



PIOUS CALIPHATE VS UMAYYAD KINGSHIP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BASIC RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE

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Abstract

The foundation of Islamic empire stands upon religious grounds to justify its legitimacy. Muslim sovereigns try to link their rule with pious Caliphate model and the first dynasty to do that was of the Umayyad Empire, though they assumed the title of Caliph but unlike pious caliphate they had a Kingship model. The research focuses on the basic religious elements of an Islamic empire to clarify the debate what is an Islamic model and which models represent a true example, whether it is theocracy or democracy or an amalgamation of both or is something new. The research also focuses why Muslims as a ruler are different from pious caliphs and why they try to quote examples of caliphate models. Is it necessary to quote pious caliphate models to unite the Muslims under one empire? Is it an indication that Muslims won't follow un-Islamic or non-caliphate models? Whether the caliphate rule of Umayyad was different from that of Monarchy of Saudi Arabia and that of Qatar and of Arab world? The research analyzes the special features of pious Caliphate



model and then discards the innovations in Umayyad model thus rejecting Umayyad rule as a succession of Caliphate but recognizes it simply as an Islamic rule. So, it clarifies what is a pious caliphate model and how should it be and answers the question whether that model can be implemented today?

Key Words: Islam, Caliph, Pious Caliphate, Caliphate Model, Umayyad, Kingship.

Introduction

In modern world, with rise of intolerance and Islamophobia, Muslims and Islam are being blamed as intolerant and outdated, so is their model of rule (Iqbal, 2020). In that aspect, Muslim regimes are being criticized as failed ones. The followers of such thoughts criticize the rule of Muslims from Holy prophet PBUH till date (Adnan, 2017). The critics fail to analyze what an Islamic rule is and what is a Muslim rule, there are many differences between an Islamic rule and Muslims rule. The modern world looks into Islamic rule through worldly lens and interprets it in terms of “all history is contemporary history” (Groot, 2016), whereas the truth is far away from such a phenomenon.

Muslim rulers try to avoid imitating Prophetic model, as for Muslims, he was the perfect one, whereas they try to follow his companions who are like stars, thus perfect examples remain that of the caliphate model (Zhussipbek, 2014). So, after prophet, it was the pious caliphate model (rule by first four caliphs of Islam) that pushed Islam across the globe, therefore, Muslim rulers willing to establish Muslim rule or empire try to follow Caliphate model, but here issue arises and Muslim rules fail to define their rule as being an Islamic one or a Muslim rule? (Cook, 2012). Muslims quote pious caliphate model but try to rule as Umayyad did, thus an argument is necessary to bifurcate the differences.

Worldly rulers need worldly examples and for them is the Umayyad model which was based on kingship and is still in process. The paper highlights the *raison d'être* of caliphate model. Whereas Islamic caliphate was a system that was far above from worldly “-cracy” models.

Pious Caliphate Mode

This model started with election of Abu Bakr (r. 632-34) as first caliph of Islam and owed it legitimacy by continuing the practices of Islam and declaring it as a spiritual and trans-worldly system (Sowerwine, 2010). This model founded its basis on sayings of



Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) to spread Islam across the globe Islam as a universal religion (Salleh, 2015). This model believed in universality of Islam and of Caliph and of Muslim nation. At that time, this idea was successful as Islam lacked the concept of sects and isms but with the passage of time a rift has been created which led to division of Muslims and an end to caliphate (Black, 2011). After prophethood came the caliphate which was followed by kingship and then proceeded by tyranny (McCants, 2014). The succeeding paragraphs discusses the main idea of the pious Islamic Caliphate.

i. Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the prime facie to justify any rule and followers of caliphate model understood it very well (Britannica, n.d.), thus the caliphs (successors of Prophet Muhammad with religious cum political power) who were also the successors of Islam or the vicegerents, followed the footprints of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Idris, 1990) which was clear from the speech of first caliph of Islam when he said that “I am the caliph of the Prophet of Allah”, which means he was the caliph of the prophet of Allah, this sentence marked the legitimacy of the caliphate and further “...as long as I follow the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and teachings of Allah, follow me, when I go astray do not obey me” (Redha, 2008). Such a speech before the *ummah* attracted the Muslims at large which was strengthened by the followers of caliph in these words, “the best among us is the one whose name is mentioned in Holy Quran” i.e. companion of the cave and one of the two in cave.” (Al-Islam.org, n.d.). He was the one who sacrificed his worldly wealth for the cause of Islam, expedition of Tabuk being the prime example when Abu Bakr was asked by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) what had he left behind in his home, his reply was, only name of Allah and his prophet (Questionsonislam, n.d.).

The first caliph of Islam held the practices of Prophet Muhammad by sending the army of Usama though everyone else opposed it (Yusuf, 2017), he was advised to halt the progress of army or change the command as Usman being a young and inexperienced, but the caliph replied he cannot unfold that flag what was unfettered by Prophet Muhammad, Madina stand or perish but the words of messenger of Allah needs to be carried out (iium, n.d.). He waged wars against those who refused Islamic injunctions and denied paying zakat and offering prayers thus upheld Islamic practices (Worldhistory, n.d.). He also countered those who declared themselves anti to prophet by claiming as prophets and prophetess (Haylamaz, 2013).

Successors of the first caliph were empowered to appoint his successors by quoting the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, “My companions are like stars, those who follow them never go astray,” (Rashed, ed., 2006) to keep *ummah* united, the first caliph



nominated Umar as his successor and second caliph of Islam but it was done in consultation with the members of *shura*, such action was again in line with Islamic traditions and was ensuring the legitimacy of the caliphate model. Era of second caliph (r. 634-44) was prolonged as compared to its precedent, thus he was able to represent the Islamic model in its totality. He presented himself accountable before the Muslim *ummah* and answered their concerns. Once caliph Umar was questioned, how can he wear a dress when everyone has received a single piece of cloth and being a tall man, that cloth is insufficient for him? His son gave the reply that he had given his piece of cloth to his father (Vankwani, 2020). Such act shows that caliph was answerable before is people.

Similarly, Islamic punishments were applied according to *Shariah* by applying the policy of Justice which relaxed punishments during famine. Yahya ibn Abi Kathir reported: Umar ibn al-Khattab, May Allah be pleased with him, said, “The hand of the thief is not to be cut who steals a bundle of dates or in a year of famine” (Elias, n.d.).

Formation of a welfare state by feeding the poor (Rahim, 2013), exempting them from zakat and *Jizya* ([Britannica](#), n.d.), initiating child care and feeding them to a certain age reflected Islamic teaching of service to humanity and a religion matching with human nature. *Uthman* (r. 644-56) sacrificed his life but did not kill the so-called Muslims/hypocrites nor let the *Sabaha* (companions of Prophet Muhammad) to be martyrdom. Followers of ibn Saba blamed him for misconduct and corruption and raised slogans that either the caliph resign or be prepared for his death (Quranosunnaa, 2021). At such a critical situation, his answer was to avoid bloodshed of Muslims *ummah*, he could not abdicate as his position was more of a religious than being a worldly one (Valiasr-aj, 2016).

Caliph Ali (r. 656-61) prophesied the prophesy of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he was approached and countered by Talha and Zubair when they said that the caliph was wrong by not punishing the murderers of caliph Uthman (Gawaher, n.d.). At that moment, caliph Ali reminded them a saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he had said that a time will come when Talha and Zubair stands against Ali and at that time, Ali will be on the right path, listening to that and recalling the same, Talha and Zubair realized that they were wrong so they retreated and admitted their mistake, but hypocrites assassinated both of them (Almahdi, n.d.), (Gawaher, n.d.), thus getting a chance to continue the chaos within Islamic empire. So again, the pious caliphate fulfilled the prophesy of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he had said that after him, there will be an era of rightly guided caliphate followed by Monarch and then tyranny (McCants, 2014).



ii. Source of Knowledge

The prime book/constitution for the caliph was Quran which was followed by *Ahadith* (sayings) and *Sunnah* (practices) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In case of non-availability of precedent, the caliphs used the Islamic sources of laws which included the use of *Qiyas* (intellectual reasoning)/*Ijma* (seeking opinions of Muslims) and *Ijtehad* (agreed opinions). As through *Ijma*, Abu Bakr was elected as the first caliph of Islam. Similarly, during era of caliph Umar, it was decided that the caliph won't lead the war in person against the Persians. Also, during famine, and stealing a handful of dates (equal to fist) the punishment of cutting of hands were exempted. The caliph also (Elias, n.d.) introduced 20 *rakats* in *Tarawi* (night prayers during Islamic month/Ramadhan) (Danka, 2009).

iii. Materialistic vs Spiritual life: Perks, Privileges and Protocol

Caliphs of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) obeyed the saying and practices of their master by accepting this world as a temporal place (Saritoprak, 2011), so the first four caliphs of Islam were seen sleeping on mud/brick or on mat (Khan, 2015) and used to wear patched clothes (caliph Usman being an exception whom the Prophet Muhammad PBUH permitted to wear silk cloths) (Redha, 2007). Such an act was not because of poverty but was perfection of inner soul. The caliphs preferred inner self more than outward appearance, as caliph Umar was seen holding the rope of camel while his slave was riding as it was the turn of his slave (Muhammad, n.d.). The same caliph Umar who ruled the Islamic empire was seen guarding the streets at night and keeping a watch upon his people, when he came across a dwelling, where he heard voices of crying children, upon inquiry, he was told that they were hungry and had nothing to eat and were poor to afford any, hearing that the caliph at once went to *Bait-ul-maal* (Islamic treasury) and brought food for that family and next day fixed allowances for them (Hadith, 2012). So, during pious caliphate era, justice with equity was served and done with everyone.

Caliph Uthman being one of the wealthiest Arab merchant of Makkah when became caliph was left with only 2 camels and a slave (HaqIslam, 2011). Such was the value of worldly life for them. Similarly, caliph Ali could not keep any housemaid for helping her wife who was daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Siddiqua, 2020), though prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who was the master of all Muslims and soon ruler of all empires.

iv. Assassination and Concept of Personal Revenge

The religious caliphs believed in Allah and did not keep bodyguards (Zaki, 2006). they believed that man is mortal and life is from Allah and for Allah, thus except first, the last three caliphs were martyrdom one after the other. But they did not pursue personal



revenge and left the matter to Allah. This practice they copied from Prophet who believed and said that Allah is sufficient for him (Wahid, 2015).

Caliph Umar was assassinated when he was going to perform morning prayer (Kusnadi, 2018), it shows that he was fulfilling the command of Allah when he was martyred. Similarly, Uthman was martyred when he was reciting the Holy Quran, Hazrat Ali was again martyred when he was going to offer Morning Prayer (Qazi, 2008). Such incidents shows that the caliphs didn't want to keep them aloof from the public and neither wanted to trust people to protect them, because they believed that one day they had to die. So, it shows how much trust they had in Allah.

v. Outcome

Religious authority came from religious person (s), used by religious men for pious purposes, conversely worldly desire led to worldly empires and thus contradicted and negated religious models. The caliphate model was a unique model in its totality and was beyond worldly interpretation, thus dragging that model into worldly model not only put that model into criticism but also made it difficult to understand. Whereas, imitating that model by non-religious men led to chaos and anarchy and failure of such models, the prime example being that of Umayyad kingship.

Umayyad Model of Caliphate/Kingship

Umayyad dynasty begun from Amir Muawiyah's kingship (r. 661-80) till its downfall by Abbasids regime (Khan, 2020). That rule was hereditary rule (Anderson, 2017). With inclusion of Pomp and show (Chand, 2007), a model that was copied from Persian empire, which was meant to create fear among hearts and minds of common masses. The main aim was to promote worldly power and rise of three Ws, world, wealth and women (Hitti, 1970). But to seek recognition among Muslims, they linked it with caliphate model and used the term Caliph for their kings, and led the prayer and widely used Islamic punishments to spread fear and wrath of state. With the exception of era of Umar bin Aziz (r.717-20), the so-called Umayyad caliphs kept themselves aloof from the public and used the following methods to sustain their rule.

The so-caliph caliph Yazid (r. 680-83) was a habitual drinker (Qureshi, n.d.) and murderer of Muslims especially the family of Prophet Muhammad (Kuyateh, 2018), also attacked the holy cities and Kabbah was destroyed (r/Islam, 2008), it was only to gain obedience and command over worldly affairs, though Islam assures protection to those who dwells inside a religious building, same was done by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when conquering Makkah, protection was given to those who entered holy Kabbah



(Dadch, 2019), but Umayyad violated and ignored what was taught by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Hajjaj bin Yusuf (r. 694-714) an important commander of caliph Waleed (r. 705-15) spread a reign of awe and fear among the Muslims, brutally beheaded the Muslims and imposed excess taxes upon inhabitants of Islamic empire (Ruth, 2021), though he also reformed Quranic texts by introducing pronunciation marks upon Arabic texts (Islamic-awareness, 2003). But such acts did not fulfill the criteria of caliphate model, rather they were used to shield their hypocrisy.

i. Legitimacy

Wealth, power and force ruled the dynasty due to which Islam was politicized. Concept of caliphate was redesigned in a way to reflect the idea that Muslim caliph is one who holds the holy lands (Mekkah and Medina) to justify the legitimacy of so called worldly caliphs (Dogan, 2018). So, their legitimacy was more of a worldly than a spiritual or an Islamic one. The successors of this caliphate were kings who adopted hereditary legitimacy thus broke from spiritual lineage (Dangor, 2003).

Power was only way to legitimize their rules and piety was kept away from kings. They were morally, socially and religious corrupt, they drank wine, promoted injustices, womanizer became a habit, thus nothing was left of pious caliph (Aghaie, 2004). But use of naked power made their rule legal and thus they enjoyed continuity of rule. The caliphs emphasized upon physical appearance of Islam as was done by present ISIS/IS (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), in public, they differentiated among Muslims and non-Muslims in terms of misinterpreting Islam which included implementing Islamic punishments like flogging, chopping of hands but all that was done without carrying out the principle of equity and justice (Singh, 2017).

ii. Source of Knowledge

Worldly ideas and philosophies, they opted more of a pre-Islamic ideas of tribalism, war was opted as first option rather than being the last, war ethics of PBUH were forgotten even Muslims were mercilessly killed (though Prophet Muhammad had instructed the Muslims not kill anyone without a just cause; not to hurt/kill women, children, aged, handicapped, clergymen; not to burn food and destroy crops, in short, Muslims were forbidden to kill non-combatants of war according to Islamic war ethics (Jalal, 2021) but Umayyad stained their hands with blood of notables ones such as ibn Zubair (r. 683-92), (Lynch, 2014).



Religious knowledge was corrupted (Guzman, 2004) and remained corrupt and was used for worldly success, world remained the only idea to be chased and retained. Religious men were ignored and persecuted (jobxam, n.d.), dignity of family of prophet was dishonored and loved ones of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) like Hassan and Hussain were martyred (Kuyateh, 2018), thus Umayyad caliphate reflected a worldly rule and wasn't any Islamic one. The Umayyad tried and were able to revive pre-Islamic tribal system (Bennaji, 2018), a system that was thrashed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and was declared as un-Islamic and a sign of *Jahilliya* (age of ignorance). The same system was again adopted by Arabs of modern world in shape of caliphate which misnamed the pious caliphate model (Alkouri, 2017). It was because caliphate was founded upon Islamic principles of justice and was in accordance with the practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Whereas, Umayyad caliphate plus modern caliphate were topsy-turvy of what was founded by the first four caliphs.

iii. Mortal vs Immortal Life: Perks, Privileges and Protocol

The Umayyad monarchs followed the practices of Persian empire and were no more Islamic in their personal lives (Spooner, 2019). They made a difference between public and private life, publicly they were Islamic men and implemented Islamic laws but in private they were far away from Islam and Sunnah. In short, that era reflected the existence and spread of hypocrisy (Marshall, 2009).

The monarchs were infallible and answerable to none. Injustice, brutality and arrogance ruled the era of Umayyad. Pomp and show and ease of life was hallmark of that regime, alms and poll taxes were used to fulfill the enjoyment of kings and poor were left hand to mouth (Deus, 2013).

iv. Assassination and Concept of Personal Revenge

They appointed bodyguards to protect them and led the prayers while standing in metal enclosure to ensure safety of their lives (Pearlman, 2015). They did not appear before public and kept themselves aloof from ordinary men, final decision was made by them, and *shura* find no place in their regime (Dangor, 2003).

Such practices reflected that the Muslim monarchs were more of Persian kings than being a follower of prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Personal revenge existed in empire (Gunes, 2015).

v. Outcome

Umayyad were kings and implemented Persian model in their rule, they claimed legitimacy by political tricks, as they pretend to be successors of pious caliphate and had



control upon holy lands but in reality they were trying to hold power in their hands, thus the rule was cloaked with pomp and show followed by fear and threat of punishments.

They did not bother to martyrdom the family members and companions of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) though they knew their cruelty (Kuyateh, 2018). Diamond cuts diamond so cruelty was replaced and countered by cruelty, Umayyad dynasty was dethroned by the Abbasid dynasty (Britannica, n.d.) and they too used violence and disregarded the sanctity of Islam and of Muslims. In brief, Umayyad caliphate was no match with pious caliphate but an invention of worldly politics by Arab Muslims.

Umayyad Model of Caliphate in Comparison to Arab World with Reference to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Umayyad model of caliphate/kingship was aptly followed by Arab kingdoms for the reason that it suited their interests and helped them maintain their supremacy in terms of tribalism and to keep power contained within their families. The Arab kingdom did their best to have the power which they had before Islam, and in doing so they focused more on their cultural practices than following the pious caliphate mode (Willis, 2010).

In modern world, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is generally a symbol of Islam as prophet of Islam was born here and it became the cradle of Islam (Hjarpe, 1979), whereas Kabbah is the particular identity of the Muslims and a sign of monotheism (Wilkin, 2020). Similarly, KSA was the center of city state of Madinah and succession of caliphate model, so it became an ideal country for Muslims to follow. Recognizing and understanding the historical importance of the place, the Arab kings like the Umayyad empowered the institution of Kingship by wrapping it in cloak of Islam. So, a monarchy was built upon pious caliphate model but unlike that, it also failed to purify its structure rather it followed the footprints of Umayyad by initiating the practices of worldly lavishness. The Kings of KSA were and are seen as a symbol of reflection of wealth, lavishness, arrogance and pride (Umoh, 2018), though at public they had forced a rigid version of Islam which is better known as Wahhabism or Salafism (Alrebh, 2018). But the practices and method of rule is same as that of the Umayyad.

Clergy/religious figures are kept under the command of the monarch as was done in Umayyad caliphate. Islam is used to have the obedience of the masses (Alrebh, 2018), public and private life are separate and commoners are not allowed to have access to the lifestyle of the monarchs. The monarch is not answerable before anyone except to worldly superpowers. The ruling family is seen enjoying drink parties with western and



involved in soiree (The Guardian, n.d.), they have kept themselves unaware of miseries and haplessness of public, what they reflect is only inflicting Islamic punishments and that too is enforced upon citizens of third world countries (US Department of State, 2021), so KSA had imitated Umayyad kinship model in its every spirit and their rules reflect the revival of Umayyad caliphate model. What is the difference that the monarchs of KSA had left in their regime is the use of the term “Caliphs” for their rulers.

Like Umayyad, the monarch of KSA also used and are using Islamic laws and punishments as a deterrence against any resistance. Beheading of guilty and sometimes of the accused, flogging of convict, amputating of limbs of thieves (US Department of State, 2021); the same is also being used by the Taliban so, it reflects the idea that representation of Islam by such models is only a way to legitimize their rule in eyes of the Muslim and among Islamic world (Synovitz, 2021), and yes it has worked and is still working. Terms/words and concepts are interpreted and reinterpreted to justify the so-called Islamic rule. The kingdom regimes are popularly known as Islamic regime though they are not Islamic regimes but Muslim regimes because of sectarian interpretation of Islam and its application.

Conclusion

Umayyad caliphate was not an Islamic caliphate; it was purely a worldly one disguised under cloak of religion to attain loyalty from masses. It cannot be linked with Islamic one but need to be studied separately. Any Muslim regime claiming to be an imitation of caliphate model is nothing but just an attempt to befool the masses to obtain their loyalty. Because caliphate model was a mode of mixture of private and public life, a caliph was the same as he was before public and in his private life. He was a man of character and a selfless man, for him world was of no importance but piety and justice was. Whereas, Umayyad model of caliphate gave a worldly interpretation to Islam making it purely a materialistic dynasty with the exception of the rule of Umar bin Abdul Aziz.

The same caliphate model of Umayyad was borrowed and implanted by the modern Muslim Arab kingdoms, where they use Islam as a symbol of legitimacy but in personal life they remained far away from Islam. Such a contraction helped them to rule over the Muslims and also to get support from non-Muslim world, this dichotomy is still prevailing in the world, where Muslim rulers use the word Islam to get support from Muslim masses but in person their lifestyle is far away from Islamic ones. In addition, they name their rules as that of a caliphate thus they have mixed the concept of pious caliphate with that of Umayyad one.



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