

“LITERALISM” AS A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF THE TAKFIRISM IDEA

Yerkinbek Kerimbekyly Shokhayev*

Abstract: The piousness level of modern Kazakhstan youth has become higher for the last decade. The young consciousness soaks the believes non-traditional for the Kazakh people that contributes to spiritual and moral degradation of the society. The Kazakhstan state policy is directed to countering all the forms and manifestations of radicalism, extremism and terrorism.

The article deals with ideological bases of nonconventional movement for Kazakhs called Salafism. The study of the reasons promoting conflicts among Kazakhstan Muslims will solve the problem. The article analyzes the notion of “literalism” in explaining the sacred Quranic texts.

The incorrect interpretation of the sacred Quranic texts leads to the distorted understanding of the religion. Salafism constitutes a threat of theological character by opposing the traditional religious clergy. It constitutes a threat to social relations and jeopardizes the loss of the cultural and national identity of the Kazakh nation.

Keywords: Salafism, Islam, radicalism, fundamentalism, extremism.

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that in recent times the future of the relationships between Muslims in our country has been quite vague. We can see that by the mutual hostility of the namaz praying people and their negative opinions towards each other at out mosques. Of course the main reason for this is the religious ideology based on literalist method which was spread under the motto of “pure monotheism” during the years of independency. Thus, in this article we are going to discuss the religious literalism and its negative influence on the society and its unfavorable result.

In many cases the religious literalism depends on the direct understanding of the very religious texts and sacred books. It is forbidden to explain and understand religious texts in other ways. (Scientific Articles Section. Academic, n. d). Moreover, perceiving religious terms directly or by their second meaning forms a steady opinion of them. They interact with others based on this opinion.

The religious literalism is one of the factors that have been leading to the separation between a lot of societies and communities for centuries. For instance, in the III century AD literalists were very popular in the Christian world. Those groups who did not understand Torah and Bible literally were persecuted by law. All of them were accused of heresy. In the late IV century in the Roman Empire literalists attempted to totally eradicate Gnostics and those who practiced antique believes. They destroyed the architectural values inherent to the polytheism ideology.

* Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur Mubarak The Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 73 Al-Farabi Street, 050000

They burned down the libraries that had been compiled for centuries. They even tortured and killed the thinkers, women flamens and scientists that did not agree with them. We can say that free thinking that is widely praised in the modern Western world was then strangled. (Christian Literalism Development Section, n.d).

The phenomenon of literalism was also the reason for many conflicts and controversies in the Islamic world. During the reign of His Highness Ali the Khawarij who were against his rule, accused other Muslims of heresy and misbelief. The main characteristic feature of the Khawarij was the fact that they understood the Quranic verses and the Prophet's Hadiths literally as the Salafites today. They did not perceive the explanations that are connected with the aims of the Sharia law and the peculiarities of the Arabic language. They understood the following Quranic verse, "Judging is only of God" (Altai 1990). literally and thought that no one can judge in all circumstances. When having disagreements on social issues Magauiya sought the judgment by the ruler of Egypt Amr ibn al-'As, and His Highness Ali – by His Highness Ali Abdullah ibn Abbas. The actions of these two associates would be considered heresy. But in fact the literal understanding of the aforementioned Quranic verse contradicts the real life situations and other Quranic verses. For example, in Surah An-Nisa of the Quran, "Allah calls upon a disagreeing couple to find a judge and to reconcile...".(Altai 1990). Moreover, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) judged his associates several times according to the Sharia law. The Khawarij literal views caused the death of thousands of Muslims, who admitted Allah's singularity, resulting from the controversy between them. In that century in order to stop the upheaval His Highness Ali had to eradicate about four thousand Khawarij.(Abu Zahra 1996).

After that in the X-XI centuries the scientists of Hanbali such as Abu Yagla, Ibn Az-Zagun, Al-Barbahari explained the figurative texts about Allah only literally. They related «a hand», "an eye", "a shin", "to descend", "to sit down", and other notions characteristic of a physical body to Allah in the truest sense of the word. Those who did not understand it literally were accused of paganism or heresy. (Al-Kausari 1998/1419) Thus, there happened "the Hanabi Upheaval" in the course of history. One of the victims of the upheaval was the great Imam Ibn Jarir al-Tabari. Moreover, during these centuries the scientists of Hanbali whose minds were infected with the literalist views renounced the edifications of Ashari School, caused altercations and upheavals during the lectures in the mosques. The scholars and public authorities of the time took various measures in order to stop the upheaval and to prevent possible harm to the society that the aforementioned group could cause.

In the XVIII-XIX centuries Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim, who lived in the city of Damascus, continued on the literalist path. They explained the following Quranic verse, "Allah ascended the throne". (Abu Zahra. 1996) literally

as “Allah sat, settled on the throne”. Thus, they attached the qualities of a physical body to Allah. They did not stop there. They accused the Muslim schools that did not agree with them of heresy and shirk (polytheism). They criticized the widespread religious Islamic schools – Ashari and Matrudi for being lost. Volumes of books have been written to form the ideology based on literalism. In order to stop Ibn Taymiyya’s upheaval and save the nation’s unity and peace, people were arrested and sent to prison. He was also put on a donkey facing its tail and sent to go around the city bazaars and streets to be a warning for others. Imam Ibn Kathir was a witness to this.

Then the ideology based on literalism was further developed in the XVIII century by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who lived in the north of present-day Saudi Arabia (Najd region). He describes most of his religious viewpoints in his book “Kashf Ash-Shubuhaat” (Removal of the Doubts). It developed into a particularly aggressive movement compared to other religious schools of the time. They were described as “the atheists of our time...”.(Abd al-Wahhab, N.D.). They explained all the verses that ordered to fight atheists literally and called upon battles against other Muslims. Thus, this aggression turned into military action against the rightful authority of the time – the Ottoman Empire. It is now called «Wahhabi movement» in history.

Furthermore, the Wahhabis thought the Muslims and their authorities at the time to be atheists and heretics. Clearly these radical views were growing from the Khawarij viewpoints that fought against His Highness Ali. The Ottoman Empire had been suppressing that movement for two centuries due to its military and social opportunities. The Wahhabis could establish their own steady country only in the XX century when the Ottoman Empire became very weak. That is why Al-Azkhar University’s sheikh Ahmad Tayyeb describes this group as “the Wahhabi – the Khawarij of the century”. (Interview with the Sheikh of Al – Azhar).

There are various reasons why people understand the surrounding world and religious texts only literally. Let us discuss some of them.

First of all, people with literalist point of view tend to possess weak principles. The unsteadiness of one’s general personal traits is the reason why one accepts the environment only by its outside view. Moreover, this kind of person does not have such qualities as reliability, responsibility and commitment. We can see it from the Khawarij actions. They made His Highness Ali and Magauiya to seek judgment from their associate Abu Musa Ashaari. But in the end they found this decision a big sin and accused the both parties of heresy.⁴ Of course this situation demonstrates the treachery of the aforementioned group.

One more reason is the low level of a person’s consciousness: the misunderstanding of the word meaning leads to literalism. All the literalist groups had this feature. Both His Highness Ali himself and the associate Abdullah ibn Abbas talked to the

Khawarij in order to dissuade them from their intentions. Because of low level of consciousness and literacy, most of them did not change their minds on literal and atheist views. They did not understand the essence of the bilateral negotiations.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that arrogance is a serious illness of man. In one of the Hadiths it is said, “Those who are arrogant cannot enter paradise”. (Al-Kushairi 1997) Arrogance means “not to accept reality and consider oneself better than others”. No matter how many times they are told the truth, people with literalist views cannot accept it without proper proof.

During our work in Atyrau oblast we tried to prove some Salafite-Takfir (excommunication) young men that their views are wrong. Even though they did not have anything to say to us, they could not fight with us; and said that they have their own views which they would continue to keep. This situation reminded us of the following Quranic verse, “If in Allah’s verses they are told to follow, even if their ancestors did not understand anything and did not find the right way, ‘we would go in our ancestors’ tracks,’ they say”. (Altai 1990). This is the case when it is impossible to make an arrogant person understand the truth. Then this negative trait of a person prevents him/her from fully understanding the meaning and contents of a text. As a result they understand only the second meaning and form a misjudgment.

One more feature of literalists is their fervency towards religion and their enthusiasm towards Quran. Abdullah ibn Abbas went to talk to the Khawarij, he saw that their foreheads were wrinkled with a lot of bows and their hands were callous as a camel’s knees because of a lot of prayers. However, this enthusiasm and sincerity cannot correlate with being right. To be more exact, they had “blind enthusiasm”. It did not comply with the Prophet’s sunnah and the aims of Islam. That is why they understood Quran and sunnah only literally. Because of this blind enthusiasm Khawarij killed the associate Abdulla ibn al-Arat for refusing to call His Highness Ali “an atheist”. But they were kind to a Christian who offered them free persimmon which they refused and bought instead. (Abu Zahra. 1996) Of course, this situation clearly shows the Khawarij great enthusiasm and their misunderstanding of religion.

Therefore, to form a viewpoint by understanding the Sharia texts literally means realizing the idea of Takfirism. For example, in the Bakara surah, “...if anyone commits atrocity, and his great sin (hatiat) surrounds him, it is then his hell where he will stay forever”. (Altai 1990). According to the literal understanding of this verse, the person who committed a great sin can be accused of heresy and sent to hell forever. In Islam a Muslim does not stay in hell forever. The literalists understand this verse literally and accused a sinned person of heresy. But in fact, “great sin” sometimes means polytheism. For example, in Noah surah the following is said about the Noah prophet’s community: “they were drowned and went to hell because of their great sins...”. (Altai 1990) From then onward, this applied not only to polytheism but other sins. For example, in Surah Shu’ara prophet Ibrahim’s

prayer is given: “I hope to be forgiven by Allah for my greatest sin on the day of retribution”. (Altai 1990) Of course it is clear that the prophet did not call his greatest sin polytheism. In Surah An-Nisa it is said, “Allah does not forgive polytheism but forgives any other sin if he prefers...”.(Altai 1990) So in this verse we see the clear verdict on polytheism.

If we understand the Prophet’s (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) “To scold a Muslim is meanness, to fight it is recreancy”(Al-Kushairi 1997) hadith literally, we then should consider a Muslim who killed a person a heretic. And in Quran Allah says, “When two groups of Muslims are in a fight against each other...”. (Altai 1990) In this verse Allah calls both fighting groups Muslims, *i.e.*, does not go beyond the Islamic circle. Therefore, the word “recreancy” means “great sin”. But the literalists explained this hadith as calling any Muslims fighting each other heretics. Moreover, based on this understanding, radical and aggressive relationships have been established. (as-Sagau 2008)

CONCLUSION

Based on this relationships they thought that other people are nit Muslims, they are Allah’s enemies, that is why they can take their cattle, property, kill them, make their women slaves, and even think that it is benevolence. (Khanam 2004). This is also reflected in some regions of our country among Salafi religious groups. Therefore we can clearly state that at the bottom of literalism lies one of the factors that lead people to aggression and radicalism.

References

- Abd al-Wahhab M. (N.D.) “*Kashf Ash-Shubuhaat*” (*Removal of the Doubts*). Riyadh: King Fahd National Publishing, pp. 64
- Abu Zahra. 1996. *The History of the Madhaab in Islam*. Cairo: Darul-fikr al-Arabi publishing house, pp. 711
- Altai, K. 1990. *The Kazakh meaning and explanation of Quran Karim in Kazakh*. Medina: Two Haram servants King Fahd’s Quran Sharif superior integrated work, pp. 604
- Al-Kausari, M. Z. 1998/1419. *Kausari articles*. Riyadh: Darul Ahnaf publishing house, 1993, 608.
- Al-Kushairi M. K. 1997. *Sahih Muslim*. Beirut: Dar-al-Jil, 4 volumes
- As-Sagau M. 2008. *Understanding Texts Literally*. Retrieved December 25, 2016 from <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2008/20081216/ar7.htm>.
- Christian Literalism Development Section. Knowledge base, n.d. Retrieved December 25, 2016 from http://proznania.ru/books.php?page_id=128;
- Interview with the Sheikh of Al – Azhar. Youtube. Retrieved December 25, 2016 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6BkuuLfKwE>;
- Khanam F. 2004. *The Quran*. Goodword books, pp. 183.
- Scientific Articles Section. Academic, n. d. Retrieved December 25, 2016 from <http://teology.academic.ru/6129/>;