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Islāmic Perspective of Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Study of Faith Based Reconciliation

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Abstract

This paper intends to discuss the inter-religious dialogue and the Prophet's engagement with the 'Other'. Both dialogue and faith-based reconciliation provide a way to mankind by which the world will become peaceful place to live. In this violence torn world, reconciliation on the basis of faith is needed, so that unity may be created out of diversity. This paper argues that interfaith dialogical theory profits from a deep understanding of moral psychology and social learning theory. The paper highlights that reconciliation belongs to Abrahamic legacy, and also focuses on how Islam established and come up with advanced civilizations characterized by relatively harmonious co-existence between Muslims, Christians and Jews. It is through reconciliation that we regain our humanity. To work for reconciliation is to live and to show others what their humanity is. The paper also shed light on faith-based reconciliation in its Islamic perspective. It is this context the present paper has been drafted.

Keywords: Inter-Religious Dialogue, Islam, Faith, Reconciliation.

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Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to discuss the inter-religious dialogue in its Islāmic perspective, and the main focus is on the Faith based reconciliation. The religion of Islām which has been delivered to humanity by our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for eternal peace in this life and hereafter is a religion which puts great emphasis on brotherhood and equality. The brotherhood between the Muslims and equal treatment of non Muslims are its two basic principles. The Qur'ān which contains the commandments of the Islāmic religion is not addressed to one single nation belonging to one single age, but to all nations belonging to all ages and therefore, the moral code it embodies is Universal. The Holy Qur'ān is a book which guides all nations at every stage of their advancement. It guides man with regard to his dealing with other individuals of the society. It lays emphasis on Justice, trust, respect for life and property, patience, truthfulness and forgiveness.¹

Both Qur'ān and the life of the Prophet (PBUH) makes clear about the significant aspects of dialogue. Allāh says: O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allāh is Knowing and Acquainted.”² This verse encourages us to explore this diversity of ethnicity, culture and faith, engaging respectfully with different groups. The verses concerning difference of faith can be understood as encouraging Muslims (i) to accept that some individuals and groups will not believe in your faith however much you may desire them to; (ii) to live with the resulting differences in compassion and acceptance; (iii) to explore each other's faith and religion with respect and in an attempt to understand one another; (iv) to wait patiently until God explains what people have differed about and why.

The Qur'ān's commanding or commending engagement with non-Muslims on the basis of justice, kindness, civility and courtesy, regardless of whether they are People of the Book, is embodied in the Prophetic Sunnah. The examples of the Prophet (PBUH) encourage Muslims to engage in peaceful relations and dialogue with other groups, not limited to Christians, Jews and Sabians. The fact that the Prophet (PBUH) did not bring

¹ Muhammad Hussain, *Islamic Principles* (New Delhi: Reference Press Publications, 2005), 83.

² Al Qur'ān 49:13

up points of conflict in his interactions with People of the Book, did not enter into combative debates with them and sought engagement with them through the Medina Charter and political and military treaties such as Hdaybiyya and Khaybar confirms that he carried out the Qur'ānic command in letter and spirit.

Significance of the Study

In the contemporary global world pursuit of peace and brotherhood is the most cherished desire of the developed and under-developed nations. Islām ensures harmonious relations among the religions without subjecting its adherents to disgrace and humiliation. Its message is portrayed as a hurdle in the creation of harmonious and just social order, posturing inter-religion and human progress. The Holy Qur'ān primary source for Muslim social order, clearly explains different areas of co-existence, equality, peace, harmony, human rights, brotherhood, tolerance, and our relations with 'other'.

The study is getting exceedingly important in its relevance in conflict ridden human existence as Prophet has played a significant role in bringing peace prosperity and co-existence in their specific socio-cultural settings across the world irrespective of color, caste, creed or religion their teachings from ancient times till date have strengthened human bonds by their modest and compassionate nature. As a matter of fact Prophet's life and conduct has been exemplary in bringing adherents of all faiths and cultures together under the overarching canopy of love for God's creation.

Review of Literature

The authenticity and validity of the inter-religious dialogue accounts is determined by the application of fiction free facts, what in plain are called sources. The reliability of the work reflects in the availability of the information that is in store in multiple but scattered corners.

In pursuit of this study the works consulted and referred to give no concrete account to cater to the needs of the work under the study. However, an attempt has been to evaluate some measure works that are relevant to subject.

Inter-religious Dialogue an edited book by Catherine Cornille, John wiley³ is a comprehensive volume argues that inter-religious dialogue has an important role to play in peacebuilding, especially in ethno-religious identity conflicts. Making use of religious

³ Catherine Cornille, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding," in *Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana (UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2013) 155-167.

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and spiritual resources such as sacred texts, rituals, stories, myths, and values can be extremely beneficial in helping religious actors to address ethno-religious conflicts. It further analyzes conditions for inter-religious dialogue to be effective and explores its limitations.

Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: A Study of Ibn Hazm's *Kitab al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal*⁴ in which author has presented his view about dialogue with other religious traditions, one must recognize the fact of different interpretations of the Scriptures and hence the different denominations and sects of the major religious traditions. Ibn Hazim studies not only the mainstream orthodox positions of major religious traditions, but also their histories in terms of sects and main differences in beliefs and creeds.

In the same way in which Brian⁵ presents his view in the way that there is a need to build bridges among the different religious traditions and especially among the members of the Abrāhāmīc family. Interfaith dialogues are a valuable beginning to a process of deeper reconciliation. This will be especially important between the Judeo-Christian west and the Islāmic world.

In view of the above literature review study of Faith based reconciliation with other Faiths is one of the significant areas of research and discourse that will dispel doubt among the different faiths. No such concrete work has been done in so far as the reconciliation is concerned. The present study is a humble effort to bring to the limelight the true perspective of inter-religious dialogue and faith based reconciliation envisaged by the Islām and our beloved Prophet (PBUH).

Methodology

This research paper has been taken into account by employing historical, analytical method consulting the verses of the Qur'ān with regard to the dialogical legacy and faith based reconciliation. An attempt has been made to evaluate the existing data available in tune with relevant references. In the end, the present work has been analyzed in the light of the eight core values of faith based reconciliation and Islāmic teachings at

⁴ Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: A Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitab Al-Fasl Fi Al- Milal Wa Al-Nihal* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2007), 1-120.

⁵ Brian Coxin, *Faith Based Reconciliation: A Moral Vision that Transforms People and Societies* (Xilibris: USA, 2007), 1-50.

one end at the same in a comparative manner. Therefore the present paper aims to present an objective analysis of the theme under reference.

Faith Based Reconciliation and its Islāmic Perspective

The metaphor “clash of civilizations”⁶ used by Samuel Huntington, has been one of the most thought provoking, oft-quoted, and controversial strategic concepts to emerge in the realm of diplomacy, and international politics in the last fifty years. It is particularly controversial in the Islāmic world, which is described by Huntington as having “bloody borders”. Regardless of its controversial nature, “clash of civilizations”, “Clash of civilizations” cannot be summarily dismissed. It merits probing and pondering to understand its implications in the twenty first century geopolitics. As such, this strategic concept needs to be understood at a more profound level, particularly in terms of its relationship to a moral vision of faith based reconciliation. Collective identity, religion and culture form the matrix civilizations. Faith based reconciliation represents a moral vision or paradigm for shaping that international system. In any controversy, one way to attempt to settle matters is for both parties to enter into violent confrontation. The better way to settle disputes is to effect reconciliation at the very outset. Reconciliation is to build bridges of understanding and create unity in the midst of diversity. Professor Dr. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi about this writes: “To build bridges is to bring together forces that naturally repel each other. For instance:

1. A holy God and disobedient sinners: To make servants of God back to their Lord is one of the tasks the Prophets have performed. The Proverbial biblical prodigal son can always be welcomed once he is reconciled to his father.
2. Jew and gentile: Where Piety becomes the paradigm of dignity and race and caste ceases to hold ground.

⁶ Clash of civilization” has many meanings given by Brian Cox in his book “*Faith Based Reconciliation*”. Meaning given is as:- First, the “clash of civilization” means the collective identity is a primary factor in shaping interests, strategic alliances, and antagonisms in national and international politics. Second, the “Clash of civilizations” means that in many cases, religion serves as the anchor point in collective identity. Perhaps the most neglected and unappreciated aspect of diplomacy and policy making is the spiritual and religious dimension. Third, the “Clash of Civilizations” means that ethnicity, religion and culture will serve as catalysts in provoking intractable identity-based conflict. Fourth, the “clash of civilizations” means that the traditional model of conflict resolution are inadequate to address most intractable identity-based conflicts.

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3. Black and White: Umar terms black Bilal, Syedina Bilal and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared Salman of Persia member of his household.
4. Muslim and Hindu: Gandhi joined hands with the Muslims during the khilafat movement in the name of faith while Muslims sought refuge in India at the peak of the partition tragedy.”⁷

The goal of reconciliation is unity not uniformity, a unity of purpose and not physical or corporeal uniformity is the goal of reconciliation. We cannot bring uniformity among diversified milieu but unity is possible as it accounts more for spiritual and moral assimilation than the ostensible exoteric semblance. The Qur’ān says: “Oh Prophet had you spent the whole wealth of the world to reconcile the hearts of the people, you would not have succeeded but Allāh unites their hearts.”⁸

At the times of provocation, the best course to adopt is a conciliatory approach rather than a confrontational one. That is the law of nature. However, it really happens that such reconciliation as can be effected exactly reflects the desires of both the parties. In the majority of cases, reconciliation is possible only on a unilateral basis. That is one party has to suppress his own inclinations and show a willingness to put an end to the dispute in accordance with other party’s wishes.⁹

Faith based reconciliation is an international initiative which belongs to Abrāhāmīc legacy. Abrāhāmīc tradition is further refined and crystallized when we take into account the examples of Jesus of Nazareth and Prophet (PBUH) of Arabia. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth emerged upon the scene as a healer and reconciler, his simple message focused on the breaking in of the Kingdom of God or the establishment of God’s new society on earth. This moral vision was grounded in the Abrāhāmīc tradition, but he sought to universalize it for all peoples.¹⁰

In the sands of Arabia, a spiritual and social reform movement emerged from the sands of Arabia. Initially, Muhammad (PBUH) understood the revelations he

⁷ Asghar Ali Engineer, “Constructing the Civilizational Pillars of Islam,” *Islam and the Modern Age* xxxix, no. 4. (2008):31.

⁸ Al Qur’ān 8:63

⁹ Wahid-ud-din Khan, *The Ideology of Peace Towards a Culture of Peace*, tr. Farida Khanam, (Delhi: Good Word Books, 2003), 28.

¹⁰ Brain Cox, *Faith Based Reconciliation: A Moral vision that Transforms Peoples and Societies* (United States of America: Xlibris US, 2007), 17.

received in Makkah and later Madīnah as a prophetic movement among Arab peoples. At the heart of his message and his mission was a reform movement that called Arabs to embrace the Abrāhāmīc tradition of submission to the one true God (*tawhīd*), adherence to a moral law revealed in the sacred texts (*Shari'āh*), and social Justice as the basis for bringing about reconciled societies. More than any other tradition, Islām was grounded on a worldview characterized by the inseparable nature of faith and politics. They formed a seamless whole or a total way of life based on a unified world view from the Qur'ān and the *Shari'āh*. In 622 C.E, the community that had formed around Muhammad (PBUH) and his teaching migrated to *Yathrib* (Madīnah), and there they sought to create a new society based on the religion Abraham and on the transcendent values that the nascent Muslim community shared with the peoples of book (Jews and Christians). Rising above Arab tribalism, Muhammad (PBUH) created an intentionally pluralistic and inclusive community grounded in social justice and forgiveness that sought to resolve conflict by peaceful means. He (PBUH) sought to heal the wounds of the past by forging a new Arab identity based on submission to God. Among contemporary Muslims, the *Yathrib* community of Muhammad's time serves as the paradigm or model for faith-based societies.¹¹ Thus we can say that History shows that any success on the part of an individual or a community has been achieved by adopting the conciliatory method. The path of clash and confrontation has never led to any genuine success in the world. Reconciliation is vital, because it gives man the opportunity to utilize available opportunities to the fullest extent, whereas confrontation leads to his entire energies being channelized into planning the destruction of others. The work of construction therefore is never engaged in, although the secret of true success lies in construction and consolidation rather than in destroying supposed enemies.¹²

To establish a solid and lasting ground for peace in a world beset with violence and terrorism, it is necessary to address the deep seated grievances of the Muslims and reform the conceptual tools to a better understanding of the historical processes in the Muslim world and its encounter with western powers.

Islām regards the God of Judaism and Christianity as its own God, their prophets as its own Prophet, their revelations and scriptures. Together, Islām holds the

¹¹ Wahid-ud-din Khan, *The Ideology of Peace Towards a Culture of Peace*, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 28-29.

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two religions and itself to be one religious fraternity. Nothing more could be asked or desired. Like the other levels of justification. This unity-nay-identity of the three religions makes the Muslims regard the Jews and Christians as their brothers in faith and in submission to the one God of all. Disagreement between them certainly is; but under the canopy of faith in God and belonging to His religion, all disagreements are domestic disputes. Indeed there is no single criticism which Islām has addressed to either Judaism or Christianity or their adherents which Jews and Christians have not addressed to themselves or their tradition.¹³

Hilf-al-Fazool one of the greatest events in the Islāmic history indicates that Prophet (PBUH) tried to reach out to the people of other faiths and build bridges on the basis of compassion and fellow feeling. In Madīnah Prophet (PBUH) was among Christians, Arabs, Muslims, *Munāfiqīn* and Pagans. After reaching Mādīnāh, the first thing Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did was to enter into an understanding with the Jews of Mādīnāh, through the popular treaty known as *Mīthāq-i-Madīnah*.

Unity of Humanity is of primary importance in Islām. Humanity, in the view of Islām, is one. God created all humans of a single pair- Adam and Eve. He created them all equal in their creatureliness that is they are all His servants, charged with actualizing all His will which he has revealed and they are all capable and responsible.¹⁴ Islām provides a base in its theory of man. All humans, it holds are born endowed with the sense for the scare and for the moral. All are innately equipped with the capacity to discern and recognize God as one and creator, as well as His will as the moral imperative. Islām thus pre-supposes a religio natural is with which all humans are equally endowed.¹⁵ The real test of an interfaith dialogue is in a concrete conflict situation. In such a situation, it is of utmost importance that the participants properly understand the internal structures of both one's own and other's religion and identify their hierarchical leadership structures as well. The practical tool for further action is to approach the leadership of both the parties to realize the necessity of addressing the issues of common concern for the sake of peaceful co-existence which necessarily

¹³ Isma'il Rāji Al-Faruqi, *Triologue of the Abrāhāmīc Faiths*, (New Delhi: Genuine Publications, 1989), 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

requires interdependence.¹⁶ Inter-faith dialogue between two religious groups, despite being external to each other but never totally incommensurable, presupposes that each one is committed to positive socio-political action and has the basic understanding of the internal structure of other's religious truth, claims and tenets in proper contexts, and then try to judge them both internally and externally in such a way that its positive and suitable aspects are projected for the presented for the present purpose. Remember that the motive is always social harmony and Peace, which are the foundational values. What is important about inter-faith dialogue is to see how different religious claims promote these values.¹⁷

As per Maulana Wahiduddin's view, Islām believes in peace, in tolerance and in love, all the human values are Islāmic values. "When the Prophet (PBUH) of Islām was in Mādīnāh, so what happened that one day the Prophet (PBUH) saw funeral procession passing through street in Mādīnāh? Prophet (PBUH) was seated at that time. On seeing the funeral he stood up in respect, one of his companions said that oh Prophet (PBUH) it was funeral of a Jew, it was funeral of a non-Muslim. Prophet (PBUH) said was he not a human being?" it means the prophet (PBUH) was able to discover a commonality between himself and that non-Muslim, that Jew.

The root word of Islām is 'Sālām'; *Sālām* means peace, so Islām means religion of peace. So this is the true picture of Islām. Those Jews and Christians who reject the Qur'ān are misguided. Indeed the Qur'ān chastises those who divide "the *din*" into sect:

"And they say, "Be Jews or Christians and you shall be guided". Say "No rather the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith, he was no idolater." Say, "We believe in God, and in what has been sent down on us and sent down on Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets of their Lord. We make no division between any of them, and to Him we surrender."¹⁸ Belief in the unity and oneness of Allāh (*Tāwhīd*) is the first and main principle of the Islāmic faith. It means that Allāh is the Supreme Being, the creator, sustainer and master of the

¹⁶ Abstract of Articles, The 2nd International Seminar on Peaceful Co-existence in Religions with Focus on Basics of Ethics in Islām and Indian Religions, 80.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Al Qur'ān 2:129-31

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universe, the highest authority and hence exclusively worthy of worship.¹⁹ “Benard Lewis” has developed his arguments on the same lines and wrote that Islām, like other religions; has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence and extremism. It is our misfortune that we have to confront part of Muslim world while it is going through such a period, and most through by no means all of that hatred is directed against us. His attempt is an attempt to find an answer to the question that whether Islām, is fundamentalist or not, is a treat to the west. He thinks to this simple question, two simple but misleading answers have been given. One school of thought says, Yes, Islāmic fundamentalism has replaced the demise of communist movement and according to other, Muslims including radical fundamentalists, are basically decent, Peace loving, pious people.²⁰

After taking into consideration, the terrorism, the clash of civilization, one must ponder over the thing that what is the need of having terrorism in a society or state or what is the need to have clash of civilizations. There is no need of such things if one remembers that by these means only destruction is possible. In order to have an end to clash of civilizations, it is time to build bridges among the different civilizations particularly in terms of its relationships, in terms of moral vision of faith based reconciliation. The faith based reconciliation belongs to the Abrāhāmīc legacy and can be summarized in eighth core value. Eight core values are the ethical implications of Abrāhāmīc tradition. These eight core values are given by Brian Cox which are:

1. The pluralistic vision of community: We seek unity in the midst of diversity.
2. Compassionate inclusion: We seek to overcome hostility by practice of unconditional love towards others including ones enemies.
3. Peace-making: we seek the peaceful resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups.
4. Social Justice: we seek the common good through transformation of the soul of a community.
5. Forgiveness: we exercise forgiveness and repentance as individuals and communities to create the possibility of a better future together.

¹⁹ Hussain., *Islamic Principle*, 2.

²⁰ Hilal Wani., *Hope in Peace and Harmony from an Islamic Perspective*,” Islam and the Modern Age .xxxviii, no.4, (2007) 33.

6. Healing: we seek to heal the wounds of history through acknowledgement of suffering and injustice.
7. Acknowledging God's sovereignty: we seek as individuals and communities to acknowledge God's authority through submission and surrender.
8. Atonement with God: we seek finding peace with God and be people of faith.²¹

Conclusion

It can be argued from the preceding discussion that;

1. Islām is based on monotheism, with regard to God; and on peaceful dialogue, with regard to methodology. This is the essence of Islāmic teaching. No other way is possible in Islām.
2. Islām regards peaceful dialogue as a primary principle and the purpose of Islām is to bring about divine revolution, to invite people to the worship of God, to strive for a society in which spiritual, ethical, and human values are cherished.
3. Islām advocates an atmosphere where peace, tolerance, love and well wishing is the order of the day an atmosphere where controversies are resolved without the use of violence. This is the desired world of Islām and such a world can be established only through peaceful dialogue.
4. In this globalized world it becomes need of every individual, society, community, and religion to find out the foundations for peaceful co-existence. Islāmic history provides us such evidences where the Prophet PBUH tried to reach out to the other faiths and build bridges on the basis of compassion and fellow feelings.
5. Dialogue and reconciliation is the sincere and serious move towards understanding from the both sides that can build the true image of the other religion, community, culture or civilization. So long this attitude of dialogue is understood and encouraged properly the mankind will become broader in vision, tolerant towards the diversities of culture and search for more and more reconciliation and peaceful living to evolve itself as a universal community.

Recommendations

1. In this globalized world, Inter faith has a great bearing so far as the overall peace, progress, prosperity and development is concerned. Once we come to understand one another's point of view and then we can expect well nurtured and humane society.

²¹ Brain Cox, *Faith Based Reconciliation*, 17.

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2. Scholars from times have tried to reconcile the different people of different faiths. Our societies need to be reconciled on the basis of faith.
3. The goal of reconciliation must be unity and not the uniformity. There is no chance of uniformity among the diversified milieu but unity is possible as it accounts more for spiritual and moral assimilation than the ostensible exoteric semblance.
4. In contemporary period, it is possible to maintain peace in the diversified societies. For this purpose different people from different societies and different religions should come forward and play their active role in reconciling the people of different faiths and different ideologies.
5. To achieve this cherished goal, seminars, symposiums, and conferences can help us in solving misconceptions should be removed, and solution to the problems should be set. *Ulama* can play a pivotal role in removing the misconception with regard to Islām.

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