

THE ROLE OF AUTHORITY IN ARRESTING MORAL DECADENCE IN OUR SOCIETY – (NIGERIA): ISLAMIC VIEW POINT

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Abstract

This paper examines the Islamic view point of the role of authority in arresting moral decadence in our society. It begins with the introduction which explains the concept of moral decadence and authority. This is followed by the features of authority at the central level which can impede the exercise of power at other authoritative levels. It winds up with the suggested effective ways of using authority to completely wipe out moral decadence in our society.

Introduction

Moral decadence could be described as the gross act of indiscipline which has eaten deep into the fabric of our society such as stealing, cheating, misuse of drugs, arson, murder, maiming, certificate racketeering, lateness to work, absence from duty, negligence at work, illicit sexual harassment, nepotism, bribery and corruption and a host of others at different levels.(Collin P.H. 1980:113). Authority on the other hand is the ability to exercise power which has been vested in some people called rulers over some other people called the ruled. (Collin P.H:18). Authority or exercise of power could be seen at different levels. It could be at the family level where the father or husband is the head of the family and the wife or mother is the lieutenant i.e. home.

It could be at the school level, community level, societal level, local governmental level, state level or Federal governmental level as the case may be. At whichever level it may be applicable, it could be summed up that the role of arresting moral decadence by the different levels of authority will be seriously affected by the authority of the central government (Federal) under which other authorities operate. This is the reason why this writer has chosen to write on the role of authority in arresting moral decadence in our society.

Characteristics of Authority

Authority is abstract in nature and cannot exercise itself. People exercise authority or power over others at whatever authoritative level they may find themselves either as rulers or the ruled. Authority has certain characteristics which an individual lacks but which make it possible for people in authority to be in the better position to wage war against moral decadence.

A.) Authority Makes Law

Members that constitute authority make laws, rules and regulations which they want the followers to obey. Although people in power enact laws that will suit them to enable them achieve their set goals and objectives, not withstanding, they as well recognize that there are some values which are worthwhile and which they want their followers to imbibe like the good virtues such as honesty, dedication to work and hard labour, etc. (1999 Constitution). It is based on this reason that the authority has a role to play in arresting moral decadence. Under the present political dispensation, we have the three arms of government i.e. the executive arm of government, the judicial and the legislative arms of government which are at the helm of governance. They are all responsible for the formulation of laws, execution and judicial respectively.

In Islamic view point, Allah the Almighty God is responsible for the formulation of laws, these are to be executed by people in authority judiciously without fear or favour to the rulers or the ruled.

However, people in authority are allowed to legislate and make some laws from time to time as the situation demands. These should be to events or developments that are not specifically mentioned in the Quran and Hadith i.e the use of Ijma and Qiyas. (Quran enjoins mankind to obey Allah, obey the Prophet and people in authority. (Quran 4:59).

B.) Authority has Power and Mercineries

The role of authority in curbing moral decadence cannot be over emphasized because authority has vested power, implementative agents and the mercenaries with which to exercise power and implement it to the letter.

Individuals and the followers lack these instruments which those in authority use to authoritatively force people or followers to obey them. Therefore, if these instruments were effectively utilized in the proper channels, authority will help a lot in arresting moral decadence in our society. This will involve using the human and material resources which people in authority have to arrest all sorts of immoral acts in the society i.e. using the wealth of the country wisely and for the people, using the military and armed forces as agents of suppressing any act of immorality, enriching and empowering the law enforcement agents to be able to deal promptly and decisively with any act of lawlessness.

It was this which Umar bn Khattab (634 – 644 C. E.) did which enabled him to record a lot of laudable achievements when he was in power. He paid the judges fantastic salaries and made them comfortable so that they would not be tempted to take bribes. He spent a lot on education, gave sponsorships on education, paid teachers good salaries, established standing professional army that were well taken care of, improved the condition of the prisons and separated the judicial arm of government from the executive arm of government for justice and fair hearing (Rahim A. 1992:82).

Also, Abu Bakr, Uthman bn Affar and Ali bn Abi Talib the pious caliphs all adopted this measure during their reigns and their periods of rule recorded high level of moral excellence which has no equal in the contemporary period.

C.) Dominion of Authority

Authority is of course the best to fight indiscipline because authority is free, it is at liberty to do and not to do. If the authority mapped out some strategies and punishments for immoral defaulters and carried out the punishments, the people in authority have liberty to do such. They cannot be sued to court for damages, they cannot be fought against, they cannot be forcefully arrested and put in detention because they have some legal and positional backings to do all that they are doing.

For instance, the case of Ubaid – Allah Abi Shammah son of Umar bn Khattab (634 – 644 C.E.) who committed Zina (adultery) and was wiped with striped till death overtook him. (Rahman Doi 1990:240)

If that punishment were to be carried out by an individual or even the father of the boy, the father would have been sued to court for murder or the so called individual, but because it was a verdict given by the head of the authority or somebody in leadership position, it caused no commotion to the person who gave the order and the other person that carried out the order.

Perhaps this is too far, the case of a man Sani Mamman 18, who was publicly beaten hundred lashes in Zangara State for illicit sex with Zuweira Aliyu 16, would have been a serious problem for those who carried out the beaten if not that the authority instructed them to do so. (National Concord 18/2/2000).

The similitude here is like using the police or military forces to combat armed robbers or drug traffickers on the order of the President of the country or a governor of a state. These agents of government are free to carry out the order and are not in any way bound to face any consequences for their action. (Roberts Jordan 1985:25)

However, the implication of this is that authority has a very great role to play in arresting moral decadence but if the people in authority are morally bankrupt, then the danger is that instead of using the authority to arrest indiscipline, it may be used in perpetuating and promoting more evils and immoral deeds. According to Robert Jordan, “an unreasonable exercise of

constitutional authority will produce civil disobedience or even civil unrest”. (Roberts Jordan, 1985:26)

An instance of this could be seen in the era of General Sanni Abacha in Nigeria who ruled between (1994 - 1998). He was accused of perpetrating all sorts of evils ranging from drinking alcohol to embezzlement, murder, having illicit sexual dealings outside his matrimonial home and using power mercilessly with full autocracy, “Abacha looted over \$4 billion (dollars)” says Obasanjo. (The Comet, 9/2/2000)

Himself and his lieutenants like Sergeant Rogers, Major Mustapha and his family members went as far as persecuting the radical activists who opposed his administration for all sorts of immoral and evil deeds perpetuated.

It is no longer news that people like Gani Fawehinmi, Lawyer Femi Falana, Chief Olu Falae, Sheu Musa Ya Adu’a, General Oladipo Diya, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola and even the Present President Olusegun Obasanjo and many others were clamped down in detention with serious and heavy tortures meted on them for their great condemnation of his administration.

In this illustration, authority was used to perpetrate evils and deal a deadly blow on those who attempted to correct those in authority to change for good.

The situation described here reveals that authority is a very strong force or instrument which if effectively and judiciously used could play a vital role in the arrest of moral decadence in our society.

D.) Projection to the Outside World

People in authority stand a better chance and they uphold an advantageous position in using authority to combat social malaise in our society. This is in view of the fact they are in a better position to project the country they represent to the international communities. If people in authority have high moral qualities, this will be depicted in their dealings with the international world.

For instance, to get the level of high moral qualities of the Nigerians by the outside world, it cannot be seen in majority of the followers or the ruled who do not have the means and opportunity to travel outside the country or to interact with members of the international communities. But people in authority who interact with them, who eat and dine with them will project the level of our moral standards to them.

Britain, United States of America and a host of other international countries like Saudi – Arabia, France and Japan etc need not be told that there is a very low level of moral quality in Nigeria today because our people in authority in the very recent past have stolen the country’s money at one time or the other and deposited this money in foreign accounts and they i.e. people in authority have again committed great atrocities which are known at home and abroad. The

case of Mr. Salisu Buhari is still very fresh in our brain, a former Senate President who was deposed because of forging a certificate from the University of Toronto (Sunday Vanguard 30/01/2000).

How to Effectively use Authority to arrest Moral Decadence

The following Islamic pragmatic measures will be a panacea to using authority to constructively curb moral decadence in our society.

1.) Living by Practical Examples

People in authority have a role to play in using authority to fight against indiscipline because as members at the helm of affairs who issue out laws and exercise power on the people, they have to live by practical examples, that is showing a leading golden examples for their followers whom they lead. This is because it will be unreasonable and illogical to fashion out good deeds and fine qualities for people to eschew when they themselves live and act contrarily to what they legislate.

To this, Olusegun Obasanjo (1977) says, “..... what greater mockery can there be of official policy than government functionaries including officials entertaining their private guests with Champaign when that drink has been banned in the country”. (Daily Times, Lagos 13/09/77).

The Quran puts this in a better form when it says, “Do you command people to do good when you forget your own soul, can’t you reason?”. The analogy of people in authority who make laws for others to follow but who themselves refuse to obey the same laws will be like the case of a doctor who is trying to cure the headache of his patient by breaking his own head. How unreasonable and disastrous is that?

For people in authority to win the respect, honour and dignity before their subjects, they will need to subject themselves to the laws of Almighty God and laws of the land because this will help them a great deal in combating indiscipline in our society. This was what Prophet Muhammad (SAW) practiced and as a result of which he was able to lay a very good foundation for the followers and the whole mankind to follow.

Umar bn Khattab (634 – 644 C.E.) the second caliph used his authority to better the lots of his followers when he was the head of state. He also used his power to correct a lot of immoral deeds. He ordered that a drunkard be given one hundred lashes and he did not spare him because the drunkard was his son. This is a transparent way of how authority could play the role of arresting moral decadence.

2.) Fear of Almighty God

People in authority should have the fear of God and should see themselves as vicegerents of God on earth, who are to see to the execution of God’s laws. They will however be accountable to the

way they govern people before God whether they like it or not sometimes later. The Quran says, "Then, we made you viceroys in the land after them, so that we might see how you act". (Quran 10:14). Islam however does not support that people in authority enjoy any immunity as it is in the present political dispensation. Every person is equal before the law and same treatment is meted either on the ruler or the ruled. The Quran says, "None of you is honourable before Allah except he who is God Fearing" i.e. who fears God in whatever he does in all ramifications of life.

3.) Democratic Rule

People in authority should be democratic in their exercise of power. This deals with the participation of leaders and followers taking critical look at issues before taking decisions that would be beneficial to all. (Yahaya A.D. 1993). Consultation with people before final decision was taken was a major instrument which Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his rightly guided caliphs employed in their administrations and this enabled them record great success in their time. Consultation with people which is termed democracy, in the words of Robert Jordan is one of the most common practical devices for limiting the authority of people in government and preserving the liberty of the individual. (Robert Jordan 1985:26)

Conclusion

This paper no doubt points out that authority has a very great role to play in eradicating indiscipline in our society. The illustrations of those who have used authority wisely and judiciously to alleviate the high standard of moral quality is indicative enough that if authority is effectively and judiciously used, it will help a great deal in arresting moral bankruptcy in our society and it will help in redeeming our immoral image before the international communities. It should be noted that it is only good use of authority which can correct our immoral acts both within and outside the country. This we can do by using authority to enforce compliance of the laws by the leaders and the generality of the people.

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