

“The Mini Dictator”

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“Al-Dictator al-Saghir”

On 30 January, 2007, as I glanced at the Kuwaiti Tanweer website; I noticed an article with this intriguing title, ***“Al-Dictator al-Saghir.”*** This Arabic title may be translated as ***“The Small Dictator,”*** or ***“The Mini Dictator.”*** Here follows my translation of the article, and my comments.

The author began with a question, *“Why did so many ordinary and educated Arabs stand up for the tyrant Saddam Hussein and defend him even after his death? And why did so many take pride that they disapproved of the hanging of the dictator, because it took place on the first day of ‘Eed al-Adha?”*

“I believe that the main reason, why both the ordinary and well educated Arabs took upon themselves to defend Saddam Hussein, is the fact that actually a mini dictator resides in our Arab-Islamic souls. It is this very dictator that causes many to beat their wives in the name of religion, or of manhood. Alas, Arab law is always on the side of the husband, regarding wife-beating as a type of discipline. This very law supports the man who commits a capital crime, on the pretext of defending the family’s honor; and hands out a mere six months jail term for the murder he committed ! Furthermore, such a criminal receives a special treatment in the prison; after all he was defending the reputation of his family! As for those laws that deal with personal status, women always receive the wrong deal. It is the same small dictator within our souls that allows us to beat our children on the pretext that we are disciplining them. It is here also that the law supports this mini-dictator.

“This small dictator does not want to be responsible to anyone. This is why we don’t even try to demand that the big dictator should be responsible for his acts. It is this very small dictator that rules the relation between the teacher and his students. Should we ignore the fact that a student is never able to ask for a review of his case when he receives a low grade for his work? Should we also ignore the tyranny we face whenever we have an application at one of the government’s departments and expect to have our problem resolved? The government’s representative behaves as if he had no regard for any law. Should we go on ignoring the fact that in all Arab countries, all prime ministers are appointed, and not one of them is elected by the people? Should we go on ignoring the fact that it is this dictator who dwells within the souls of those who send people to prison for an infringement of any law? Take for example the laws that deal with publications. As far as I know, anyone who dares to write critically of religious subjects will end in prison, all over the Arab world, with the exception of Lebanon. Do we want to deny the fact that Arab universities are nowadays nothing but intellectual prisons, in the sense that discussions are circumscribed within specific limits?”

“Isn’t it this mini dictator, residing within our Arab souls, that allows our “big” leaders to behave above the law, all the time claiming unashamedly that they rule in the name of law? This mini dictator is an Arab product par excellence. No constitution, no rule of law, can deal adequately and properly with this dictator. The reason is, that psychologically, we are predisposed to allow this mini dictator to go on living within us, in order that we, in our turn, may continue to lord it over those who are weaker than ourselves.

“Therefore, the hanging of Saddam Hussein will not lead to the “hanging” of the mini Saddam who resides in our sick souls. This is why we have witnessed many Arabs showing all kinds of grief and sorrow when the big dictator left this world.”

The author of this brief article pointed to a deep-seated problem that has persisted throughout the 1400 years of Islamic history, namely, the absence of freedom and democracy in all aspects of life. Rulers have acted as if they possessed absolute power over their subjects.

While the first caliphs were chosen by the consensus of the leaders of the Islamic Umma in Medina, the caliphate became a hereditary position after the assassination of the fourth caliph, Ali in 661 A.D. From then on, these Islamic leaders ruled as absolute monarchs. I remember in my study of the history of Islam, that one caliph assumed this title: **“Al-Hakim bi-amri-Allah”** i.e, **“The Ruler by Allah’s Command.”**

Coming to our times, most Islamic countries are under dictatorial or authoritarian regimes. This deep-rooted state of affairs clings to Islamic civilization due to the fusion of religion and politics into one entity. Since in Islam, human beings are regarded as Allah’s **‘abeed**,* it becomes normal for Allah’s representatives on earth, whether he is a caliph, or a king, or a president, to assume the role of despot or hegemon.

The author of this brief article in describing the situation within the Arab world in his sarcastic style, pointed to the **effects**, or **results** of the Islamic theory and practice of government. He did not deal with the source that breeds dictators and dictatorships. It would have been dangerous for him, to point to the undeniable fact that the Islamic tradition is responsible for the persistence of this sad state of affairs. What a hopeless prospect for more than one billion of our fellow-human beings!

***‘Abeed** is the plural of **‘abd**, the Arabic for slave. Among Arab Muslims, the name **‘Abdallah**, spelled sometimes, **‘Abdullah**, is quite popular.

Readers who are familiar with Arabic, may access the original text by going to the following URL: <http://www.kwtanweer.com/articles/readarticle.php?articleID=1371>