

The Concept of Tolerance in Islam: An Analysis

Dr. Muhammad Asghar Javedⁱ Dr. Muhammad Naeemⁱⁱ Dr. Muhammad Zubairⁱⁱⁱ

Abstract

The religion, Islam, encompass all aspects of human life which could be in personal affairs or social contracts. The Ashraf (the noblest) creatures of Allah (swt) meet greatness with interaction in variant social dominion. Islam observes logical principles about human behavior with others. It stresses the Muslim community to be tolerant at unbearable moments of life and to stay optimistic in terms of thoughts. It gives instructions about the good relations with Non-Muslims and their communities. It never believes in human disgrace or its humiliation on the base of cast, colour or religion. This research highlights the concept of tolerance, harmony, permissiveness and sympathy in Islam which are applicable for notion of humanity. Additionally, Islam does not verify the false notions and propagandas i.e. Islam is a religion of cruelty and extremism, and the passion of Jihād spares the Muslims to exercise any kind of cruelty with the people of other religions. Further, this research explains the reality that Islam is not only the religion of peace and love but it also teaches the accommodation of other religions. It emphasizes to show tolerance in other religious autonomy.

Key words: Harmony, Islam, Justice, Muslim, Tolerance.

Introduction

Islam gives the lesson of peace, love, brotherhood and harmony. It also rejects the negative propaganda of those who wrote that Islam is a religion of cruelty and extremism. Islam gives rights to every single human as well as stresses on religious tolerance. According to the Holy Qurān and Ḥadīth, Islam not only has accentuated on religious tolerance but also has stressed on moral, economic and social tolerance.

Islam teaches mutual love, brotherhood, justice and tolerance. It is one of the prominent features of Islam that none of the other religions of the world preaches its followers to treat the followers of other religions as Islam does. It is the speciality of Islam which gives the rights to the non Muslims with tolerance. Islam is the religion of nature. Its taste is to give respect and profit

i Assistant Professor, The University of Lahore, Pakpattan Campus

ii Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, AWKUM

iii Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, AWKUM

to mankind. According to the Holy Qurān, Muslim Ummah is created for the welfare of humanity.

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ¹

You are the best of peoples evolved for mankind Engoing what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

Muslim is a source of blessing and profit for the whole mankind without any discrimination of religion and route line.

The teachings of Islam emphasizes on the service of humanity. People have confined Islam to offer prayer, to keep fast, to pay Zakah and to perform Hajj, and they have ignored moralities, dealings and good deeds which have to be brought in religious practice.

The Holy Prophet has ordered all above mentioned deeds as well as he also preached human rights. It means to act upon Islamic worships is not a complete Islam but human rights have a framework after the Haqooq ullah (Allah's rights). Islam teaches to deal the people equally regardless of their color, religion and race.

Lexical Meanings of Tolerance

According to Syed Ahmad Dehlavi:

“Tolerance means to bear pain or hardships with patience. It also means to bear the things you don't like².”

But as a convention it also means that a man or any group of people or a government bear the things that they don't like. In spite of disliking these things they make them permissible for those who like them³.

Dr. Syed Basheeryar has defined Tolerance as:

“Tolerance is a compound word one of them “Rawa” is a muscular noun and it means to make something permissible. And the other word “Dari” is a feminine noun which means to make a matter permissible and to keep bear⁴.”

In view of this definition, it becomes clear that “رواداری” (a Persian terminology, also used in Urdu, which means to make permissible and acceptable) is the second name of tolerance.

Definition of Tolerance in Dictionaries:

In Collins Dictionary the Tolerance has been mentioned with the following meanings:

“Broad mindness, charity, forbearance, indulgence, lenity, magnanimity, open mindness, patience, permissiveness, sufferance, sympathy⁵.”

According to the Oxford Dictionary the tolerance is:

“The willingness to accept or tolerate, especially opinions or behavior that you may not agree with, or people who are not like your.”⁶

Under the light of above mentioned different Urdu, Persian and English lingual definitions, it becomes obvious that the tolerance is the name of such human behavior in which forbearance, generosity, leniency and gentleness are the qualities to facilitate the others. This behavior thinking and action can be religious concept and social as well. However, tolerance is such an essence in which a man keeping on his ideas and beliefs tolerates the ideas of other with patience.

Moral Importance of Tolerance

Tolerance is a quality of human beings. The humans cannot be made united over a single point of view due to the individual differences; human beings are created with different physical and mental qualities. This diversity is natural which cannot be ignored. As an example, the students of a certain class have various mental levels. Similarly, they pose different potentials to do something. In a community, the people have different sort of thinking. They have their personal priorities. So, living in a plural society, all should respect the feelings of others. This respect shall create an atmosphere of peace, tolerance and positive social adjustment. Though the clash in thoughts and priorities is natural but the negative criticism or hurting someone feelings is an inhumane step. We should give importance to the route line and thoughts of the people of other religions morally.

Mateen Tariq says about moral tolerance:

“Keeping in view the physical differences of individual and nations, it is our moral duty to respect the feeling and passions of others with great patience⁷.”

Religious Importance of Tolerance

The concept of easiness of Islam is not the matter of today but it is the concept of fourteen hundred years ago. The Holy Prophet had taught his Ummah the lesson of easiness, blessing and affection. The conservative minded persons of today having limited knowledge don't admit and accept. On

the other hand, the Non Muslims, Muslims and modern generation of both also think that perhaps Islam has no concept of affection, gentleness and tolerance.

Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah’s Messenger said:

“Indeed, the religion is ease, and no one makes it hard on himself save that he will be overpowered⁸.”

He said on another occasion: According to ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ūd Allah’s Messenger said thrice,

“The extremists have perished⁹.”

It means that Islam is merely religion of tolerance, love and peace. It never bore a person having extremistic view. The Holy Prophet granted the golden rule of wiping out terrorism and extremism. The age of the Holy Prophet was the age which granted humanity the rule of peace, love and tolerance.

Tolerance in Religious Independence

Islam invites to worship the oneness of Allah but it doesn’t stress the people of other religions to alter their faiths and to accept Islam. The Holy Qurān describes to convey the true message of Islam.

حُذِّ الْعَمُوْ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِيْنَ

"Hold to forgiveness commands what is right but turn away from the ignorant".

Islam forbids the way of preaching which affects the religious independence of some one. Islamic governments protect and secure the worship places of Non-Muslims and provide facilitation.

Tolerance was the major cause of the success in preaching

When the Holy Prophet started preaching of Islam, he had only a few followers with him. The help of Allah Almighty and having his great human character were the sources of relief. He spent his life with his family, he also traded, lived with friends and foe, but in all respects he remained modest and great in the sight of his fellows. He was found in the mosque for fulfilling the rights of Allah. People observed all aspects of his life slowly. His kind behavior, justice, mercy and tolerance with the enemies were his great characteristics that caused the spread of Islam¹⁰.

Islamic concept of tolerance in inter-religious collective guardianship

Islamic Bayt-ul-māl guards a Muslim who is crippled or becomes old or in poverty as well as Islamic Bayt-ul-māl provides guardianship to a Non Muslims. It takes responsibility of guardianship as a duty binding for the followers of all religions.

Abu ‘Ubaid reported from Sa‘ūd bn Mosayyib in Kitab-ul-Amwal:

“The Holy Prophet gave charity to a Jewish family and after the death of the Holy Prophet this charity is being continued¹¹.”

Zaid reports:

“Verily, the mother of believers and modest wife of The Holy Prophet, Ḥaḍrat Ṣafiya gave charity to her relatives they both were Jews and the charity was sold out in thirty thousand Darhms¹².”

On an occasion, Syeda ‘Aisha (R.A) asked the Prophet of Allah (S.A.W) about her relation with her non-Muslim mother, the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) answered with yes and encouraged her to have good terms¹³.

The Holy Qurān and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) provide a comprehensive guideline. The Holy Qurān directs the preachers to be polite and gentle while you speak to others.

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ
بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ¹⁴

"Invite, all to way to your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are the best and most gracious for your Lord knows best, who have strayed from him path".

The verse of the Holy Qurān and the principles of preaching have laid down in a way which is good and effective for all times. It denotes, the preachers should be qualified with the proper tools and potential of wisdom (Ḥikmah).

Neighbor rights and Islamic concept of tolerance

Tolerance helps a society to promote peace and love. Pondering over the excellent model of the Holy Prophet, he always ordered to behave well with the neighbors. The discrimination of a Muslim, non Muslim, enemy or a traveler should be reduced. According to Anas bin Mālik , Allah’s Messenger said:

“If someone spends the nights satiated while his neighbour is hungry beside him and he knows about that, he has not believed in me.”¹⁵

He also said on another occasion:

“That person is not a true believer who saturates himself with food while his neighbour starves¹⁶.”

This is reason that Islam orders to behave the neighbours with great tolerance without the discrimination of color or creed.

Tolerance in the Holy Qurān

The absence of tolerance in a society could affect the human respect and honor. It provides honour for the rights of others. The Holy Prophet taught tolerance to an individual and to communal level of life. The Holy Qurān gives the lesson of tolerance in many verses.

Allah Almighty says:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ¹⁷

“There is no compulsion in Dīn (Religion). Surely, the guidance has been evidently distinguished from error.”

The act of compulsion does not compete with Islam, and the religion cannot induce by force. It is the willingness and determination of a person. Therefore, in such conditions nobody can be forced to convert his religion to Islam.

It has been law of all the nations of world that they use the behavior of discrimination with other nations. In this modern world, to destroy the rights of others is considered an admirable action. But Allah Almighty says in the Holy Qurān:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُقْسِطِينَ¹⁸

“Allah does not forbid you to be good to them and treat them with equity and justice who did not fight against you on (the question of) Dīn (Religion), nor did they drive you out of your homes (i.e., homeland). Surely, Allah likes those who conduct themselves with equity and justice.”

The Muslim should not have any enmity with anyone for nothing. Whoever has no enmity with you, it is the demand of justice you should not observe enmity with him. A Muslim should show morality and humbleness in order to impress the non believers who may embrace Islam. Allah Almighty ordered moderation, tolerance and kindness with others and He also forbade the Muslims not to use abusive words about their fake gods.

“And, (O Muslims,) do not abuse these (false gods) that these (polytheists) worship besides Allah, lest these people should (also, in retaliation,) revile against Allah’s Glory wrongfully due to ignorance. Thus have we made the

conduct of every sect (and faction) seem attractive to (their own eyes and they regard only that as truth). Then all have to return to their Lord, and He will inform them of (the results of) their deeds which they used to do¹⁹.”

Allah Almighty taught the Muslims in this verse to behave non Muslims with great morality and tolerance and respect their beliefs²⁰.

Tolerance in light of Ḥadīth

The saying of the Holy Qurān for the Prophet (S.A.W) throws light on the scope and importance of tolerance. The indications are quoted in Ḥadīth which highlights the importance of high morals and tolerance.

The Holy Prophet says:

“Beware! Whoever did a cruel deed or snatched his right, or teased him more than his strength, or took anything from him without his will, I shall fight (against the Muslim) from his behalf at the day of judgment²¹.”

Once the delegation of the non Muslims came to the Holy Prophet, the Prophet (s.a.w) felt happy to serve them. Delegation of Christian of the Ḥabsha came to meet the Prophet and He made them stay in the mosque of the Prophet and took the responsibility of their hospitality himself.

“These people have a prominent importance for our companions, that is I Liked it to respect and serve them myself²².”

A delegation of fourteen Christians of Nujran came to Madīna. The Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w) stayed the delegation in mosque, and allowed them to say prayer according to their own ways of worship. They offered their prayer facing towards east²³.

At the conquest of Makkah an Anṣāri commander S‘ad bin ‘Ubādah said to Abu Sufyān:

“Today is the day of battle.”

The companion pointed the day as day revenge. The Holy Prophet got angry and took flag back from him. The flag was given to his son Qais and said to Abu Sufyān:

“Today is not the day of revenge but the day of Mercy²⁴.”

In fact, it is the great example of the peace, love, affection and tolerance. The Holy Prophet not only forgave them but he granted them with his great characteristic of Mercy.

“There is no revenge upon you and you are totally free²⁵.”

Promotion of Tolerance in the era of Rightly-Guided Caliphs

The preachers should meet the people on their ground and should convince them with illustrations covering to their mental level. The preaching should be dogmatic, from offence and be attractive. There should be no contradiction in manner and words. Our wording should be polite and based on gracious examples. The motive should be broad and constructive.

The verse also refers to cover all the human disputes and rights. The preachers restrained from conflicts and bear patience. This patience gives an advantage in the end. Allah Al-Mighty orders the beloved Prophet to be patient and courageous.

Allah Says:

وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ²⁶

"And do you be patient".

In time of extraordinary provocation the Prophet (S.A.W) has been commanded to show patience and tolerance. It should be taken a weakness and a thing of heart losing. Because the first ever improvement is to defend himself from the wishes that arises in the innerself.

In light of these verses we should invite all to the path of Allah and expose his message.

In the light of Prophetic teachings, caliphs established and enforced Islamic law in their respective empires.

In continuation to the Prophetic teachings, the Caliphs of the Islam maintained the policy of tolerance in dealing with other communities. In the following line the aspect has been highlighted in detail.

Interfaith Harmony in the Era of Ḥaḍrat Abu Bakar Siddīq

There are numerous pacts and treaties which were signed with non-Muslims in the era of Ḥaḍrat Abu Bakar Siddīq. To elaborate and to make explicit the concept of harmony, few examples are quoted below:

For the people of “Anaat” you declared:

1. Their religious sanctities (synagogues, churches, cathedrals etc.) will not be demolished.
2. They can ring their bells (arcade) whenever they want except at the time of Muslim prayers.

3. They are allowed to demonstrate their cross freely on their religious festivals.
4. They are obliged to serve Muslim travelers for three days. It is also incumbent upon them to guard and secure the life and property of Muslims when needed²⁷.

Ḥaḍrat ‘Umar Farūq and the meaning of tolerance

There are many examples of harmony patent on the annals of history regarding this age. Imam Ṭabari states:

“When the tribe of Tughlab was defeated, they were not convinced to leave their creed. On this, Ḥaḍrat ‘Umar commanded that the people of Tughlab will not be forced to leave their religion and are free to practice their faith. However, if any one amongst them willfully enters the fold of Islam, no one is allowed to stop him²⁸.”

Harmony in the Era of Ḥaḍrat ‘Uthmān

We find glorious exhibits of harmony in the era of Ḥaḍrat ‘Uthmān. For instance, if we see:

“In your Caliphate, a Jew in a court of governor Waḥīd was performing juggling tricks. Ḥaḍrat Jundab bin Ka‘b, who is a senior successor, was also among the viewers. He assumed those tricks to be an evil/Satanic spirits so he killed that Jew. Governor Waḥīd arrested him and sentenced him to death for the crime he committed. Jundab asked jail keeper if he could help him to escape. Agreeing with Jundab the keeper replied: Escape from here! (Verily) Allah will not inquire me about you. When governor Waḥīd was informed about the entire episode, he sentenced keeper to death for not performing his duty well²⁹.”

Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī on Minority rights and Harmony

The era of Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī is recorded as a golden age in Islamic history. He not only provided minorities with their rights but was always compassionate towards them. Once he received a case in which the assassin was a Muslim and the victim was a non-Muslim. He ordered to handover the assassin to the family of deceased ones and sanctioned a decision on the Fatwa of Ḥaḍrat ‘Umar. (or passed his judgment according to the fatwa of Ḥaḍrat ‘Umar). But the successors agreed to set the offender free by taking restitution (blood money) from him. When this came into the notice of Ḥaḍrat ‘Alī, he called the family of the deceased and inquired them whether they were forced to do this or were free in making their decision. They replied, neither they were persuaded nor pressurized to do so. After

knowing this Ḥaḍrat ‘Ali allowed for blood money (equal to the restitution of a Muslim) and said:

“The non-Muslim citizens who fall under our supervision (their blood money is also) equal to the restitution of a Muslim citizen in our state³⁰.”

Modern Researchers and their ideology regarding Harmony and Tolerance

Following are the theories set forward by Muslim scholars and researchers regarding harmony and tolerance:

Mawlāna Mawḍūdi states

“Respect the emotions of people and do not criticize them in any regard which may cause harm to them. Never indoctrinate them nor force them to leave their faith. Rather, demonstrate high ethics from your conduct and behavior³¹.”

Syed Sulaymān Nadwi

Syed Sulaymān Nadwi described the biography of the Holy Prophet with detail and he also described the concept of tolerance as he said:

“From the lengthy discourses of prophetic teachings (on harmony and tolerance) we came to know that Muslims have contributed their excessive share in developing and promoting peace and harmony in the world by promoting these teachings of Prophet. It was due to the same traditions of Prophet that Muslims despite of having concrete dogmas and doctrine, agreed to mix-up with other nations of the world and work mutually³².”

Syed Şabaḥ ud Dīn

Mutual harmony is a great and dominant attribute of Islamic creed.

Regarding interfaith harmony Syed Şabaḥ ud Dīn states:

“Can you find any example of interfaith harmony and tolerance other than of Prophet? That Wahshī who killed his paternal uncle fled to Ṭāīf after Conquest of Macca but when he returned and accepted Islam, Prophet pardoned him³³.”

Syed Siddīq Shah

Tolerance is a vital part of human personality without which social structure as a whole become restless and fanatical. Regarding this ideology syed Siddīq shah states:

“Tolerance is the highest attribute of human personality. It is a fact that Muslims in all their postures seems the embodiment of tolerance and peace³⁴.”

Arnold. T.W states about the teachings of The Holy Prophet SAW

“Due to the influential teachings of Prophet, Islamic societies became the safe domains where minorities feel more safe and secure comparatively to non-Muslim states³⁵.”

Causes of terrorism and lack of harmony & Tolerance

Harmony is a key which elevates a man to honor and dignity. Human in terms is the one who treats his fellow beings on the basis of equity and equality. Therefore, the one who lacks the trait of harmony and tolerance always suffers from fundamentalism and extremism. Radicalism gives rise to terrorism. That’s why Islam has always proclaimed harmony and tolerance and all its representatives have demonstrated the lesson of tolerance and harmony. The modern researcher Muḥammad Siddīq shah states about Harmony and tolerance:

“Islam is a religion of brotherhood, love, tolerance and harmony. Radicalism, torture, terrorism and violations of human rights are all the reasons which give rise to intolerance³⁶.”

Conclusion/Findings

Islam is a religion of peace, love, tolerance and forbearance. As like other human rights, Islam gives great emphasis on harmony and minority rights. Qurān and Ḥadīth significantly emphasize on harmony and forbearance. In every era of Islamic history, harmony was demonstrated explicitly. The standards set by the Prophet in his era (which is called as the best era) and succeeding to him the era of Companions and successors, all are the merits to be followed. Leading scholars, Jurists, Saints and Shyūkh of Islam, not only taught the teachings of harmony but also demonstrated it widely and set forth the examples.

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