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Factors of Atheism as a Challenge to Effective Da'wah: An Analysis and Strategies for their Solution in Contemporary Era

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Abstract

Atheism is disbelief or lack of belief in a supreme being called God. It is opposed to "Theism" which is a belief in God and a particular religious philosophy. Although Atheism has its roots in ancient Greece; it has become a major philosophy of life after the Renaissance of Europe. Today more than 60% of Europeans consider themselves atheists and now it has become a key feature of the modern world. There is no doubt about the fact that in Muslim World, Atheism is established and widespread due to social media. In many Major cities of the Muslim world especially among the educated segments of society, Atheism is very common. Although, the number of atheists in the Muslim World is too small but it is increasing at an alarming rate. There are many factors that contributed to the rise of atheism in Europe and the same factors are now causing Atheism in the Muslim world. In this paper, a descriptive and analytical method was used to highlight the importance of the topic. Our youngsters are inclined towards atheism due to less awareness of Islam. It is recommended that parents and teacher should educate their kids about the religion of Islam.

Keywords: Atheism, Factors, Challenges, Da'wah strategies, Solution. Contemporary era

1. Introduction

The Muslim Ummah is facing many problems in general and Atheism is one of them. Islam and atheism are two different concepts. Islam does believe on the oneness of Allah Almighty whereas atheism negates the existence of God and portrays religion as a danger for humanity and peace. The idea of denying the

existence of God has always existed in different forms since ancient ages. However, atheism increased rapidly in Europe and the rest of the world in the eighteenth century. It is absence of faith in God or other supernatural beings. Atheists don't practice any religion and typically believe that there isn't enough proof to back up the existence of a higher power. Some agnostics may intentionally reject the existence of gods, while others may just lack faith in the absence of compelling proof. Since this is one of the most agonizing problems because it directly affects the faith of a Muslim. It means deviating from the right path and to turn away from religion. In Atheism, one can adopt baseless things about metaphysical beings and misinterpret religious rules and regulations. It can mislead individuals and turn them away from their religious obligations. The rise of atheism in Muslim countries might cause conflict between secular and non-secular systems because Muslim countries have their own social (worship, marriage, rituals), economic (interest-free banking system, Zakat system), and legal systems (criminal and social laws) which are guided primarily by Qur'an and Hadith. Muslims are facing many socio-political and religious challenges due to so called modernism. One of the main challenges that is being faced by the all communities is Atheism. Atheism is spreading fast in all religions and civilizations. Basically, it is a lack of belief in God, gods or any supernatural being. Atheism has become a serious challenge for Muslim societies also. Atheists are preaching their thoughts and beliefs through social media. So it is important to explore the meaning and background. This study will also highlight the factors, challenge and Dawah strategies of Muslims in order to overcome Atheism.

2. Literature Review

Atheism is one of core challenges in Muslim communities. In Pakistan, most of the people are followers of Islam but unfortunately younger generation is moving towards Atheism. Scholars are writing down about Atheism. Islam clearly condemned atheism and warns the believers to stay away from the path of devil. Different article and books have been written on this topic.

- Sam Harris, an American atheist writer, published 'The End of Faith' in 2004. He refutes religious concepts and describes religion's destructive impact on human life. This text is regarded as the birthplace of scientific atheism.
- Richard Dawkins' 2006 book 'The God Delusion' is another popular work on scientific atheism. He is known as the prophet of new atheism. He has a vast global audience of readers and fans. His book is the best-selling book in both Europe and the United States.
- Daniel C. Dennett wrote 'Darwin's Dangerous Idea' to highlight the importance of natural selection theory.

In 2007, Christopher Hitchens, one of the new atheists' founding members, published the book "God is Not Great." He believes that religions are man-made desire with no relation to a supernatural creator.

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- Michel Onfray published 'Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam' in 2005. The author attempts demonstrate how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam stifled desire, pleasure, knowledge, and science.
- Paul Kurtz published 'Forbidden Fruit' in 2008, arguing the feasibility of secular ethics. He considers that it is possible to live a decent and moral life despite believing in any religion.
- Sam Harris published 'Islam and the Future of Tolerance' in 2015. This book is a debate between an atheist and a liberal Muslim titled Majid Nawaz. In this book, Sam Harris contends that Islam is incapable of bringing about change in the context of extremism, whereas Majid Nawaz believes that Islam has the potential to eradicate extremism and intolerance. Abul Feda bin Masood wrote 'Blasting the Foundations of Atheism,' in which he focused on the point raised in the book 'The God Delusion' about the presence of God.

3. Research Gap and Research Methodology

Therefore, this research will try to explore the Factors of Atheism as a Challenge and present the solution of in the contemporary era. Study from this perspective has never been done before, so this research will help to fill the gap in literature. This research is descriptive and analytical in nature. Data has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Then recommendations have been given to highlight the importance of the topic.

4. Back ground of Atheism

The word Atheism is derived from the ancient Greek word “atheos” which means “without god”.¹ The Arabic word for Atheism “**Lahad (لاحد)**” is used for the person who goes towards oppression, aggression and conflict. Dictionary of Philosophy said about atheism:

“A system of views rejecting faith in the supernatural (spirits, gods, life beyond the grave, etc.)”². Webster Dictionary defines: "The belief that there is no God".³ Atheists actually do not believe in God or any supernatural being. Atheists denied the Creator, Master, and Lord of this universe. Atheists believe that the universe or its substance is eternal. The changes in the universe are determined by chance or by the nature of matter. In Islamic language, the word atheist is used for the unlucky person who deviates from right teachings and negates the existence of ALLAH Almighty. The prime purpose of the atheist is to put effort to get worldly pleasures. They do not have any interest in metaphysical being. They do believe that a rational approach is sufficient to cherish worldly pleasures. The concept of atheism is not a new one. It has been an old subject of discussion. This concept has existed in human societies over a long period of time but it could not gain power due to the preaching of the Prophets of Allah. Resultantly, most people have been following the concept of one God or Polytheism. Every age saw the advent of Atheism and efforts have

been made for its spread in societies. Atheism has been discussed and welcomed in multiple societies and it is spoiling people, especially the young generation. As per the perception of Atheists, this universe has been created because of Big Bang.⁴ In the life of the Holy prophet PBUH, there were people who believed on the one hand and there were people who were non-believers, on the other. For such people, the specific word “*Dahr or Ilhad*” has been used in the Holy Quran.

وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ وَمَا لَهُم بِدَلِيلٍ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنَّ هُمْ إِلَّا يَطُنُّونَ⁵

"And they say, "There is no life but our worldly life. We die and live, and nothing destroys us except time." They have no knowledge about that; they do nothing but make conjectures."

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا لَا يَخْفَوْنَ عَلَيْنَا أَفَمَنْ يُلْقَى فِي النَّارِ خَيْرًا مِمَّنْ يَأْتِي آمِنًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ اعْمَلُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ⁶

"Surely those who adopt perversity about Our verses are not hidden from Us. So, tell me which one is better: the one who is thrown into the Fire, or the one who will come safely on the Day of Judgment? Do whatever you wish. He is watchful of whatever you do."

4.1. Atheism in modern world

Nowadays, with so much freedom of speech, the idea of atheism is growing significantly. Secularism and liberalism are terms used to refer to atheism in the modern world. There has been a significant shift in the way the average person views life. They believe that we are seeking the full spectrum of happiness. Because of this, they won't give a damn about how they'll acquire their basic needs. Today's man has a different perspective on life because of the swift advancements in science and technology. They have been contesting the existence of God and posing several other questions. Today's man behaves in a manner akin to that of an animal, whose only needs are food and rest. "Just put effort to do something for the betterment of today" is how they view life. With the most followers of any religion, atheism presently makes up 16.4% of the global population and is one of the religions with the quickest rate of growth.⁷ There are a few causes for the modern atheism's widespread adoption.

5. The main factors of Atheism in perspective of Pakistan

Pakistan was emerged in the map of history in 1947 on the name of Islam. The prime reason behind the creation of Pakistan was two nation theory which differentiate Muslims and non-Muslims. According to the 2017 Census, Muslims make up 96.2 percent of Pakistan's population, Hindu 1.6 percent, Christian 1.59 percent, Scheduled Castes 0.25 percent, Ahmadi 0.22 percent, and other minorities 0.07 percent.⁸ Atheism is spreading gradually in Pakistan due to the unfair use of freedom of expression. At a very low pace people are getting inside Atheism. They almost left the true teachings of Islam. There are

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many reasons for people turning towards Atheism in Pakistan. Different things compel them to change their approach towards religion. A few reasons for the spread of Atheism in Pakistani society are as under:

5.1. Extremism

The first reason for the advent of Atheism in Pakistan is so called religious leaders who had interpreted negative and harsh image of Islam.

They are going to say that Islam is very orthodox religion. They are attaching extremism with

The Religion of Islam. For Example, Taliban and other extremist groups are defaming the name of Islam by attacking and killing innocent masses. Infact Islam is a religion of peace and harmony. Allah Almighty said in Quran

*“Anyone who murders any person who had not committed murder or horrendous crimes, it shall be as if he murdered all the people. And anyone who spares a life, it shall be as if he spared the lives of all the people”.*⁹

5.2. Liberalism

Liberalism and Islam are two distinct and complex ideologies with a variety of thoughts, actions, and interpretations. Liberalism is a political and philosophical worldview that promotes individual liberties, human rights, equality, and little government intrusion. It developed in the 17th and 18th centuries during the Enlightenment. Another prime reason for the wide spread Atheism in Pakistan is the broadminded scholars who are going to spoil the image of Islam. They are saying religion and worldly affairs are separate matters. Atheist teachers are also one of the reasons for the spread of atheism. Atheist teachers and lecturers in higher educational institutions are spoiling the innocent minds of children. The NGOs are also focusing on the early education of the children so that they can capture the minds of the children from the very beginning.

5.3. Poverty

Poverty in Pakistan is a significant and complex issue that has persisted for many years. It stems from a combination of social, economic, political, and geographic factors. Poverty is also a big reason behind atheism. When people have no job then they are not following any God due to have less faith on God. Rich persons are not supporting poor members of the society. Rich is becoming richer and poor is becoming poorer. It is due to the unfair distribution of wealth. Holy Qur'an declares it in Surah 43 verse 32.

5.4. Less religious family background

One of the biggest reasons for Atheism among Muslims is their dissuasion from Islam. Generally, children are not getting any proper guidance about religious obligations in their homes. Religion has become less important in their homes. So, becoming an Atheist is not a surprising thing in the modern context. Allah said in the Holy Quran.

“When it is said to them: “Follow what Allah has sent down,” they say: “Instead, we would follow that (religion) on which we have found our fathers.” Is it so, even though their fathers had no understanding at all, nor had they been on the right path? ¹⁰

5.5. Materialistic point of view

It is also a major cause of inclination towards Atheism. Man is usually influenced by outward things. Materialistic person put a relatively high priority on making a lot of money and having many possessions. Muslims today are putting effort to get the pleasures of this world. They are forgetting the Islamic concept that this life is a trial for Muslims. Muslims are instructed not to be too passionate with the temporary world; in hoarding wealth for their sustenance in life. The Holy Quran says:

“Know well that the worldly life is but a play and an amusement, and a show of beauty, and exchange of boastful claims between you, and a competition of increase in riches and children”. ¹¹

Therefore, a materialistic person has placed more importance on possessions rather than people. They often talk about money.

5.6. Empiricism

Empiricists are mostly going to concentrate on experience and observation. An atheist believes there is nothing beyond the natural except in the sense of natural phenomena that we don't yet understand.¹² “The view, that reason is the only guide leading to the improvement and progress of the human race and that adherence to religious or other non-rational beliefs, is outdated.¹³

5.7. The Indulgence in Self-Desires

There are some people who think to satisfy themselves with cardinal pleasures. They do not bother to think about religion anymore.

“So, have you seen him who has taken his desires as his god, and Allah has let him go astray, despite having knowledge, and has sealed his ear and his heart, and put a cover on his eye? Now who will guide him after Allah? Still, do you not take lesson?”¹⁴

5.8. Religious Strictness

Sometimes it happens that our religious scholars impose their own particular ideology upon their listeners. It creates frustration among individuals. Therefore, Children sometimes find Islamic teachings difficult. They want to ask questions from religious scholars and when scholars are unable to reply them, they move in different directions in utter confusion. Islam commands its followers to be kind and polite. The Holy Qur'an says:

“There is no compulsion in Religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error.” ¹⁵

This is another problem we face nowadays and is one of the main reasons behind people's closeness to Atheism.

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5.9.Environment of the House

Another factor behind the increase of Atheism is the behaviour and conduct of the parents. All people living under one roof differ in ideas and thoughts from one another. Too much rigorousness at houses distracts our young generation from the right path. When parents impose things and do not guide their children properly then they become astray. When our children observe that their parents have less interest in their personal matters then they move out to get assistance from other people showing some kindness and interest. People are attracted to Atheism when they cannot find any answer to the mental queries.

5.10. Negative Role of social media

Unfortunately, social media is spreading frustration and anxiety among people. There is no check and balance upon the posts and news which are shared on it. General public upload different videos on social media. There is unlimited freedom of expression. There are people who have secular and liberal thoughts and ideas. They openly come on TV, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to propagate their views.

5.11. Lack of Government Interest

It is the responsibility of the government to provide an Islamic atmosphere in an Islamic country. They have to take proper actions to ensure the implementation of Islamic teachings.

Government should check properly what is happening on electronic, print and social media. The government has made a department named PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority) but it does not work according to Islamic teachings.

5.12. Moderate Muslims

Non-practicing Muslims do create a bad impression of Islam. Moderate Muslims are those who are just born in the family of a Muslim but they are not following Islam practically. The result is that people take the wrong impression of Islam. A non-Muslim layman begins to believe in the wrong portrayal of Islam.

6. Challenges of Atheism

Due to the promotion of Atheism, Pakistani society, in particular, and the world, in general, are facing serious challenges. We can consider the morality of our people today and how the teachings of Islam have been harmed? As per the instructions of Islam, no one is superior or inferior; all are equal. But unfortunately, wrong and mistaken interpretations are made in Islam. Different sects among people are generated. One sect blames the other for inventing new things in Islam. Everyone thinks of themselves as the true Muslim on the right path and calls fellow Muslims as infidel.

6.1.Loss of Morality

When people are leaving the religion of Islam, automatically society falls into the depth of moral degradation. This gives birth to element of immorality and every second, one man is directly or indirectly affected by it. The culture of pornography has become very common, nowadays. Then Allah's command becomes important that says that he will bring in Muslims' place another Ummah, Allah says:

*“If He so wills, He can remove you, O men, and bring others (in your place). Allah has the power to do that”.*¹⁶

6.2.Atheism in the Curriculum and Education system

Atheism threatens the education system to a great extent. We have many examples of our new generation being affected with pornographically material. Similarly, the co- education system makes a bad impact on the minds of the students.

6.3. Focus of the worldly life

The concentration on this world and attraction to worldly pleasures is the root cause of man's immorality. He forgets that this life is temporary. As Allah said:

-
Know well that the worldly life is but a play and an amusement, ¹⁷

And Allah says in Quran:

For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no one to guide, and He leaves them wandering blindly in their rebellion.¹⁸

6.4.Withdrawal from Social Norms

When a man has no faith then he also withdraws from good moral values and social norms.

6.5.Unlimited Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is a good thing but disrespect and blasphemy is committed by many astray Muslims in the name of it.

6.6.Anxiety

People with anxiety disorders frequently have intense and permanent fear about every situation. A man who denies Allah and his messenger is always pessimistic. He becomes uncertain about everything especially about Allah and life hereafter.

7. Dawah Strategies for their Solution

It is our responsibility to make efforts to minimize Atheism from Pakistan. Government should also take this matter seriously and should arrange proper precautionary steps to address this issue of Atheism and to solve it. Proper measures should be taken on Federal as well Provincial levels to eliminate Atheism from Pakistani Society. Following da'wah strategies may be adopted to minimize Atheism from Pakistan:

7.1. Religious Atmosphere in Homes

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Basically, training of individual starts from home. Parents should ensure to give basic knowledge of Islam to their children. Parents should inspire their children so that they can protect their children from the fire of hell.

“O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from a fire, the fuel of which is human beings and stones....., who do not disobey Allah in what He orders them, and do whatever they are ordered to do.”¹⁹

When parents see something against Islamic teachings being practiced in their home they should properly act according to the situation and guide their children with love and affection so that actions and behavior will be liked by Allah so they may make Allah happy.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

Each one of you is responsible and each one will be asked about his subordinates.²⁰

Some tips that assist you to take a start:

7.2.Soft Behaviour of the Parents

Many times, parents become very aggressive towards their children. Parents have a responsibility of implementing Islamic rules in their houses wisely. But they need to keep this in mind that Islam is the religion of love and peace. Parents need to be kind and polite with their children. If they do anything wrong then they should guide them politely.

7.3.Accountability of Family Members

Guardians should maintain a proper check and balance on family members. Some time when Youngsters feel some emotional problems then they are more comfortable to discuss their issues with others as compared to their parents. Parents should be aware of the activities of their children. They should check out the activities of them. If they observe something strange then they should do proper counseling of them.

7.4.Role of the Religious Scholars

Our scholars should improve their knowledge regarding Islam and current affairs. They should be aware what is going on in the world and how we can cope up with the tricks of Atheists.

7.5.Role of PEMRA

Pakistan has been created in the name of Islam. So, Government should take positive steps to make Pakistan more Islamic. In this regard PEMRA should be more vigilant in checking the stuff going aired on the TV and social media. Allah says in the Holy Quran.

“O you who believe, if a sinful person brings you a report, verify its correctness, lest you should harm a people out of ignorance, and then become remorseful on what you did.”²¹

7.6.Adoption of the Real Spirit of Islam

Unity among Muslims is very important and Sectarianism is something which Atheists use against us by brain washing our younger generation. Atheists

emphasize Muslims kill one another as they are not sincere. They further promote that this religion is not the best one as all Muslims claim all over the World. Allah says in the Holy Quran.

*“Hold fast, all of you, to the cord of Allah, and be not divided.”*²²

We have to stand united under the flag of Islam as one great nation and should not create divisions among ourselves and should not fight with one another.

8. Invitational Strategies for the Prevention of Atheism

Through social media, we know about the quick spreading of Atheism. So, following steps may be taken to cope up the situation.

- The Da’wah of Islamic teachings should be expanded on a large scale and this Da’wah should be given in a proper way. For instance, there may awareness lectures in schools or in social media may be organized.
- Curriculum should be redesigned. It should be based upon teachings of the Quran and Sunnah and the young generation should be made to practically act upon. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that it may inculcate the spirit of questioning and investigation among the students.
- Workshops should be organized in the big institutions, in the big mosque of the college area and according to the age in which youngsters, women and parents may learn something and change themselves. Similarly, this work should be done on a monthly basis by forming a team or panel of teachers and competent persons at the highest level in the universities.
- There is a need to create software and website pages and blogs that are helpful in this regard. Be present 24 hours a day in this panel / team so that people from every field can give a good reasonable answer to their question immediately.
- Raising awareness through books, articles, radio programs, TV channels, websites and various social programs to make people aware of its horrors and the seriousness of its consequences on society and human life.
- Government should support the preachers of the mosques and the scholars and sheikhs to counter the growing tribulations of Atheism.
- Various principles have been stated regarding the invitation which are related to the psychology of the addressee and there are also some ethical principles which, if observed, have an effect on the matter.

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ²³

“Invite (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel. And argue with them in the best of manners...”

9. Conclusion

Atheism refers to the denial of the existence of Almighty God. A society where atheistic thinkers are on the rise that is on the verge of destruction. People with atheistic ideas, especially the youth, fall prey to many social and cultural,

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spiritual and moral, mental and psychological evils. Today our society is surrounded by many moral and social obscenities. In these circumstances, it is the duty of Muslim scholars in a Muslim society to shed light on the nature of Atheism and its causes, to refute atheistic ideas through scientific arguments, and to adopt policies in the education and training of the younger generation. The definition, history and nature of Atheism have been highlighted in this article for the same purpose.

Recommendations:

- Dawah research center may be established to spread the exact picture of Islam.
- Muslim scientist should come forward to find out new scientific researches that support religion.
- A comprehensive religious understanding of Qur'an, Hadith and Islamic Beliefs should be given to Muslim youth.
- The course 'Philosophy of Science' should be added in the traditional and religious (Madaras) education curriculum.
- Muslim scholars with sound scientific knowledge should come forward and response atheist.
- Atheist organizations are heavily funded to promote atheist ideology. Muslim Governments and universities should announce projects to defend the atheists' ideology.
- Muslim world and the people of rest of world while portraying them terrorists and danger for them. Muslim scholars should keep these both aspects in mind while responding them.



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