



PROPER ISLAMIC ENLIGHTENMENT AS A FACTOR OF STABILITY AND LAW AND ORDER IN SOCIETY

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Abstract. *The article examines the role of proper Islamic enlightenment as a factor of stability and law and order in contemporary society. The author defines Islamic enlightenment as a progressive social activity aimed at disseminating genuinely Islamic ideas, principles, values and knowledge, at eliminating religious illiteracy and at combating false notions about Islam, and distinguishes it from proselytism. On the example of Uzbekistan, the article identifies six principal forms and channels of Islamic enlightenment: national and religious family rites and ceremonies; mosques; religious and educational literature and audiovisual materials; the Internet; state measures and the religious and educational mass media, including periodicals, television programmes and specialised educational institutions for women; and visits to holy places (ziyoratgoh). The contrast between the concealed existence of Islamic enlightenment in the period of state atheism and its current status as a priority of state policy is shown. In conclusion, proposals are formulated for improving spiritual, educational and religious-studies work, with particular attention to young people.*

Keywords: *Islamic enlightenment, Islam in Central Asia, Uzbekistan, stability, tolerance, religious education, mosque, religious mass media, Internet, women's religious education, ziyorat, youth, prevention of extremism.*

INTRODUCTION

In the present period, when the idea of reviving national traditions has been raised to the level of state policy, the study of the history of Islam and of its values, such as tolerance and humanism, which form an integral part of spirituality, deserves particular attention. Of especially great interest is the study of the role and significance of Islamic enlightenment in the socio-political and cultural life of the peoples of Central Asia under present-day conditions, since it makes it possible to determine the factors influencing the spiritual and moral life of the local population.

Islam, as one of the traditional confessional communities of Central Asia, plays an ever more noticeable role in the socio-political life of the region. As a factor in the formation of public consciousness, Islam also exerts a substantial influence on the course of political events (Khalid, 2007). Islam continues to exert a great influence on various spheres of the social, family and spiritual life of millions of people, not only in our region but throughout the world. Awareness of the ethical and moral foundations of Islam, handed down from generation to generation, contributes to strengthening not only the cultural and historical identity of the peoples of the region but also the spiritual, moral and social attitudes directed towards the preservation of peace and stability and towards the strengthening of the feeling of mutual support among people.

It should also be noted that over many centuries Islam contributed to the formation of principles of peaceful coexistence with the representatives of other religions and did not hinder the penetration of general democratic values into Central Asian society. It is a well-known fact that it was precisely the peoples of Central Asia, their culture and traditions, that raised Islam to an enlightened level. At the same time, questions of the correct interpretation and understanding of the essence of the canons of Islam and of Islamic enlightenment remain topical today. The aim of this article is to define the concept of Islamic enlightenment, to identify its principal forms and methods in present-day Uzbekistan and to formulate proposals for its improvement.

MAIN PART

In my view, the concept of Islamic enlightenment should be understood as a progressive social activity aimed at disseminating genuinely Islamic ideas, principles, values and knowledge, at eliminating religious illiteracy and at combating false inventions concerning Islam.

Islam is a far broader concept than simply a religion, than the mere observance and performance of religious rites. It is a way of life, a mode of conduct with its own order and rules that are binding upon every Muslim. In today's conditions of ignorance about Islam in society, of the spreading of false information about Islam and of the use of Islam by various groups for their own interests, the need to intensify enlightenment and the responsibility of enlighteners are growing.

In our time proper Islamic education and enlightenment acquire particular relevance and responsibility. Both the times and society demand a competent and wise approach to Islamic enlightenment.

The significance and importance of proper Islamic enlightenment in the present period can hardly be overestimated. Islamic enlightenment aimed at disseminating a correct understanding of the foundations of Islam, at fostering high ethical and moral qualities and at calling for the upbringing and self-improvement of the individual is capable of becoming one of the important factors in the stabilisation and harmonisation of society.

In this connection, wise Islamic enlightenment is necessary – I repeat, enlightenment and not proselytism, not the enticing away of others, as others do. In Islam, as we know, there is a different principle. It is the conduct of enlightenment, both among Muslims and among the rest of the population of the country, aimed at disseminating a correct understanding of the teaching of Islam and of the principles of good-neighbourliness, tolerance and patriotism. The main attention of this enlightenment should undoubtedly be directed towards young people.

Educational activity is not the exclusive prerogative of particular individuals. In accordance with the norms of Islam, every Muslim is obliged first of all to acquire knowledge, and one who has acquired knowledge should strive to be an enlightener. However, a particular burden of responsibility in this matter naturally falls on those who, having become imams or muftis, have taken upon themselves this responsible task, or on those who have acquired sufficient knowledge of Islam to pass it on to others.

What forms and methods of Islamic enlightenment can be observed in Uzbekistan today?

First, Islamic enlightenment is carried out during the observance of national and religious traditions and rites connected with betrothal (nikah), the wedding (to'y), the birth of a child (aqiqa), the traditional Turkic family celebration in honour of the first laying of a newborn child in the traditional cradle (beshik to'yi), circumcision (sunnat to'yi), anniversaries (kumush and oltin to'ylar – silver and golden weddings), and so on.

Events have also begun to be held such as mushkul kushod – a traditional women's rite and ritual widespread in Central Asia, historically performed for the fulfilment of wishes, deliverance from misfortunes and the solution of life's problems; mavlud (or

mawlid) – the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad in the Islamic tradition; hajj oshi – the tradition according to which our compatriots who have returned from the hajj and umra pilgrimages lay a table and distribute national dishes as a sign of gratitude to God and as a gift to people; and Navro‘z sumalagi – the principal traditional sweet dish, prepared once a year during the spring festival of Navro‘z.

Educational conversations are also held during mourning ceremonies such as ta‘ziya, janoza, kir yuvdi, yigirma, yil oshi, ehson and others. During these events, with reference to the suras of the Qur‘an and the hadiths, subjects are explained concerning the spiritual and moral upbringing of children, respect for elders, married life, the rules for visiting cemeteries, the afterlife, patience and so on.

Second, one of the principal places of Islamic enlightenment are the mosques, which are centres of religious preaching and education, where the believer receives answers to the questions that interest him.

Third, religious and educational literature, posters, religious symbols, audio and video cassettes and CDs serve as an important source of information about Islam and its spiritual and moral values.

Fourth, among the mass media that to one degree or another set themselves the task of Islamic enlightenment, the Internet occupies a special place and apparently has the broadest prospects.

According to existing surveys of Islamic Internet sites, their number today has far exceeded one hundred. The creators of Islamic sites include both communities and organisations – muftiates, educational institutions and associations of believers – and private individuals, which in the main determines the appearance of the web pages.

The first group includes such major Russian sites as www.muslim.ru, the official site of the Council of Muftis of Russia; www.ansar.ru, a Muslim information and analytical channel; www.islam.ru, an independent Islamic information channel; and others. In addition, those interested in Islam have the opportunity to obtain information from Uzbek sites such as www.muslim.uz, www.islom.uz, www.fikr.uz, www.iiu.uz and others.

Fifth, the proclamation of the Muslim festivals of Qurbon hayit (‘Id al-Adha) and Ro‘za hayit (‘Id al-Fitr) as non-working days; the publication of translations of the meanings of the Qur‘an, of the hadiths and of the works of great scholar-theologians

such as Muhammad al-Bukhari, Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani, Mahmud al-Zamakhshari, 'Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduvani, Baha' al-Din Naqshband, Najm al-Din Kubra and Ahmad Yasawi; the celebration at state level of memorable dates connected with the names of great religious figures of Central Asia; the beginning of the legal dissemination of information promoting the values and norms of Islam in the form of books, brochures, and television and radio programmes; and the adoption of new, more liberal laws and the simplification of the procedure for registering religious organisations have all given an additional impulse to Islamic enlightenment (Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, 2021).

The Muslim Board of Uzbekistan is the founder of a number of publications, including the weekly newspaper "Islom nuri" ("The Light of Islam") and the monthly popular-science magazine "Hidoyat" ("The Right Path"). Since 2000 the Republican Scientific and Educational Centre named after Imam al-Bukhari has published the spiritual, educational, scholarly and literary journal "Imom al-Buxoriy saboqlari" ("Lessons of Imam al-Bukhari"). The International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan publishes the religious-educational and popular-science journals "Islom tafakkuri" ("Islamic Thought") and "Islom ziyosi" ("Islamic Knowledge").

Programmes about Islam and about the spiritual and moral development of the younger generation are broadcast on republican television. Television channels of an educational character have appeared, such as "Madaniyat va ma'rifat" ("Culture and Enlightenment"), "Oilaviy" ("Family"), "Yoshlar" ("Youth"), "Mahalla" and others.

The weekly religious and educational television programme "Hidoyat sari" is popular. The scholarly and educational programmes of the "Ziyo" media centre of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan have received particular nationwide recognition.

The actual state policy in the field of religion has also created favourable conditions for Muslim women to study the religious and spiritual heritage. Today two women's Islamic specialised educational institutions operate under the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan: the institution named after Khadicha Kubro in Tashkent and the institution named after Juybori Kalon in Bukhara. Preparatory and educational courses have been organised for the female population over the age of 35. The main task of the women's Islamic secondary specialised educational institutions is to train specialists possessing theoretical knowledge of religions, and of Islam in particular.

In addition, women acquire primary knowledge of Islam during such events as Mavlud, Bibi seshanba, Mushkul kushod and others. Gathering together, they recite suras of the Qur'an, hold conversations on religious subjects and in some cases perform the prayer together.

Sixth, visits to holy places – or, as they are called among the people, “ziyoratgoh” – are of great importance in the life of every people, since they are connected not only with historical memory, traditions, religious views and the national mentality, but also with the prevention of accidents, natural disasters and socio-economic problems in the family, and with the search for their solution.

Among some peoples, visiting a ziyoratgoh is understood as a way of life, a custom and a tradition – in short, as their distinctive ethnic history. The word “ziyorat”, or “visit”, is based on such notions as “hoping for the best”, “obtaining relief”, “being freed from ailments” and “performing charity”. For this reason people connect visits to holy places with the fulfilment of their innermost wishes. In the popular imagination every holy place possesses divine power.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that whereas in the difficult years of atheism the state persecuted its citizens for their religious convictions, the observance of simple national customs was regarded as religious propaganda and Islamic enlightenment existed in a concealed form (Khalid, 2007), today the restoration of the health of spiritual life and the revival of the spiritual and moral values of the peoples of Central Asia have become one of the priority directions of the state policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

For the further improvement of spiritual, educational and instructional work in the field of religious studies, attention should be paid to the following:

- to increase the vitality and effectiveness of spiritual and educational events aimed at promoting the place and significance of the culture of inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue and of the compatibility of national and universal human values in ensuring social stability;
- to broaden the knowledge of the history and philosophy of religions among the activists of organisations working with young people, and to provide video and audio materials, literature and relevant information revealing the danger of fundamentalism and religious extremism for society and, especially, for young people;

- to create teaching aids for subjects that acquaint young people with the history and teaching of Islam;
- to carry out explanatory work aimed at eliminating the extravagance and ostentation allowed in the conduct of religious and family events;
- to hold regular meetings and conversations of scholars of religious and Islamic studies, psychologists, imam-khatibs and mahalla elders with young people, with the aim of fostering in them a sense of respect for universal human values and for the culture of inter-ethnic and inter-religious communication.

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