

Analysing *Juma* Sermons

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ABSTRACT

Juma sermons have been used as a platform to disseminate knowledge from the day of its start. It was never confined with the religious knowledge only because in Islam there is no division of sacred and profane. Consequently anything delivered comes under the preview of religion. Its importance has also been realised by organisations and tried to use them for their purpose in India. Its emerging popularity as a medium to disseminate knowledge attracted to enquire and understand the message delivered, its nature and approaches used. This paper is an attempt in the fore mentioned direction. Of course in India, various religious movements have emerged in due course of time with slight differences of their ideologies. These ideologies reflects in their activities so in their Juma sermons. In this study, six major religious movements of India have been covered with the presupposition that they cover directly or indirectly the entire Muslim population of India. Two sermons from the headquarters' mosque of each movement have been recorded simultaneously to maintain the standardisation. Finally, the paper puts forth that social issues are, if discussed does not have the scientific or practical approach in offering the solutions.

Key words: Juma Semons, analysis, ideologies, no scientific/practical approach, offering solutions

The importance of *Juma* sermons has been established when organizations like UNICEF used them as the media for social marketing of the polio campaign setting Muslims as the target group. They hired religious teachers, who usually deliver the *juma* sermons, and asked them to favour the campaign so that the reluctant Muslim community may come forward. This has been used as the main and fundamental medium to propagate the message and brought a very good success. Expecting the same and realizing its importance UNICEF is planning to use it again for its war against AIDS, though personally I do not feel both the issues comparable because of their different natures in the realm of religion. The first was for the people who were eager to confirm the religion and the second for those who are not only willing to deviate but already deviated from it.

Juma is a special weekly prayer offered on the day of *juma* (Friday). Offering five time daily prayer is one of the fundamental pillars of Islam but *juma* prayer has its own importance as mentioned in the religious books of Islam and as it is practiced by Muslims. A sermon is an

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essential part of this prayer without which the prayer cannot be performed and is called *juma* sermon.

Sermons, of course, have great significance in opinion formation within the related community and work as agencies to promote awareness, revival and reformation. Sermons (*khutba*) are delivered on various occasions like *Eid ul Fitr*, *Eid ul Zuha* and *juma*. Apart from these, some religious gatherings are also organised with the motive of self reformation through the media of sermons. Of all the occasions *juma* is the most important and effective because of its high frequency. It is weekly while *Eid* is annual and the others only occasional.

Through sermons religious teachers express their thoughts and ideas. These ideas and ideological stances can also be found in books written by many of them. However, ideas reflected through the text cannot match up to the sermons for the simple reason that the masses that form the most important component of the sermons either do not have access to the books or cannot read the language in which these books are written. Also, sermons are more important than books because lecture delivery includes gestures, vocal stress and many more things to make the audience understand better than books. Another important distinguishable point between writing and speaking is that most of the time people hesitate to put on paper what they would spontaneously be vocal about.

While it is safe to argue that *juma* sermon constitutes a different category among other available sources, it is necessary to explore the mode and range of its impact upon the target group.

Methodology

A content analysis of the sermons has been undertaken. In social sciences it is a methodology for studying the content of communication. It is defined as the study of recorded human communication such as books, paintings etc. When it comes to selection of the sermons a valid question may be raised on how to select the most appropriate number of representative sermons from among thousands that too with intra community diversity. Muslim community in India has thousands of mosques where *juma* prayer is offered. Moreover, these mosques are not homogenous in terms of their suprarreligious beliefs. Therefore, sampling technique was felt the best answer to this question and was applied.

Applying sampling technique must have some logical base that may ensure representations from all homogenous groups of the target community. So it is felt that popular religious movements of the country may provide a valid base for sampling because each and every Muslim and of course the mosques, directly or indirectly, have some level of agreement with one of these movements. So five popular, national level movements have been identified and considered as stratum. These are: Ahle Hadees, Barelwi, Jamat Islami, Jameeatul Ulma and Tablighi Jamat. Shia which is a sect and not a movement was not included in sample.

The selected movements are spread across the country and each of them has thousands of mosques where *juma* is being offered. So the question of sampling remains yet valid. Fortunately all five movements have visible organizational structure and therefore headquarters. So it is felt

appropriate to take the sermons from mosques located at the headquarters of the selected movements. Further to put all the samples into the similar context of time it is decided to record them on the same day. Two sermons have been taken as sample from each Mosque.

Discussion

Research has proved that the development of scientific knowledge and temperament will gradually weaken the sense of religiosity. An instance favouring this assertion can be seen here also. Muslims very well know that offering five times prayer daily is must for a believer and *juma* that appears weekly and valued a little more, is one of them. But due to diminishing religiosity the ratio of Muslims offering daily prayer is very less, though offering *Juma* is still considered necessary by most of them. The question that arises here is whether considering *juma* vital is because of elevated religiosity or something else? There are indicators that negate religiosity and subscribe that social pressure is the motto behind. Performing *juma* in shortened manner is one of the indicators of declining religiosity but simultaneously presence of social pressure does not allow its performance to be left out. Another indicator that favours the cause of social pressure is the arrival of the majority of people to the mosque at the exact time of its start though religiosity asks them to come much before it starts and remain till late to perform the supererogatory prayers. Despite this, there is a category of people who come early but leave the mosque immediately after the obligatory prayer ends that is without performing the supererogatory prayers. The supererogatory prayers are not compulsory like the main part but are not to be treated as less important though one can forego them in pressing situations. A study made to find out reason of this behaviour reveals that people who come early to the mosque do so merely out of fear of not getting a proper place in it and not due to a deep sense of religiosity.

Sermon being an essential part of *Juma* prayer has a sacred nature. All times it starts with the recitation of *Qura'n* (the holy book of Islam) and *Hadith* (sayings of Prophet Mohammad s.a.w) since it has been a common practice to begin all the sacred duties by such recitations. The Quranic recitations are in Arabic language which is of course not the language of the masses in India. To make the audience understand, sometimes full and sometimes part of the recitations are translated and explained in detail in Urdu or the regional language. Normally it takes fifteen to thirty minutes.

It is noticed that the *Imam* (religious teacher who delivers the sermon) generally selects portions from *Qura'n* and *Hadith*, that he feels appropriate for deliberation at the given period. His selection of themes may range from behavioural, family, marriage, evil practices of the society, education, neighbourhood to political issues and so on, but his first and foremost endeavour is to base his sermon on at least a verse from the *Qura'n* or one saying from *Hadith*. On the basis of the verse or the saying of the prophet (s.a.w) and sometimes both, he tries to explain the whole issue. Often, historical references, that too of the golden Islamic period only, are also used during the explanations. Consequently, most of the sermons turn round the ideal period of Islam. Social issues, if chosen by the speaker, remain in isolation from the real context. Solutions are also offered in the same context of idealism and not on the basis of 'the best possible' approach.

References to current and very well accepted documents are also found, but on rare occasions. For example, reference to the Sachar Report while talking about backwardness of the community in general and educational backwardness in particular is found in one of the sermons. At the same time it is also felt that the reference of Sachar committee was just a passing reference because the speaker simply mentioned its name saying that ‘Sachar committee also reported the same’. After this mention the speaker turned to his usual style focusing on theological approach of education and the whole thirty minute sermon remained barren of any idea through which Muslims can overcome their educational deprivation.

The reason for the mention of Sachar Committee seems to be ‘fashion’. Fashion is of coercive nature in itself. No one in the society can escape the influence of fashion, sooner or later, depending on their personality people succumb to it. Academic fashion includes referring to latest documents, talking about issues of recent academic value, name-dropping etc. So, in this case the coercive nature of fashion influenced the speaker to refer to the latest, most-talked-about document of the time among the academicians and the activists. Unfortunately, the whole issue opened and closed with the mere mention of the document and he could not go on with tapping the document to bring in awareness or to redress the situation.

The essence of sectoral differences is also felt in sermons. This is partially noticed in some sermons while some others are found fully loaded with it. Sometimes it is felt that sermons are being used as an instrument to fortify the sectoral boundaries by highlighting even the smaller differences and by degrading others. It does not have any positive social implication except tightening the boundaries of various sects and weakening the overall harmony of the community.

It is commonly observed that sermons always present a reformative approach and offer the performance of religious duties as remedy of all the problems. Sermons are, of course, very effective means of communication and propagation which can be used for the social betterment as well as advancement of the community. Some information about opportunities based on the needs of the local people may be added with the content of reform. It can also be made much useful by shifting it from mere idealism to practical level.