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Pakistan, Turkey: Islamising everything - Is Erdogan the brightest face of moderate Islam?

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Turkey, Erdogan and “Moderate” Islam

In his latest statement, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared women without babies to be ‘incomplete’. “Rejecting motherhood means giving up on humanity,” he continued, adding, “I would recommend having at least three children.”

This is one of the many statements he has given recently in an onslaught against Turkish women. Previously, he said that family planning wasn’t a part of Islam. “People talk about birth control, about family planning. No Muslim family can understand and accept that,” he declared.

Erdogan, with these statements, has established himself as a hardline Islamist, who is surprisingly leading one of the first secular, modern, Muslim-majority nation states. In a famous 2013 speech, he clearly and openly said women were not equal to men.

“Our religion has defined a position for women: motherhood,” Erdogan said. He added by saying, “Some people can understand this, while others can’t. You cannot explain this to feminists because they don’t accept the concept of motherhood.”

Erdogan, who for many, is the brightest face of moderate Islam called the term ‘moderate Islam’ itself to be vile and offensive a few years back.

While he is actively campaigning to Islamize his country, Turkey has been an active member of NATO. In fact, Turkey commanded International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2002, after US invaded Afghanistan. Besides that, Turkey has long been lobbying to get a full membership of European Union.

Appearing to be a modern state, ready to become a full member of EU at one side, while Islamising the country internally at full throttle sounds familiar - at least for us, the Pakistanis.

When US was our greatest ally against the Communist Russia, and dollars and arms came home limitless, one dictator Zia ul Haq was Islamising the constitution - curbing freedom and violating all sorts of human rights.

Being a proponent of Islamism, Zia neither took jokes, nor criticism - same as Erdogan, who recently forced Germany to take action against a comedian, Jan Böhmermann for “insulting the president”. What did the comedian do? Read a satirical poem on Erdogan.

His assault on Turkish comes at the same time when Council of Islamic Ideology announced ‘lightly beating’ your wife was fine. As differing explanations were given by scholars of various schools of thought, Chairman Shirani said a man can beat his wife but has to make sure it doesn’t break any of

her bone.

The “Protection of women against violence” proposal by CII further bans coeducation, female nurses attending male patients and airhostesses, to mention the few.

This proposal resulted in an angry outburst on social media, as people from all walks of life condemned it. Many, however, found it perfectly according to the teachings of Islam.

The discussion that ensued revealed an interesting trend of contextualising violence. One Quranic verse, which has often been used to justify the acts of violent husbands, and which of course, would be one of the references used by CII to propose their ‘beating lightly’ clause, was under discussion on social media.

There were various interpretations of this specific verse. Some said it was used as a metaphor. Some insisted it only meant hitting with a handkerchief. Some proposed looking at the Sunnah of Prophet to see if he ever beat his wives. And for some, it was what many Islamic scholars in the past had interpreted – that in a situation when your wife is being disobedient, you can hit her.

In this discussion, the most active group was of ‘Islamic feminists’. As the term implies, this group of young women (and men) identify themselves as Muslims, insist that Islam has given enough rights to women and it is truly feminist in nature.

If being the follower of a religion wasn’t enough, this group associates itself to a modern-day ideology as well. Isn’t this an oxymoron? If you claim Islam has given enough rights to women, why do you need to be called a feminist as well? Isn’t being called a Muslim enough?

This group contextualises most of the teachings of religious scripture, often overlooking some parts not favoring them. In the debate, that this group tries to win by mixing the teachings of religious scripture with modern-day, secular ideas, it is mostly on the losing end.

This unfortunate practice of integrating religion with today’s ideas has become a part of Pakistan, which is named as “Islamic Republic of Pakistan.” The Objectives Resolution, which claims the sovereignty belongs to Allah contradicts the idea of a democratic republic, in which the people are sovereign.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto continued this impossible mix with his ‘Islamic Socialism’, which again had disastrous results for Pakistan.

What Liaquat Ali Khan started with Objectives Resolution was continued empowered by Ayub Khan, continued by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and concluded by Zia ul Haq.

This utter confusion of which, like Pakistan, Turkey is also becoming a victim, must be cleared once and for all. This is 21st century. The world is inching towards progressiveness with each passing day and in these times, when Muslims don’t consult their religion before buying a smartphone or signing up for Facebook, it’s best for us apply this personal secularization to all other aspects of our lives – be it political or social.

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P.S.

* <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2016/06/10/comment/islamising-everything/>

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