

## **Humanitarian Response in National Emergency situation in Pakistan**

### **Islam a challenge for INGO ?**

Pakistan has been severely affected by a historic natural calamity since July 2010, affecting more than a third of the country; about one sixth of the population is seriously affected and rendered homeless. The state has difficulties in responding to the needs of the victims, and above all it hasn't got the means to take up appropriate actions and give an adequate response to the needs of the victims.

At the same time it is difficult for the INGO to take up the humanitarian response easily due to the interference of the radical groups like the Talibans, the jamaat e islami. There is a high risk for the humanitarian workers to carry out their mission effectively and without danger for their lives.

The earlier biggest disaster in the North in 2005 (Kashmir Earthquake) has also had similar problems and the humanitarian response was a major challenge. It was not easy to carry out the humanitarian response effectively and huge delays were noted, causing the prolongation of the sufferings of the victims.

The question developed in this paper is the following one: What is the role and influence of Islam in Humanitarian Aid? If Islam advocates for humanitarian response as an obligation, why is the humanitarian response such a major challenge? Is it the influence of radical Islamic reactions which is the major hindrance? Does the state corruption influence humanitarian aid? Or is it both?

This paper is an attempt to address the relationship between Islam, Islamists and humanitarian aid from a religious and political perspective. Particular emphasis will be put on the link between Islam and humanitarian aid. It will also bring to evidence that the Islamists instrumentalize religion as a reaction to the western political attitude perceived as Christian and modern, imposing its influence on the traditions of Islam and the Muslims. This will also be the opportunity to look into the identity of the Pakistani society and how the Islamists in today's Pakistan are striving to raise the issue of identity through reactionary attitudes at the time of disasters both natural and man-made.

### **Humanitarian Aid in Islam**

For all Muslims, humanitarian act is one of the founding principles of Islam. The different sacred verses and the prophet either oblige each one to undertake action in favour of the suffering or encourage them to act. These sacred verses also ask the faithful not to put aside the non Muslims.

Humanitarian action or expression of solidarity constitutes an essential part of religious practice in Islam. Zakat is the third important founding pillar of Islam and is equally as important as Prayers, fasting, (Zakat), pilgrimage to Mecca and Jihad. It is a religious obligation to fulfill an act of solidarity, because it is in a way important to receive help from above, pay for the sins and get a place in Paradise. It is a natural accomplishment of duty for any Muslim.

Any humanitarian gesture is considered as a duty. It is an act of Charity, which is encouraged in the sense that the Holy Quran advocates that the first to enter paradise are those who have done good to the poor; Zakat being the practical mechanism that helps accomplish this task. This clearly indicates that there is a close link between one's faith and the duty towards the poor. Charity is a clear indication

of this good will. This act of charity strives to obtain the Creator's satisfaction. Different surats in the Quran indicate the need to fulfill one's duty through Zakat.

It is considered that the good will of a Muslim is to be concerned with the wellbeing of his fellowmen, especially in situations of distress or poverty. This concern is an evident sign of detachment from material things and a sign that the Almighty's love transcends through the faithful towards the most affected and afflicted. This indicates clearly the vertical relation with the Creator which has its fullest meaning only when the faithful reaches out horizontally towards the poor.

Zakat is also the right of the poor to live in dignity. The holy Quran even stipulates the different categories of beneficiaries S9:V60 sadaquat. It also stipulates that Zakat is for those who are united with the poor for the cause of Islam.

In history, different empires have also resorted to the government using its legitimate right to bring help to the poor by collecting from those who are affluent or those who can.

Quran also stipulates that Zakat must be distributed in the country where it has been collected. The system of Zakat must bring about exemplary social cohesion among the faithful. In a tradition where religion (faith) and political and social dimensions are closely related, Piety and Pity are also symbiotically linked. This sets the framework for social action based on the belief that any act of charity or solidarity must be in the scope of the religious values. Any act of solidarity is also a means to maintain the "Umma", the collective solidarity of all Muslims at different levels: villages, nation and at the international level.

Islam does not understand the concept of "Universal", but rather "collective" (Umma). The notion of umma refers to the communal concept of group that is the priority to the faithful. While making a clear distinction between believers and non believers, Islam also exhorts all faithful to give importance to the humanity of the human person irrespective of their beliefs and during the war even to the enemy.

Although the Holy Quran exhorts Muslims to undertake social action and the obligation of the Muslims towards their own communities and also to the non Muslims, it does in no way raise the issue of getting help from non Muslims. It neither condemns the help given by the non believers as "Haram" nor does it say that anything that is not coming from Zakat or waqf is against the precepts of Islam.

As a conclusion it can be understood that Zakat is an act of solidarity and charity to fulfill the religious obligations as a faithful. There is an evident link between religion, social action and the economic condition. It is not only the fulfillment of an individual act, but the accomplishment of important religious precepts in Islam, as important as the other religious precepts. It is this symbiotic relation between the three dimensions, namely the social, political and religious dimensions which can clarify to a certain extent the challenges of working in a Muslim context, wherein in an Islamic state like Pakistan, the NGO are subject to dual link: the society and the public political force.

### **Christians and Social Action**

The Bible all along its different books, gives prime importance to extend charitable actions towards those who are poor. Helping the poor is in some cases a religious precept as in the case of the Ten Commandments, where it is given as an obligation. The different social teachings of the Church exhort all Christians to help the poor, because it is the obligation of each Christian towards his brother who is the image of Christ. But the act of charity is not institutionalized and it is discretionary.

There is no institutional obligation to help the poor as in Islam, but there is a moral obligation for any Christian to be concerned by the help he can extend to his less fortunate brother especially in times of need or distress.

Christianism also preach universal love irrespective of religion, caste or creed. It is the human person who is the center of all action and it is the poor who institutes the act of love and concern. And act of solidarity or charity is universal in nature and is not exclusive.

In a modern humanitarian response, perceived from a secular perspective, the help given does not fulfill any religious obligation, but rather a moral duty towards the poor and the suffering. Any act of solidarity or charity is not geared towards the religious belongingness but rather to the human person who symbolizes the superior being, image of the Creator.

The Church as a universal institution gives a single interpretation and this becomes the basis for action for all those who are involved in social action as a Church-based organization or a faith-based organization.

Thus social action initiated by a Church-based organization often claiming a secular attitude raises a certain number of ambiguities, especially in a Muslim context. The motivation behind these concerns is not fully understood especially in a traditional context. The very fact that the religious sphere is separated from the political dimension raises a certain number of ambiguities and lack of clarity, leading to a certain number of interpretations and lack of understandings.

### **Islamists and humanitarian action**

In Pakistan nationhood and People hood are both based on Islam and nationalism. It is enrooted in the political will to create an Islamic state. Since the creation of Pakistan, religion has been the easiest source of abolishing divisions and unifying the Muslims under one nation. The religious and the political spheres were often amalgamated and during the course of history, they became more and more affirmed.

In Pakistan after the petrol crisis and the economic boom in the Middle East, many Pakistanis went as migrant workers to Saudi Arabia. Many ulemas were invited to be trained in the holy land of Mecca and above all, the pilgrimage to Mecca gave them a closer contact with the Wahabi movement, leading them to get into a more and more radical Islam, which would be later used by the different political movements in Pakistan, using radical Islam as a means for establishing political power.

The radicalization of Islam became a characterized means to affirm the traditional cultural and religious identity. Putting in the forefront radical Islam as a national identity before the global evolution, the Islamic leaders make it the core ideology for the cause of Islam. From 1988, Islamists who have been fermenting as militant groups, have come out as an organized group, and Zia ul Haq who has always fostered fundamental Islam, now makes use of these groups for his political support.

Talibans were encouraged during the afghan occupation and were given prime importance by the US.

The September 11, 2001 attack, the gulf war that followed, the attack on the Talibans and the position of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism created a fertile environment for radical Islam to develop.

The concept of civil society is not fully understood and it is difficult for the civil society to act neither as a counter force, a buffer role, nor play the role of mediation as it could be done in a modern democratic

secular environment. The state does not have a clear notion of the role of the NGO due to the political history of the country, which has been under military rule for long periods. On the contrary the Islamic NGO is considered as humanitarian sub-contractors of the state or the Islamic religious community. They penetrate the humanitarian domain by their Islamic political background and not as a civil society organization. This is due to the fact that Pakistan is not a "Political state".

The international civil society humanitarian intervention could be perceived as a disgrace by the islamists and also other Muslims. They make an amalgam between international government policies related to fight against terrorism and the collateral damage that they have caused on the civilian population; and the Western INGO willingness to help the affected people in such dire conditions at the time of manmade and natural calamities. There is often a judgment of intention that humanitarian action undertaken by the international community is vested interest oriented.

External private fundraising is often perceived with reserve by the state and also by the beneficiaries who are under nationalist, religious or ideological influence of the influent strata of the society (the mullahs, the radical groups etc.)

It is also important to keep in mind that since the years 1990 and more specifically since September 11, 2001 there is a malaise between the West and the Islamic states, and this malaise is more crystallized in the developing countries and less in the Middle East where people are more inclined to put the emphasis on the economic development rather than on Islam (Saudi Arabia being an exception). Countries like Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines have become the epicenter of this pro traditional Islamic culture and identity and the Islamists have formed themselves into an organized force.

Another important issue is the Palestinian problem which has brought many Islamic countries to be in rupture of dialogue with the West, as they easily and falsely perceive that any compromise on this issue is serving the American interest. It is also a reality that traditional Islam is trying to impose itself as a counterforce to the modernity and as such it has turned into a conflict between modernism and tradition. In this context of contempt against the west, it is the poor who pay and are victimized. All these factors contribute to give a prime place to fundamentalism which helps in maintaining a "rapport de force" with the West. In this struggle, "humanitarian terrorism" has become one of the means to put pressure and a means of reaction towards the western culture.

In Pakistan, these reactions are put into practice and this situation is also aggravated by the Americano-western occupation of Afghanistan. This will in no way contribute to understand the Christian universal motivation of helping all human person in situation of sufferings or in precarious humanitarian need. Even though the government of Pakistan may ask for help, the humanitarian terrorism prevalent in Pakistan will be making all interventions highly vulnerable. Analyzed from this angle, humanitarian response in Pakistan and in Afghanistan will be a major challenge and this has to be taken into consideration.

In this traditional society characterized by hierarchical and authoritarian links and where political tradition is feudal and political culture is inexistent, the local NGO are subject to internal conflicts or strategic alliances with the authorities. This is very often exploited by the state either through non-interference and letting the Islamists tackle the issues or by putting obstacles to the NGO.

As long as the democratization process does not steam up in Pakistan, as long as the military virtual presence is felt and as long as radical Islam is enrooted, humanitarian response by INGO and local non Muslim FBO has to be taken up with high precaution. The democratic transition is highly fragile and far from being launched.

## **The present IDP crisis in this context**

### **An opportunity to be seized by the protagonists for dialogue**

The IDP crisis is getting worse day by day. The civil government is not at all appropriately equipped to tackle the humanitarian challenge. First of all, it has to face major national challenges coming from the Taliban and the radical groups and on the other hand as said above, the democratic process is not fully in place. In addition to this there is a lack of good governance, the massive weight of the decade long military rule is weighing much and above all the state lacks local resources to help the victims (food, shelter, health material etc).

In this crisis, the civil society organizations are far from being allowed to play their role fully and the INGO are in a situation of wait and see attitude and take up activities with much prudence. Some are opting to work with the military or the military based services. But this will be a danger on the long run because it reverts back to the past where the military was systematically deployed.

Secularization of the humanitarian activities must be taken up as one of the opportunities that this natural disaster can offer. The government must take courage to offer the NGO and the INGO their right and due place as CSO to respond alongside the government to the dire conditions of the poor victims.

The religious leaders also have the possibility to open the path of life dialogue based on religious ethos and motivate the grassroots communities to come together with a shared vision of liberating themselves from the clutches of poverty especially in this trying moment of natural disaster where Christians or Muslims or Hindus, the victims share a common destiny and shared aspiration to liberate themselves from the pains caused by the natural disaster.

### **Conclusion**

In a society which is based on traditional values wherein Islam is predominant, all humanitarian activities must be based on religious ethos and respect of the traditional culture. This means a good understanding of the local context, the local traditions and also identifying the right interlocutors for opening up dialogue. Religious leaders of the different religions and in particular Catholic and Muslim leaders must be associated in mobilizing the grass roots, because they are in constant touch with the population.

Humanitarian response could become one of the means for dialogue between faith communities as long as the interpretation is objective, moderate and devoid of vested interest of the religious communities at stake. Humanitarian response by FBO could become a means for dialogue and joint action between different religious communities and could set the propitious environment for the emerging of the civil society as a counterforce and a vector for mediation not only at the political level but also at the level of fundamentalist forces.

International NGO and in particular FBO NGO will certainly contribute to a long lasting results if they take into consideration the faith dimension in their response and the need for such dialogue based activities wherein the religious leaders can contribute. Action and result oriented thrusts will certainly not contribute to a long lasting alleviation of the sufferings of the victims.

This would entail a strategic approach to tackling the humanitarian response and helping the victims through a coordinated approach, with a minimal logistical role for the military. The FBO should come

together as a platform for action in dialogue and must also coordinate their efforts with the religious leaders.

If the present disaster is not taken up as opportunity to open life dialogue and also coordinate all efforts to motivate the grass-roots to live together, then the IDP who are already totally exhausted and helpless, will turn towards the Islamists who have the right word and the right means to get them to their fold. This will create another disaster for the country where democracy is still not instituted.

### **Some elements of reflection for humanitarian response**

1. It is urgent to establish a strategic approach to humanitarian response in Pakistan. This means the local Caritas organization must be encouraged to get into strategic operational alliance with local Faith-based organizations to reflect on how to introduce international Humanitarian response.
2. This implicitly means the creation of a NGO consortium in Pakistan with like-minded organizations to maintain a constant reflection on Humanitarian response by faith-based organizations.
3. The faith-based organizations must integrate the religious ethos in their disaster preparedness from an institutional point of view and also prepare themselves for a collegial disaster response. Community organization must be given prior importance with animation activities that bring people together to instill in them a culture of togetherness founded on a common and shared vision to liberate themselves from the clutches of poverty and live in dignity.
4. The inter-religious dialogue must also include the humanitarian response as one of the vectors of life dialogue in situations of disasters both natural and manmade. This could also be included in the disaster preparedness at the institutional level.
5. All these discussions and dialogues must be maintained in a systematic way regularly and not just at the moment of emergency interventions. For this Network MO must work alongside the local network members and encourage them to maintain this dialogue.
6. As in the case of Buddhist countries it will be good to maintain dialogue with moderate mullahs and other religious leaders in which international network members can also participate.

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