NATURE-BASED RELIGION

(the innate nature of religion in Islamic theology)

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Feb.2017

***Abstract**: Fitrah is a specific state of initiation and is applied to the issues which are present at the time of the first creation of human beings and are not acquired. The claim of the present article is to show Islamic principles in three aspects of belief, act, and ethics are rooted in the first creation of human being and are inborn.*

***Key words**: Fitrah, Tinat, logic, belief, act, morality, Islam, religion, Tuhid*

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Introduction

Fitrah فطرت is derived from Fitr فطر meaning beginning and fitrah is a special kind of beginning.[1] The innate issues (Fitri) are those affairs which are present at the time of ***first creation*** of human beings and human beings by entering this world bring them with themselves. In other words, they are not acquirable, although experience and attempt can have a great role in flourishing Fitrah.

Here we offer that Islam is a religion which is inborn, innate which means that the principles and basis of Islam i.e.

beliefs, actions, ethics are all traced back to the first creation of human beings and they are not subjects which can be attained in all aspects.

This claim is not only specific to the last religion i.e. Islam, but all holy religions as they are seething from the same source, have this feature in common: the holy Prophets are sent by God, the One and the Only One to people. Therefore, their teachings should be identical and no difference among them is acceptable. This point is clearer in the realm of beliefs which includes reports about realities in comparison to the other sections of religion. The only difference among religions regarding this point is the fact that a part of truth has been given to the last Prophet and not the other prophets. But in Sharia شریعت (the religious laws), the differences may result from time and place difference. For example, as the religion of Prophet is the Final religion, its rules and regulations are easier than rules and regulations explained by other prophets.

Due to the distortions and changes, religions have been going through different nations and some discrepancies broke up among these religions. The holy Quran says, "

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ

"The only religion with Allah is Islam (submission). Those to whom the Book was given disagreed among themselves only after knowledge had been given to them being insolent among themselves." (3:19)

This verse introduces the religion of all prophets was "Islam" and asserts that the differences among followers of holy religions is the consequence of sins and distortions. In this verse, this Single religion is called Islam. In some other verses also we can see this naming. For example, in the following verse, Ibrahim (p.b.u.h.) has been named as a Muslim and "Hanif" (حنیف):

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

"No, Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Nazarene. He was of pure faith, a submitter (Muslim). He was never of the idolaters." (3:67)

Islam means to surrender: surrender in heart and in practice. But to surrender, a guideline is needed. Whatever prophets bring for people, i.e. religion, is the process to this surrender; a surrender in heart in which beliefs are compatible with truth and a practical surrender by putting religious rules into practice: "***"The only religion with Allah is Islam (submission)."***

حنیف "Hanif" is derived from a root means interested in something, having tendency towards something; it means a straight path and also an individual who

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becomes interested in the straight path or is avoiding a distorted religion. The followers of Islam are called Hanif. Because they become interested in the straight religion.

Universality of Fitrah

In traditions, Fitrah is not an attribute specifically given to some human beings; in fact, all human beings enjoy fitrah and Fitrah is born with them. It is narrated from Prophet of Islam that: “

ما من نفس تولد الا على الفطره

Every soul is created while he has fitrah.[2]

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said regarding the universality of Fitrah:

ان الله عزوجل خلق الناس كلهم على الفطره التى فطر هم عليها

From the verse 30 of surah Rome we can infer the universality of fitrah; because the word “ al-nas” (الناس) , is famous because of its general application. Therefore, all human beings have specific fitrah and creation which is endowed to them by God. Even thought, Fitrah or fitrah-bound affairs are divided into common fitrah shared by all human beings and specific fitrah given to some human beings or to a group of human beings. In other words, the truth that all human beings have fitrah does not reject this idea that human beings can have different fitrah. It means that all can have common fitrah or can have common fitrah and specific fitrah together. While discussing fitrah, it should be clarified that we are speaking about common or specific fitrah.

Beliefs Inborn-Base:

The holy Quran said about beliefs which is inborn and innate that,

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Therefore set your face to the religion purely, the upright creation upon which He originated people. There is no changing of the creation of Allah. This is the valuable religion, although most people do not know?” (30: 30)

This verse invites his addressee to the straight path and named it as a religion upon which He originated people; fitrah which human beings are created with and is not changeable. At the end, He said an upright religion is the one which is upon fitrah.

In traditions, fitrah and Hanif have the same meaning and in their interpretations, the gnosis of God and Unity of God have been mentioned. From the holy Prophet of Islam, we have received that “*Each baby is born with fitrah and the meaning of fitrah is*

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knowing the fact that God is his/her creator" and the verse 25 of surah Luqmān asserted this.

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"If you ask them: 'Who has created the heavens and the earth? ' They will reply: 'Allah. ' Say: 'Praise belongs to Allah! ' But most of them do not have knowledge."(31:25)"[3]

The true religion is the one which is based on Fitrah, a religion which its base, i.e. the gnosis of God, is present in fitrah and creation of human beings and this fitrah is not changeable.

In traditions, the subject of the Unity of God is also mentioned as a part of fitrah[4]; Because the gnosis upon which human beings is originated includes the Unity of God and human beings know The One and Only God in their nature.

According to the verses and traditions, this gnosis traces back to pre-world-creation and God gathered all human beings in a world or worlds before this world; he introduces Himself to them directly and after this recognition, they confessed to His being God. This recognition has remained in their soul and they has been entering the world by this recognition.

1. The innateness of this recognition "in religious practices and worships:

The gnosis of God and the unity of God which are the foundation of Islam, are the base of all human beings belief. Besides this belief, people also have practical fitrah. In traditions from Prophet, pray and worship of God are examples of Fitrah: الصلاة و هی الفطرة[5]

Human beings, after knowing God and believing in Him, by the help of Fitrah realize that they must worship their God; even though they do not know the way and steps of this worship. Due to this when they face someone who claims to be a prophet and a messenger, pay attention to his words and if he could prove rightness of his words, they can ask him to teach them how to worship. Therefore, worship is something rooted in our nature and is of fitrah-demanded subjects; human beings through fitrah can realize the necessity of worshipping the previously proved God.

2. In some traditions from Prophet, some issues related to cleansing like clipping nails, shortening beard or brushing have been mentioned as fitrah-oriented issues.[6]

These issues are of fitrah-bound reasons, because human beings by their fitrah can understand goodness of cleansing. In some traditions, it is narrated from Prophet who counted some actions like Friday major ablution, shortening beard, keeping stubble, etc. and some religious practices as Zakat in Islam's Fitrah.[7]

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Islam-Fitrah refers to those religious rules and practices which are not separable from Islam and are of permanent features of Islam, in a way that they are signs of a Muslim.

It is quoted from the wife of Uthman ibn Maz'un who complained of her husband to Prophet that my husband continuously prays and fast and does not pay attention to his family. The holy Prophet got sad and told Uthman,

لم یرسلنی الله تعالی بالرهبانیه و لکن بعثنی بالحنیفیه السهله السمحه ... فمن احب فطرتی *فمن أحبّ فطرتی* فلیستنّ بسنّتی ومن سنتی النکاح.[8]

This tradition and similar traditions introduce a simple religion, fitrah of Prophet or fitrah of religion of Prophet.

In fact, the base of Islam religion, i.e. the gnosis of God, the Unity of God and also worshipping God, purity of soul and body are of fitrah issues and human beings according to their first creation and via fitrah-reason is able to understand them. The fitrah in terms of actions and beliefs (regarding Islam and mankind) are the same, because the unity, worship and purity are of Islamic fitrah and of human beings fitrah.

The innate knowledge about ethics

In addition to beliefs and actions, human beings enjoy ethics fitrah. Human beings can differ bad from good by his fitrah reason and know that politeness and honesty, justice and thanking are praiseworthy and lie, injustice and ingratitude are blameworthy. The holy Prophet said regarding reason:

فیقع فی قلب هذا الانسان نور، فیفهم الفریضة و السنتة و الجید و الردی، الا و مثل العقل فی القلب کمثل السراج فی وسط البیت[9]

In this tradition, it is asserted that human beings by Fitrah reason and without learning know what is good and what is bad.

Imam Sadiq said, "*The servants of God recognize good actions from bad actions through reason.*"[10]

Imam 'Ali said, "*Good temper is the fruit of reason.*"[11] And "*politeness in human beings is similar to a tree which its roots is reason*".[12] And "*the fruit of reason is telling truth.*"[13]

In traditions, there are references to the nature-base of ethical virtues. Some of these traditions are about public and some for special ones. For example, from the holy Prophet, it is quoted that:

جلبت القلوب علی حب من احسن الیها و بغض من اساء الیها[14]

Imam Sadiq said,

جلبت القلوب علی حب من ینفعها و بغض من اضربها[15]

These traditions reveal that all human beings accept some actions and do not accept some other actions. But concerning special unshared-Fitrah,

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following two traditions from Prophet are significant.

ما جبل ولی الله الا علی السخاء

یطبع المومن علی کل خلق لیس الخیانه و الکذب

Therefore, some features belong to a specific group of people. These affairs can be determined for them based on the results of previous souls of them (before entering this world.) or as the prior knowledge of God is that he/she has tendency towards religion, this tendency is given to his nature. But what is obvious is that fitrah does not fade will power of human beings and human beings, even though generosity is wired in his fitrah, can be stingy and vice versa. In addition to it, human beings by practice can strengthen or weaken some fitrah-bound tendencies in themselves.

Religion and Islam Are Rooted in Nature

As we have seen in verse 30, Surah Rome, religion is counted as a fitrah-oriented issue. In traditions, sometimes Islam is counted as the example of fitrah. For example, when Abdullah ibn Sinan asked imam Sadiq about the interpretation of Fitrah verse and added "ما تلک الفطرة" (what is fitrah?), imam answered,

هی الاسلام

"It is the very Islam"[16]

In a tradition from Prophet we have read that the meaning of Fitrah in the verse fitrah is the religion of God.[17]

In interpretation of these traditions, we should say that religion includes beliefs, practices and ethics; therefore, when we say religion is fitrah-based, we mean it refers to innateness of these three aspects. In some traditions, which introduce Islam nature-bound, they undoubtedly refer to one of these three aspects; for example, in that tradition quoted by Abdullah Sinan, after interpreting fitrah as Islam, we read that:[18]

فطرهم الله حین احد میثاقهم علی التوحید

Conclusion

We have seen that human beings have fitrah. This fitrah is in three axis of beliefs, practices, and ethics and the meaning of Islam and religion being-based in nature is due to innateness of some beliefs, practices and ethical points in Islam religion.

Fitrah in some of these fitrah-oriented affairs means enjoying some insights and in some others means tendencies. The root of fitrah-oriented teachings in first part is teachings of God in the

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world before this world and the root of the fitrah-oriented teachings is nature.

Endnotes:

[1] Ibn Fares, Bi Ta, vol.4, p.510, ibn Manzor, 1410, vol.5, p.56
[2] Hindi, 1397 AH. Vol.4, p.395
[3] Usul Kafi, vol.2, p.12
[4] Ibid. vol.2,p.12
[5] Al-Mojam al-Kabir, Tabarani, vol.11, p.272
[6] Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol.3, p.6; Bihar al-Anwar, vol.76, p.68
[7] Kanzul Ummal, vol.7, p.763; Mostadrik al-Vasail, vol.7, p.12
[8] Kafi, Kolayni, vol.5, p.494
[9] Bihar al-Anwar, vol.1, p.99
[10] Usul Kafi, vol.1, p.29
[11] Ghurar al-Hikam, vol.1, p.339, no.1280
[12] Ibid, vol.2,p.109,no.2004
[13] Ibid, vol.3,p.333,no.4643
[14] Kafi, vol.4,p.381
[15] Ibid, vol.8, p.152
[16] Kulayni, ibid, vol.4,p.12
[17] Siyuti, vol.5,p.155
[18] Kulayni, ibid: vol.2, p.12

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