjudicated between them in accordance with the laws revealed to Mūsā (PBUH) before the complete criminal laws were revealed to him. As Allāh has completed his *dīn* (way of life) and permanently shaped a set of laws, now it is not valid for any judge or arbitrator to adjudicate with other than Islamic laws (Al-Zuhaylī, 2009, 3: 550).

### **5.5 The Qur’ān with regards to the subjects of Islamic law**

With the Charter of Madīnah, the city state of Islam came into being in 622 AC. Among the unique features of the Charter is that it incorporates the concept of freedom of religion under the sovereign authority of Allāh and His Messenger. The Jewish citizens of the state of Madīnah used to refer cases to Muḥammad (PBUH) for adjudication. Verses 41 to 50 of *Sūrah al-Mā’idah* have given instructions to the Prophet with regards to administration of justice among the non-Muslim citizens: *“If they come to thee, thou may either judge between them or leave them alone... Judge between them in accordance with what Allāh has revealed, and do not follow their errant views forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. ... Judge between them in accordance with what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their errant views ... who could be a better law-giver than Allāh?”* According to these verses, the Qur’ānic laws are binding upon the Jews and Christians who have been given distinct laws earlier. So, it is quite natural and logical to deduce the principle from it that the Qur’ānic laws are equally binding upon all the non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state who have not been given any divine books.

### **5.6 Can an Islamic State Refrain from Exercising its Jurisdiction over the Non-Muslim Citizens?**

Allah says: *“Hence, if they do come to thee, thou may either judge between them or leave them alone (Al-Mā’idah 5: 42).”* It seems that this verse has given the Prophet (PBUH) an option, and not an obligation, to administer justice among the Jews. In interpreting the verse, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (4: 542) writes,

“With regards to administration of justice among *ahl al-‘ahd* (the people with whom the Islamic state has concluded a truce), the rulers have the option; if they refer (any case) to them, they may adjudicate or refrain from adjudicating among them and observe (the situation), as Allāh has given such an option to His Messenger (PBUH) in this verse”.

But verse 49 of the same *sūrah* puts an obligation upon the Prophet (PBUH) to administer justice among them in accordance with the laws revealed to him. It says, “*Judge between them in accordance with what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their errant views; and beware of them, lest they tempt you from any of that (teaching) which Allah has sent down to thee.*”

Rashīd Riḍā (6: 364) explains how the Jewish people could tempt the Prophet (PBUH) and cause his deviation from the Right Path:

“Judge between them in accordance with what Allāh has revealed upon you in the Qur’ān and do not follow their vain desires through hearing and accepting their statement even though there are some sort of welfare in such a judgment (in accordance with their whims), such as attracting their hearts and encouraging them to Islam, because truth cannot be attained through falsehood. Beware of them; lest they tempt you, i.e. by choosing you (as their judge) they want that you to decide their case with other than what Allāh has revealed to you and thereby to cause your deviation.”

On the basis of verse 49, some jurists took the position that the option has been abrogated and now the Muslim rulers are duty-bound to administer justice among the non-Muslim citizens in accordance with Qur’ānic laws. According to them, in this verse the Prophet (PBUH) has been given two instructions: to adjudicate among them in accordance with what Allāh has revealed and not to follow their evil desires. To refrain from administering justice among them amounts to following their evil desires and therefore this verse is to be treated as abrogating the ‘option’ given in verse 42 (Al-Māturīdī, 3: 525). Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (4: 87-8), one of the leading jurists of Ḥanafī school of thought, sums up their reasoning:

“And they (i.e. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Ikrima and others) have mentioned that the statement of Allāh ‘Judge among them with what Allāh has revealed’ abrogates the option mentioned in ‘Hence, if they do come to thee, thou may either judge between them or leave them alone.’ ... Those who are in favour of ‘option’ have not said that the verse of ‘option’ was revealed after the verse ‘Judge among them with what Allāh has revealed’ and that the ‘option’ has abrogated the ‘obligation’. Contrary to that, the following verse indicates that option has been abrogated: ‘Who do not judge in accordance with what Allah has revealed are, indeed, unbelievers’. Whosoever turns back from (administering justice among) them, indeed falls within the category of those persons who do not judge in accordance with what Allāh has revealed.”

What is the last position: option or obligation? Those who think (e.g. Al-Ṭabarī, 4: 542) that this option is still applicable, deny the possibility of verse 42 being abrogated by verse 49, because “abrogation is possible only in that case where one ruling negates the other ruling in its totality, so much so that there remains no scope for conciliation between the two rulings.” Al-Ṭabarī (4: 542-3) explains why abrogation is not applicable to these two verses:

“Whereas there is no proof in the clear text of the Qur’ān on abrogation of one verse by the other, whereas none of the two rulings negates the other, whereas

there is no authentic narration from the Messenger of Allāh (PBUH) to the effect that one of them has abrogated the other and whereas there is no *ijmā'* (consensus) of the Muslim scholars with regards to abrogation here; therefore our statement is correct that both the rulings are supportive of, and consistent with, each other and none of them abrogates the other.”

According to them, the two rulings may be reconciled in the way that the option is to be applied only in cases of the litigants coming from *dār al-ḥarb* or enemy territory (Al-Māturīdī, 2005, 3: 525) or the foreigners (Abū Zahrah, 1987, 4: 2194) staying for the time being and seeking the jurisdiction of the judiciary of an Islamic state. Because, careful study of the case brought by the Jews before the Prophet (PBUH) reveals that the incident took place in Khaybar which was, at that time, in state of war with the state of Madīnah (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984, 6: 204). As the people of the enemy territory, they voluntarily referred the case to the Prophet (PBUH) and through this verse he was given an option to exercise jurisdiction over them or to simply refrain from it (Al-Tha'labī, 2002, 4: 63). And the obligation is to be applied (Al-Bayḍāwī, 1999, 527) to the Muslims and *ahl al-dhimmah* (i.e. the non-Muslim subjects living in an Islamic state who, in return for paying the submission tax, enjoy permanent protection and safety). With regards to the statement of 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās that the option of verse 42 was abrogated by verse 49, it may be said that the use of the word *naskh* as a technical term to denote the sense of abrogation was a latter-day innovation; during the time of the companions the word *naskh* was used as a generic term for any sort of modification (Ibn 'Āshūr, 222).

### 5.7 Autonomy of non-Muslim citizens in an Islamic state

Whether the non-Muslim citizens in an Islamic state can be given autonomy for their self-administration of justice may be better understood from the variant legal status of the Jewish people in the city-state of Madīnah. It has been mentioned earlier that immediately after reaching Madīnah, the Prophet (PBUH) concluded an agreement among the different tribes and in that agreement the Jewish tribes also were included. The agreement with the Jews of Madīnah may be loosely termed as a 'pact of non-aggression or no-war' (Muḥammad Shaḥī, 2001, 3: 146). At the nascent stage of the Islamic state, no regular tax was imposed upon the Jewish tribes; rather as a party to the agreement (*ahl al-mu'āhadah*), they were given, to a lesser extent, autonomy for internal administration of their trivial matters (Al-Shāfi'ī, 2001, 5: 503); but decision making in serious issues was reserved for Allāh and His Messenger (Hamidullah, Articles 23 and 42). Later on, when Islam grew stronger, a commandment was given how to treat the people of other faith:

“Fight against those who - despite having been given revelation [aforetime] do not [truly] believe either in God or the Last Day, and do not consider forbidden that which God and His Apostle have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them] till they [agree to] pay the obedience tax with a willing hand, and feel themselves subdued.” (Al-Tawbah, 9: 29)

After the revelation of the above verse, the liberty hitherto given to the Jews was curtailed; they were brought under tax liability, namely *jizyah*. Furthermore, from that time, major civil and criminal laws of Islam became binding upon them and the parallel administration of justice by their tribal leaders and judges came to an end (Al-Nuḥās, 2: 296 and 435). Even, the Muslim ruler is also not allowed to adjudicate their cases in accordance with their personal laws (Al-Andalusī, 1993, 3: 501). According to Imām al-Shāfi'ī (2001: 504), the very meaning of “feel themselves subdued” in *Al-Tawbah*, 9: 29 is that they would not be given autonomy with regards to their administration of justice; rather they would be governed in accordance with the laws of Islam. Even if a territory is amalgamated with the Islamic state not in consequence of military conquest, rather on the basis

of a mutual agreement (*ṣulh*), the Muslims are not entitled to relieve the non-Muslim subjects from the obligation of Islamic laws (Al-Shāfi‘ī, nd. 777). Al-Shāfi‘ī, in his masterpiece *Kitāb al-Umm*, presented a demo of what should be written in an agreement between the Muslim ruler and the people of other faith interested in residing within the Islamic state. He says (nd.: 791) that the agreement must contain, *inter alia*, the following stipulation: “that the laws of Islam will be applied upon you, and in no circumstances any law repugnant to the laws of Islam will be binding on you. And you will have no right to refuse Islamic law in any given issue”.

The underlying principle is that “From whom *jizyah* (submission tax) is taken, laws of Islam will be applied upon them” (Al-Ālūsī, nd, 6: 141). On the other hand, it is not obligatory upon the Muslim ruler to adjudicate among the foreigners (temporarily) residing within the Islamic state, even though they willingly seek our jurisdiction; rather he is given the option and he will always take the welfare of the Muslims into consideration (Al-Marāghī, 1946, 6: 120).

### **5.8 Classification of the laws of non-Muslim citizens:**

Once the non-Muslims decide to reside permanently within the Islamic state, the laws of Islam are to be applied upon them. But this does not necessarily mean that despite their non-belief in Islam they have to swallow each and every regulation of Islam. In fact, under the auspices of freedom of religion, in some affairs they are given immunity from Islamic laws. To ensure this privilege, laws have been divided into three classes: (a) laws relating to belief and rituals (*al-‘i‘tiqādāt*) e.g. belief in God, manners of worship and procedure of slaughtering animals etc., (b) laws relating to family affairs (*al-mu‘āmalāt*) such as marriage, divorce and inheritance etc. and (c) criminal laws (*al-ḥudūd wa ‘l-jināyāt*) e.g. theft, robbery, adultery and sedition etc. So far the first two categories are concerned, they have the right to be regulated by their own laws, but with regards to the third category of laws they are to be governed, just like the Muslims, by the universal laws of Islam (Ibn ‘Ashūr, 1984, 6: 205-6).

## **6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the first time in written history of mankind, the Charter of Madīnah guaranteed freedom of religion for everyone residing within the Islamic state. From the very beginning Islam has remained true to its self-declared cardinal principle “There is no compulsion in (accepting) religion”. Dividing the laws of its subjects into private and public, Islam has ensured autonomy to the non-Muslims so far their private laws are concerned. On the other hand, Islam has maintained strict uniformity in applying its public laws upon all the citizens irrespective of their religious, ethnic, and linguistic or any other affiliation.

## **7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research has been highly inspired by, and largely indebted to, a book titled “*Hukm al-Jāhiliyyah* (Governance of Ignorance)” written by Aḥmad Shākir (1892-1958).

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