Towards the Role of Islamic Education in Promoting Peace and Harmony in a Society: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on the role of Islamic education in promoting peace and harmony in a society. The basic aim of Islamic education is to produce masses fulfilling Allah's rights and human rights, as well as adorning human being with good characters and ethics for peaceful living around the globe. Indeed, Islamic education lays down sound foundations for individual, family, and social life to promote true believers of Islam and good citizens for a peaceful and harmonious society. This paper, however, reveals a real picture of the impacts of Islamic education on the development of peaceful masses and harmonious environment.

Therefore, the role of Islamic education is being discussed with respect to, how to attain individual, family, and social peace. The study employs qualitative research methodology to find out the relevant verses of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions (Hadiths) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The paper also addresses the misunderstandings and misconceptions about religious education that it leads towards extremism and terrorism. Overall, this study provides an insight into the significance of Islamic education for Muslim societies and its role in producing sound masses for the individual, family, and social life.

Keywords: role, Islamic education, peace, harmony, individual, family, society

Introduction

Nowadays, the world is beset with enormous social problems and human being are undergoing anxious, depressed and tense situations. The peaceful and harmonious environment has become of paramount significance for all societies and cultures around the globe. In this respect, the religious schools and sects, like other institutes, emphasize on socializing the society by providing religious education. Globalization has produced benefits in many areas including, education, healthcare, promotion of free media, human rights and personal freedoms, increased awareness and empowerment for individuals[1].

At the same time, it has made modifications in living styles, customs and habits of individuals. Similarly, modernization is another factor to bring many changes and reforms in different living aspects of life. In such circumstances, religious education has become an important focus of religious scholars in promoting peace and harmony in a society. Generally speaking, religious scholars highlight various aspects of religious education related to the development of a peaceful and harmonious society.

However, Islam requires and demands moderation and naturalness in all aspects of worldly and religious life[2]. Islam, literally means peace, stands for universal love, harmony, and mutual co-existence[3]. Islam calls for peace, tolerance and kindness, which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual and social harmony[4]. In an Islamic society, religious education is the fundamental right of all individuals, which promotes the formation of well-organized and well-socialized masses with appropriate

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social norms and values. It is true to say that religious education is a real backbone for Muslim societies. The Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him) are divine sources of religious education, which provide guidance and instruction for every sphere of life. An extensive review of Islamic teachings reveals that religious education predominantly aims at building a peaceful, tolerable, patient, and harmonious society for the welfare of humanity.

Definitions of the Key Terms

1. Islamic Education

In general, religious education involves instruction in the beliefs of a particular religion. It may also be defined as general education that follows religious instructions and ideals[5]. Religions [Islamic] education can be seen as a process through which a person learns something which his society believes is related to Allah.[6] However, the term Islamic education stands for Islamic education derived from the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Generally speaking, Lawal states

> *"Religious education can also be described as those processes designed to induct each new generation into the attitudes, beliefs as well as the practices of a religions or faith in order to promote the religion and at the same time provide for the individual a unifying center for his life[7]."*

2. Peace

According to the Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary:

> *"Peace is a situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area, state of being calm, of quietude and living in friendship with somebody[8]."*

The World Book Encyclopedia defines peace as:

> *"Peace is the state of being calm, quiet and freedom from disturbance[9]."*

Peace reflects mental calm, freedom from war, or the society cessation of war (peace talks)[10]. Hence, peace is considered as the secure and freedom environment without any fear that promotes the development of social lives.

3. *Society*

According to Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary:

> *"Society is a particular community of people who share the same customs and law[11]."*

Society is an organized group of persons associated together for religious, benevolent, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic, or other purposes[12]. Society is a social community or a social mode of life[13].

4. Islamic Education in Promoting Peace and Harmony

Islamic education is confined in the divine book the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that refers to his deeds, words, and indirect commandments[14].

The Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (Hadith) are the two streams coming from the same source [from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)][15]. The Prophet (peace be upon him), as a great teacher, has provided complete guidance in all fields of life[16].Whilst Islamic education refers towards the straight and practical path to achieve universal peace and unity. Basically, Islamic education is peace education that promotes a culture of peace[17]. The teachings of Islam are fully aware of human nature and human needs. The various aspects of Islam including, ideological, spiritual, legal, social, economic, and political, are mutually consistent and supplement for each other[18].

Islam is a comprehensive and universal religion for all races and classes of people aimed at addressing the needs of humanity with its spiritual, moral, social, legal, political, and economic systems[19]. The key Islamic principles related to peace and peace-building include: salam/silm (peace), tawhid (Oneness of Allah), rahma (compassion) and rahim (mercy), fitrah, justice, forgiveness, vicegerency, and social responsibility[20]. Human history clearly testifies the reality that Islamic education has played a pivotal role in building a peaceful, decent, and harmonious society. The five pillars of faith include: declaration of faith, five prayers, charitable giving (*Zakāt*), fasting of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Makkah, principally lead towards peace and unity among Muslims. The truth of happiness and peace is completely mentioned in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him)[21]. Allah sent Last Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) with the message of peace and has chosen the religion Islam for Him. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam[22]."

In another verse, Allah orders the believers to enter completely in Islam, which means enter into the religion of peace:

"O, you who believe! Enter perfectly in Islam, and follow not the footsteps of Satan (Shaitan). Verily! He is to you a plain enemy[23]."

Allah Almighty highlights the dignity of human being in order to protect one's life:

"If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land, it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind[24]."

The verse reveals Islamic standpoint towards saving humankind. Killing one humankind is considered as killing of all humankind; in the same way, saving one humankind is a saving of all humankind. Indeed, this verse reflects upon the universal message of Islam towards constructing a peaceful and harmonious society.

5. *Islamic Education and Individual Peace*

Islamic education draws attention significantly on individual peace. Peace requires self-control and Islamic education promotes it; whereby individual life leading towards family and social life. Islam calls every person to cooperate with one another in material and moral fields[25]. Iman (to have belief/ belief in Allah) provides inner peace and happiness whereas Islam (to submit or to surrender [for Allah will]) does external peace and harmony[26]. Muslim is not only forbidden to harm others, but he is commanded to be positive by preventing any harm to others that could be done to them[27]. Human peace solely depends upon the equilibrium state of thoughts and actions (deeds) and giving everything its due; and is far away from guesses, arbitrariness, exaggerations, and negligence. Islamic education considers pious believers more honorable to Allah Almighty than other Muslims; although all human have the same dignity, equality, and status. The Qur'an mentions clearly:

"And indeed, we have honored the children of Adam[28]."

"And has given you shape and made your shapes good (looking)[29]."

"Verily, we created man in the best stature (mould)[30]."

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa (piety). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware[31]."

"Moreover, a number of traditions (Hadiths) explicitly highlight the message of peace for individual life. For example, a man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him), "Whose Islam is good" or "What (sort of) deeds in (or what qualities of) Islam are good?" The Prophet replied, "To feed (others), and to greet those whom you know and those whom you do not know[32]."

"Whoever is pleased that he be granted more wealth, and that his lease of life be prolonged, then he should keep good relations with his kith and kin[33]."

"Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveler[34]."

"Riches does not mean having a great amount of property, but riches is self-contentment[35]."

"Whoever can guarantee (the chastity of) what is between his two jawbones and what is between his two legs (i.e., his mouth, his tongue and his private parts), I guarantee Paradise for him[36]."

"If anyone of you looked at a person who was made superior to him in property and (in worldly rank and in good) appearance, then he should also look at the one who is inferior to him, and to whom he has been made superior[37]."

"None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself[38]."

Abu Musa reported: Some people asked Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him), "Whose Islam is the best?" He replied, "One who avoids harming the Muslims with his tongue and hands[39]."

"He who is not merciful to others, will not be treated mercifully[40]."

"Al-Qati' (the person who severs the bond of kinship) will not enter Paradise[41]."

"The worst people before Allah on the Day of Resurrection will be the double-faced people who appear to some people with one face and to other people with another face[42]."

In addition, Islamic supplications recommend Muslims supplicating for good character, actions, and deeds.

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّى أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ مُنْكَرَاتِ الأَخْلاَقِ وَالأَعْمَالِ وَالأَهْوَاءِ[43]"

"O Allah, I seek refuge in you from evil character, evil actions, and evil desires."

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّى أَسْأَلُكَ الْهُدَى وَالتُّقَى وَالْعَفَافَ وَالْغِنَى[44]"

"O Allah! I ask you for guidance, piety, abstinence, and independence of means."

"اللَّهُمَّ أَصْلِحْ لِى دِينِى الَّذِى هُوَ عِصْمَةُ أَمْرِى وَأَصْلِحْ لِى دُنْيَاىَ الَّتِى فِيهَا مَعَاشِى وَأَصْلِحْ لِى آخِرَتِى الَّتِى فِيهَا مَعَادِى وَاجْعَلِ الْحَيَاةَ زِيَادَةً لِى فِى كُلِّ خَيْرٍ وَاجْعَلِ الْمَوْتَ رَاحَةً لِى مِنْ كُلِّ شَرٍّ[45]"

"O Allah, set right for me my religious commitment, which is the safeguard of my affairs. Set right for me my worldly affairs in which is my living. Set right for me my Hereafter in which will be my final abode. Make this life a means of increase in all that is good, and make death a relief for me from all evil."

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّى أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ لاَ يَنْفَعُ وَمِنْ قَلْبٍ لاَ يَخْشَعُ وَمِنْ نَفْسٍ لاَ تَشْبَعُ وَمِنْ دَعْوَةٍ لاَ يُسْتَجَابُ لَهَا[46]."

"O Allah, I seek refuge with you from knowledge that is not beneficial, a heart that is not humble (before you), a soul that is not satisfied and a prayer that is not answered)."

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ ، وَالْجُبْنِ وَالْهَرَمِ ، وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ ، وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ فِتْنَةِ الْمَحْيَا وَالْمَمَاتِ[47]."

> *"O Allah! I seek refuge with you from weakness, and laziness, from cowardice and from senile old age, and I seek refuge with you from the punishment of the grave, and I seek refuge with you from the Fitnah (trial and affliction etc.) of life and death."*

The above discussion demonstrates that Islamic education, specifically refers to a healthy and peaceful individual life that is an important key to family and social peace.

6. *Islamic Education and Family Peace*

Family is a natural and fundamental unit of a society[48]. The term family is used to designate a special kind of structure, whose principles relate to one another through blood ties and/or marital[49]. In Islam tradition, the family is recognized as the basis of a society; in which good values and conducts are placed at the highest rank to keep family relationships healthy and harmonious[50]. As individuals constitute families, families set up nations and nations establish the whole world. By ensuring a happy and peaceful family, Islam aims at securing peace for a nation and peace for the world[51].

Generally, the family consists of parents, children, spouses, brothers, sisters, relatives. Islamic education has prescribed the responsibilities and rights of the members of a family in order to maintain happiness, well-being, and welfare in a family. The status and respect of all family members mentioned clearly including: mother, father, brother, sister, children, paternal and maternal uncles, paternal and maternal aunts. Islamic teachings also provide awareness regarding neighbors, friends, and servants. Islamic code of ethics requires treatment even with those relatives and family members who cut asunder the blood-tie[52].

Islamic education has greatly stressed on the rights and responsibilities of all family members. For instance, the Qur'an clearly mentions the rights of parents: "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor. And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy and say:

> *"My Lord! Bestow on them your mercy as they did bring me up when was young[53]."*

Similarly, the Qur'an promotes good treatment with relatives and other people:

> *"Worship Allah and join none with Him (in worship); and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor (al-Masakin), the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess[54]."*

Prophetic traditions highlight a number of strategies for the sound foundations of a family life. For example,

> *"Verily, Allah will ask every responsible [individual] about all those, whom he was made responsible; he protected or wasted, even if a man will be asked about his family members[55]."*
> *"Whoever does not show mercy to our little ones, and respect the rights of our elders, he is not among us[56]."*

Islamic education addresses mutual responsibilities and rights of spouses for a healthy, decent, caring, and loving home environment. For instance, the traditions recommend a Muslim husband to fulfill the rights of his wife:

> "The man is a guardian of his family and responsible for his charges[57]."
>
> "The best of you is the one who is best to his wife[58]."
>
> "I [the Prophet (peace be upon him)] enjoin good treatment of women . . . And their [women's] rights over you are that you treat them well in clothing them and feeding them[59]."
>
> "Treat women nicely,[60]"

 And

> "And I command you to take care of the women in a good manner[61]."

In the same way, the traditions recommend a Muslim wife to fulfill rights of her husband:

> "A woman is a guardian of her husband's house and responsible for her charges[62]."

 And

> "Any woman who dies when her husband is pleased with her, will enter Paradise[63]."
>
> "It was said to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him): Which woman is best?' He said: The one makes him happy when he looks at her, obeys him when he commands her, and she does not go against his wishes with regard to herself nor her wealth[64]."

This shows that Muslim spouses can provide strong foundations for a happy and peaceful family life by practicing Islamic guidance. Furthermore, traditions prohibit praying against family members and wealth, hitting or beating a woman. For example:

> "Do not supplicate against yourselves, and do not supplicate against your children, and do not supplicate against your servants, and do not supplicate against your wealth, for (it is possible) that it will coincide with an hour in which requests are granted, so your supplication will be responded to as well[65]."
>
> "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) never hit anyone with his hand, nor any woman or servant[66]."
>
> "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) never beat any of his servants or wives and his hand never hit anything[67]."
>
> "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, if he witnesses something, let him speak well or else keep silent. Deal kindly with women, Deal (kindly) with women[68]."

The above discussion highlights the beauty of Islamic education in dealing with family life, as social relations depend on harmonious concord between husband and wife.

7. *Islamic Education and Social Peace*

Islam is a complete way of life embracing all aspects of life[69]. Islam is confined to economic, political, devotional, legal manners, values, attitudes, customs, and manners in all reaches of human concern and relationship[70]. Principally, Islam aims at producing a distinct culture based on Islamic ideals and values[71]. Islamic education ensures the strong basis of a peaceful environment in the society. Islamic teachings provide complete guidance and direction to establish a pacific social life. Islam is also a complete integration of cultural diversity in the society. Islam is a complete faith

that had achieved intellectual peak, introduced ethical dimensions, freedom of mind and knowledge for meaningful actions[72].

The Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* mainly focus on protection of Muslims and non-Muslims. The teaching of the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has fostered a society of peace, harmony, tolerance, and forgiveness. The Prophet (peace be upon him) through his character eventually won the hearts of people. Promoting peace in a society is highly encouraged in the verses of the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an mentions that Allah Almighty does allow making mischief on earth:

> *"Eat and drink of that which Allah has provided and do not act corruptly, making mischief on earth[73]."*

Similarly, Allah does not like mischief-making human being.

> *"But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world; and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the Mufsidūn (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupts)[74]."*

> *"They strive to make mischief on the earth. And Allah does not like the mischief-makers (Mufsidūn) [75]."*

> *And make not Allah's (Name) an excuse in your oaths against your doing good and acting piously, and making peace among mankind. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower[76]."*

Additionally, the Qur'an stresses on reconciliation in foreign relations in various verses. For instance, "But if they (the enemies) incline to peace, you also incline to it, and have trust in Allah. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower[77].

So, if they withdraw from you, and fight not against you, and offer you peace, then Allah has opened no way for you against them[78]. Fulfillment of promise, gratefulness in mutual dealings strengthens the bond of love and affability among human beings. Hospitality and entertainment find a prominent place in Islamic teachings. Handshaking is also a symbol of goodwill. Islamic way of greeting is by uttering the word Salam which carries the meaning of peace:

> *"A good, pleasant, friendly word is a Charity (Sadaqa)[79]."*

> *"A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other." The Prophet then clasped his hands with the fingers interlaced[80]."*

> *"The best among you are those who have the best manners and the best character[81]."*

> *"The worst people before Allah on the Day of Resurrection will be those whom the people leave (undisturbed) to be away from their evil[82]."*

> *"The best among you are the best in character (having good manners)[83]."*

> *"Abusing a Muslim is Fusuq (i.e., an evil-doing), and killing him is disbelief (Kufr) [84]."*

> *"A Qattat (who conveys disagreeable and false information from one to another) will not enter Paradise[85]."*

> *"The worst people before Allah on the Day of Resurrection will be the double-faced people who appear to some people with one face and to other people with another face[86]."*

> *"Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the worst of false tales; and do not look for others' faults, and do not spy, and do not be jealous of one another, and do not desert (cut your relation with) one another, and do not hate one another; and O Allah's worshippers! Be brothers (as Allah has ordered you!)[87]."*

"The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger[88]."

A man said to the Prophet:

"Advise me!" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Do not become angry and furious." The man asked (the same) again and again, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in each case, "Do not become angry and furious[89]."

"The example of a believer is like a green tree, the leaves of which do not fall."[90] Make things easy for the people, and do not make it difficult for them, and make them calm (with glad tidings) and do not repel (them) (i.e. to make them hate good deeds and to run away from Islam)[91]."

"It is not lawful for a Muslim to desert (not to speak to) his brother Muslim for more than three days; while meeting, one turns his face to one side and the other turns his face to the other side. Lo! The better of the two is the one who starts greeting the other[92]."

"When you are three persons sitting together, then no two of you should hold secret counsel excluding the third person until you are with some other people too, for that would grieve him[93]."

"Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbour, and whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain his guest generously; and whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet (i.e., abstain from all kinds of evil and dirty talk - e.g., abusing, lying, backbiting, etc.)[94]."

"The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" It was said, "Who is that, O Allah's Messenger?" He said, "That person whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil[95]."

Islam offers a number of comprehensive principles for the problems of human societies in different ages. Generally speaking, Islamic education promotes good ethics, including: repentance, love, patience, hope, honesty and trust, control of desire, unity, hospitality, humbleness, and fulfillment of promises, forgiveness. At the same time, Islamic education forbids bad manners, including: the lust of wealth, bad use of tongue, vain talking, anger, falsehood, malice, jealousy, mystery, greed, hypocrisy, religious controversy, false deposition, disputes, pride, backbiting, flattery, and dissensions, disclosure of secrets, sorcery, unethical jokes, immoral songs, name calling, and deceit. By putting social etiquette into practice, we can still have a society free from malice, hatred, ill-will, tension, conceit, greed, ostentation, envy and numerous other social evils[96].

However, about the concept of *Jihad*, Professor Muqtedar Khan stated that Islam does permit the use of force, but the theory of jihad, which means "struggle in the path of God," forbids violence except:

1) When Muslims are not allowed to practice their faith, that is, when freedom of religion is threatened.
2) When people are oppressed and subjugated.
3) When people's land is forcibly taken from them. In such circumstances, Islam allows a range of responses[97].

It was the result of the Prophetic peace policies that in total 82 wars of the Prophet (peace be upon him) 1157 people were killed from both sides[98]. This historical

evidence proves that Prophetic period was an ideal period and Muslims should construct and develop a peaceful and harmonious society based on Islamic teachings. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent as a mercy for all humankind:

> *"And we have sent you (O Muhammad) not, but as a mercy for the worlds (Alamin mankind, jinn and all that exists)[99]."*

Conclusion

This paper provides an insight into the role of Islamic education in promoting peace and harmony in a society. The findings of this study reveal that Islamic education primarily plays a key role in attaining individual, family and social peace. It also helps in promoting tolerance, humbleness, and harmony in a society. The findings highlight that individual peace leads to family peace that leads to the social peace; likewise, individual disorder eventually leads to family disorder that leads to the social disorder. Moreover, Islamic education evidently preserves and protects the rights of humankind in general and Muslims in particular aiming at social peace, integration, and cohesion.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the significance of the issue at hand, the following recommendations are suggested to promote peace and harmony in a society:

i. A special attention should be given in Muslim homes to teach and develop Islamic education related to peace from childhood and later stages of life.
ii. Family life should present a real picture of peace and harmony by practicing Islamic teachings and showing healthy family lifestyle.
iii. The members of society should encourage Islamic values and norms and Islamic principles of social justice in order to establish a strong connection among social members.
iv. Muslims should exhibit the best character by showing kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, and justice in all societies and circumstances.
v. Islamic mosques should deliver the message of peace and harmony for all people without any discrimination of race, sect, and religion.
vi. Islamic Mad'aris should emphasize particularly in providing appropriate religious education with the aim of developing a moderate and humble society.
vii. Islamic departments of the Universities should emphasize on character building and peace education.
viii. Religious groups should promote a peaceful dialogue for understanding each other in a respectful way.
ix. Religious institutions should focus on the development of tolerance and peace-building education in teachers and students.

The above recommendations may be helpful in protecting and maintaining peace and harmony in a society.

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