

Religious Diversity, Religious Tolerance and Harmony in Islam: A 21st Century Pluralistic Approach

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Abstract:

This paper examines the concept of “religious diversity”, “religious tolerance” and “Harmony in Islam “ as mentioned in the Holy Quran and how commonalities in diverse religions may be used as a model for civilization dialogue towards achieving harmony. This study reveals that religious and cultural diversity are laws of nature which cannot be changed while the concept of “identity” is a contested issue in modern discourse. Results also show that peace may be established among diverse religions through their commonalities and the best way to exploit these commonalities and to reduce the religious divide is through civilizational dialogue. The alternative dispute resolution (adr) and other methods for changing the nature of religious differences and reaching a consensus—thus arriving at a peaceful co-existence—are also discussed. It was found that people are often misguided or divided in the name of religion and culture, despite the fact that the philosophy of every religion is based on peace and harmony.

Keywords: religious diversity; religious tolerance, religious harmony, conflict transformation; conflict management; dialogue; islamic perspective

Introduction:

Now we are in 21st century. Our science, technology, astronomy and many other branches of knowledge have been developed very fast in every sphere of development at a large. And it becomes very easy to know universe’ growth, development, construction and destruction through different sources. If it is tried to see the earth from the middle point of the universe using biggest space telescope, we can’t see not only the earth but also (may be) our galaxy. It (universe) is more than infinitive. And it is the kingdom of our lord/god/ brahma/almighty allah. The all name indicates one, our creator, the creator of the universe/infinite. He knows better than us. Allah says:

“he is allah, the creator, the inventor, the fashioner; to him belongs the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting him. And he is the exalted in might, the wise.”(surat al-hashr 59:24).

“and to allah belong the best names, so invoke him by them”(surat al-a’raf 7:180).

The dalai lama once argued that there will be “no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions” [1]. The holy qur’an says: “o people of the book, let us come to a common statement/word (*kalimatinsawa'in*) between us and you...” (al-qur’an 3:64). The concept of dialogue is not a new idea; it has a lengthy and old history. Dante (1265–1321), in the 13th century, had talked about the idea of a universal community of the human race (*universalism civilitates humane generis*). Actually dante’s main thinking behind this idea was that he gave more emphasis on the principle of humanity; justice with all despite religious diversities. Nevertheless, some scholars differed in their understanding on the emergence of the concept of dialogue, believing that the concept originated post-1989. The holy quran is regarded as the words of most beneficent and most merciful allahsubhanutala. And it says about diversity, about peace, about tolerance, about harmony, about the religious plurality and its success, and about universal brotherhood. The quran provides the full code of conduct of life.

Methods and materials:

The researcher uses content and comparative analysis in examining (religious) tolerance in islamic philosophical perspectives. In addition to the content and comparative analysis the researcher uses historical method in writing this paper. Upon using the historical method the researcher will reinterpret information gathered through the following materials; books, journals and magazines, autobiographies, and various websites.

Analysis:

Many wars or conflicts in this contemporary world are related to belief of religion, in other words, intolerance between beliefs or faith. This is apparent in conflicts with muslims and other „western“ societies and sometimes within – sects. It leads to the question whether muslims can fit into the pluralistic society. The recent attack on the *charliehebd* magazine, the debate over wearing hijab, the banning the *burka* in france, outlawing minarets in switzerland, controversies of using religious symbols in germany show intolerance of religious behaviors or the lack of religious tolerance. Therefore, the concept of tolerance enables people who are from different ethnic, religious, racial, or national groups to live in peace.

Tolerance is a deliberate choice of non-interference in the conduct that one disapproves. In other words, it is an attitude of not opposing the different beliefs and practices of others that evoke the disapproval in oneself. Some political philosophers such as john rawls, rossharrison and jean hampton view tolerance as a liberal concept or as the basis for liberalism. In this view, tolerance can be flourish in the state or government that safeguards the rights of all religions and differences. But in the islamic word, it is not viewed as a liberal political concept. Further, in the western view religious tolerance has distinct characters; individual freedom of thinking, worshiping freely, propagation of one’s religion or renunciation of one’s religion. Controlling of one of these is considered as violation of rights. In the book of *the difficulty of tolerance* (2003) t.m. Scanlon describes tolerance as;

“tolerance requires us to accept people and permit their practices even when we strongly disapprove of them. Tolerance thus involves an attitude that is intermediate between wholehearted acceptance and unrestrained opposition.” (scanlon, 2003).

Still the concept of tolerance is puzzling. Certain behaviors can be tolerated and certain cannot be tolerated. We should accept that tolerance leads to costs and dangers to all of us but it is considered something that should be necessarily followed.

When a muslim does any extremist work, extremist activities, we can't blame the islam community. Here is a difference, islam never says about extremism. But in now a day's some institutions, or some parties like taliban, al qaeda, boko haram and isi, have raised a destructive/ extremist alarm in all over the world but it is quite wrong according to the quran. We should keep in mind that a true muslim follows the words of allah, cited in the holy quran and the practice of the prophet mohammad (sa). And the quran articulates several significant principles regarding inter-religious harmony, peaceful co-existence and religious pluralistic success. Several of these principles bear mentioning here.

“say, ‘we believe in god and in that which he has revealed to us and to abraham, ismail, isaac, jacob, the descendants and that which was revealed to mooses, jesus and that which was revealed to the prophets from their lord, we make no difference between one and another and we bow in submission to him’” (2:136).

“help one another in benevolence and piety, and help not one another in sin and transgression” (5:2).

The quran states, “let there be no compulsion in religion” (2:256) and “will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?” (10:99).

In islamic tradition man has given free choice to exercise his/her thought, to exercise his/her belief, to exercise his/her choice, and his/her religion. Cooperation should be based on the common good for all people. Several of these principles bear mentioning here:

“we believe in what we have been revealed to you and what is revealed, and our god and your god is one.” (al-qur'an 29:46).

“that each of us is equal; no one dominates or is better than the others: let us come to a common statement/word (kalimatinsawa'in) between us and you...and that none of us are masters/lords (araban) over the other, except god who is the master of all.” (al-qur'an 3:64).

The quran acknowledges that the common good can be discovered by all people from all religions and traditions, and that we must all strive for the good (al-qur'an 5:48)

“he made so many tribes and races and cultures among you so that you might recognize one another” (al-qur’an 49:13). These principles of peace and harmony are also the cardinal principles of christianity, hinduism, buddhism, judaism, sikhism, and other religious ideologies.

Diversity is the natural inclination which all of us have to accept in the core of our hearts. Giving space to all religions and cultures is the best way to harmonize the relations between one religious community and another. Most religions from the very beginning have been great supporters of tolerance, accommodation, and peaceful co-existence. They advocate equal rights to all people and do not differentiate human beings on the basis of color and race. The holy qur’an states that “he made so many tribes and races and cultures among you so that you might recognize one another” (al-qur’an 49:13). These principles of peace and harmony are also the cardinal principles of christianity, hinduism, buddhism, judaism, sikhism, and other religious ideologies.

Findings and conclusion:

Religion and culture were never constraints; the main constraints are politicization and the misuse of religion and culture for one’s own interests. Problems arise when one shows hatred towards other cultures and consider his own above all; this superiority complex gives birth to communalism and chauvinism which are the main hurdles people face during inter-civilization and intra-civilization conflicts. People with conflicting behavior are those who lack tolerance, accommodation, cooperation, and amity. Through civilization dialogue people of different philosophies and ideologies can minimize and mitigate their differences. The difference between christianity and islam (inter-civilization differences), and differences between the same culture and same group, such as sunniversus shea (intra-civilization differences), can be managed once both parties utilize civilization dialogue. Parties should not be silent because silence (a communication gap) can give birth to a security dilemma which can give birth to new conflicts and clashes. There are many commonalities between world religions, therefore the better way to achieving peace, consensus, peaceful co-existence, and above all cooperation would be through these commonalities; and the first tool that religious communities can use is civilization dialogue to build trust and consensus among themselves. Religious hatred, communal feelings, and radicalism are the main challenges for the modern world. Religious communities have to learn from past mistakes and to respect multiculturalism and pluralism. Religious leaders can become the torchbearers of peace and cooperation and they can teach the same in their respective religions. Religious tolerance is required to be started from top to bottom at a societal level so that world religions can be able to maintain peace and respect one another. World religions can use all means to teach societies about mutual respect and religious harmony. However, civilization dialogue is the major alternative which can be used to prevent religious hatred and religious extremism. Here, the role of all stakeholders become very important, such as the role of religious scholars, political leaders, common schools, common supports, and technological means, which can strengthen the movement of civilization dialogue. It is believed that culture and religion do not create conflict or rivalry between the

followers of different religions and faiths. Culture, religion, and above all the notion of diversity, are for the purpose of developing better understanding between human beings—so humans can “recognize one another”. The world civilizations can defeat forces of communalism, segregation, balkanization, and extremism once the people of this world come together on one platform. The principle of humanity has no barriers of caste, color, community, culture, and religion. The principle of civilization dialogue teaches that “humanity” does not support one sector one group, rather it is a notion free from all these concepts. Here, we are more concerned about the “common agendas and common issues” of humanity. In other words, if human beings understand it in one phrase then they would say “my problem is your problem and your problem is my problem” and the solution to the problem would also be “you and i”—this is the whole philosophy behind the discourse of civilization dialogue. Civilization dialogue is the best tool through which human beings can create a sustainable and balanced planet where present generations and posterity both can be happy. Civilization dialogue is a “means, not an end in itself”. It is a means to reach consensus, compatibility, cooperation, and above all peace. In summation, it can be said that the core issue is the attainment of “world peace” and a “sustainable planet” and the means or method to reach peace is through civilization dialogue.

The world community in general and world religions in particular is capable enough to recognize intolerance and extremism and use various mechanisms to defeat this menace. For instance, peace education, sensitization, civilization dialogue, tolerance, conferences, joint sports, and the exchange of ideas may be the ways forward to preserve unity in diversity.

Therefore, today, integration with other culture is the major problem for muslims, particularly, in the west where can be seen lack of tolerance in muslims“ behaviours. But it cannot be viewed as the result of islamic teaching. This view leads to attack on islam, including the holy text and prophet in the name of free speech. This so called human right which is base for the hate speech is seen as humiliating and disrespecting other religions and it leads to intolerance and violent attack by extremists though islam does not allow this intolerant behaviour. Further, muslim immigrants take qutb and wahhab intense version of islam with them that demarcates islam and other religions. This is in contradiction with the basic teaching of islam.

In conclusion, reality shows that though some islamic thinkers reject exclusivist interpretation of islam they do not support pluralist interpretations and there is lack of support for relativism among them, too. Generally, when a scholar gives superiority to his/her traditions it causes chaos, unlike religious tolerance and pluralism.

Last of all i say that the creator is omnipresent, he is omniscient, he is omnipotent, and we have to exercise what we have learnt from holy quran and the practice of the prophet mohammad (sa), we have to exercise tolerance, we have to exercise patience, we have to exercise benevolent, and then the light of islam will spread all over the world and will enlighten the humanity, the society, the nation and all the people in the world.

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