

Contemporary Challenges regarding Muslim-Christian Dialogue: And Its Solution in the Light of Nobel Sīrah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ

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ABSTRACT

Islam recognizes the status and respect of other faiths and communities for socioeconomic and sociopolitical development. Therefore, the kind Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the first ever personality in the human history who accepted the identity of other faiths and involved them in state affairs of the city state of Madīnah in 610 CE/1AH. The citizens of the first Islamic State including Jews, Christians and Polytheists were treated as equal and respected citizens. The door of discussion and mutual cooperation were opened for all faiths and communities of the society. For that purpose, the Holy Prophet ﷺ set out some special parameters and principles of dialogue and interaction with other faiths. These principles may be freedom of religion, mutual respect and cooperation, interfaith tolerance, focus on common issues, active participation in state and social activities etc. The history is eye witness of this conduct that Muslim rulers and public care these principles and promote them in all ages of the Muslim governance. However due to some reason modern era have been observed of not being compatible with minorities in east as well as in the west. Categorically, they are having encounters with many difficulties, challenges and issues for security, rights and peaceful coexistence in all over the world. Unfortunately, Pakistan have also considered to be the part of hyper national and international sociological environment regarding minorities. In order to overcome these issues and challenges then we must follow the Prophet's Seerah ﷺ regarding interfaith dialogue and mutual cooperation in a pluralistic society like Pakistan. In this study, the efforts are made to explore contemporary challenges and its solution in light of the Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ from current sociopolitical context.

Keywords: Interfaith Dialogue, modern challenges, Prophet Seerah ﷺ, solution

INTRODUCTION: Interfaith dialogical activities have been one of the most important and most vigorous topics in different ages of the human history for the sake of peace and peaceful coexistence. But the actual issues and spirit of

interfaith dialogue and relations have been discussed after the everlasting Prophecy of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. With the passage of time it has been part of human cultural and intellectual discourse, thought and civilization in different segments of the human history. Now a day, it has gotten all the zeal and zest from both Islamic and Christian perspectives due to some seen and unseen reasons. Contemporary era is counted as the era of interfaith, intercultural and inter-civilization dialogues. Many efforts have been done to bring different communities and faiths of the world closer to each other. According to a vital research study on interfaith dialogue issue;

“The 20th century is considered as the most notable era for the promotion of interfaith dialogue and other interreligious activities among different religious communities. Many interfaith activities were launched to bring closer different faiths, specially, the adherents of Abrahamic faiths: Jews, Christians and Muslims. For this purpose, the foremost initiative was taken by Muslims and Christians scholars, in 1950s”.¹

Categorically, Islam recognizes the status and respect of other faiths and communities at all without any racial, colour and language discrimination. Therefore, the Holy Prophet ﷺ ever first in the human history in the human history prophet Muhammad is the first ever personality who accepted the identity of other faiths and involved them in sociopolitical and socioeconomic affairs of the city state of Madīnah. The Jews, Christians and Polytheists were treated as equal and respected citizens of the state at that time and after it. The door of meaningful interfaith discussion and mutual cooperation were opened for all faiths and communities of the society. The fundamental sources of Islamic Sharī'ah (Divine law), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), thought and civilization promote it frequently. According to a scholarly opinion of Muhammad Ammārah on Islam and Interfaith relations;

“The Charter of Madīnah, by which Muhammad ﷺ is recognized as the head of the state provides the constitution of the city-state of Madīnah, is characterized by pluralism and liberty, relatively different from the nation-states which are fabricated around an ethnic and linguistic society. It arranges the standard of communal liability of the (multiethnic) groups”.²

To improve socioeconomic development and interfaith relations, the Holy Prophet ﷺ set some special parameters and principles of dialogue and discussion with other faiths. These principles may be freedom of religion, mutual respect and cooperation, understanding, interfaith tolerance, focusing on common

issues, participation in state and social activities etc. As a result, the history is eye witness of this conduct that Muslim rulers and public care these principles and promote them in all ages of the Muslim Governance without any partiality. Although later on, the spirit of Islamic Governance and roles of righteous caliphate was not followed properly but the overall dealings and relations with non-Muslims have considerably been good in the different phases of Islamic History. A renowned Muslim scholar and researcher Dr. Muhammad Hamīdullah pointed out many agreements of the Holy Prophet ﷺ with non-Muslims which had provided them respect, protections and rights.

“The religions, Churches, life, honor and property of all Christians are living in the East and the West is under the protection of God (Allah), His Messenger (ﷺ) and the believers. No Christian shall be forced to convert to Islam. If any of the Christians are subject to murder or any other injustice, Muslim must help them”.³

However, it is observed, modern era is not considered best for minorities in East and the West both due to some academic and nonacademic reasons. They are facing many challenges and troubles and issues for peace, tolerance, mutual relationship and peaceful coexistence in all over the world up till now. Unfortunately, due to national and international hyper potical environment Pakistan is also included in one of them. It is keenly suggested if we want to overcome these issues and challenges then we must follow the Prophet’s Seerah ﷺ instructions regarding interfaith dialogue and mutual coexistence in a pluralistic society like Pakistan. In this study, efforts are made to explore contemporary challenges and their solutions in the light of the Seerah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ from current Pakistani sociopolitical context

SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE:

Interfaith dialogue, debates and discussions have been a pivotal part of most significant activities in different phases of the human history. Especially it seems a momentous activity in Muslim-Christian perspectives in contemporary era. Doubtlessly, it has become a burning issue of today on both the national and international levels. Particularly, when we are living in the age of globalization and the exponents of the clash of Civilizations are found to be at their peaks with such serious context it is highly notable that the interfaith dialogue seeks to achieve peace, tolerance and harmony between world religions, communities, faiths and civilizations. We can use the tool of positive and fruitful dialogue in order to remove conflict, clashes and contrives from different communities of the contemporary world. It also acts as a of bridge and helps in keeping different

faiths and communities of the world closer to each other. According to S. Wesley's analysis ;

“Those engaged in dialogues were considered bridge builders” across the traditions. A certain *trickledown effect* was assumed in interfaith dialogue as well! Further, in most dialogue events there was little concern about the extent to which the individual in dialogue was able to truly represent the tradition, not only as a ‘religious’ system but also as a social, cultural, economic, and political manifestation. In some groups these dimensions were consciously suppressed to keep controversies out in the task of building a community of heart and mind.”⁴

The dialogue has always been a necessity for mutual understanding and communication between Muslims and Christians, because both of the religions have several issues in common. We believe in one God, Prophet-hood and Divine revelation, we respect Jesus, Merry and Angles. We interact socially, religiously and politically in number of issue. We can be married with each other, we can eat and share the several occasions of grief and happiness. We can search many issues of dialogue for common understanding peace and prosperity. Therefore, Book of Allah differentiates the people of book, specially the Christians from others. Almighty Allah pronounces in the Glorious Quran most likely;

وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَّوَدَّةَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَ لَنذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِيَسِينَ وَرُهَبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ⁵

“And nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, “We are Christians”: because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.”

Moreover the kind conduct of the Holy Prophet ﷺ justifies our sympathetic and kind approach towards minorities. The holy Prophet ﷺ explains the behavioral approach towards the non-Muslim minorities acceptable clarifications ;

“The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment(Youm al-Qiyāmah)”⁶

We can find out beautiful examples of the Prophet kind relationship and conduct with non-Muslims minorities including People of the Book. It is narrated by a prominent Seerah writer Muhammad bin Abdulamlik in Seerah al-Nabvīyah;

“He actively protected the rights and freedom of the people of the Book, honored those beliefs and traditions that he shared with them and treated them with courtesy and respect. He ensured the religious freedom of people of the Book in Madīnah time to time”.⁷ Furthermore, according to most important statement of Imam Baidhāvī: “when a delegation of Christian from Najrān came to negotiate a pact with the Prophet ﷺ he courteously allowed them to pray in the Mosque (Masjid of the Holy Prophet ﷺ) which lasted the whole day.”⁸ Likewise a renowned scholar and dialogue expert Hassan Muhammad Bāgil describes the Muslim-Christian dialogue and relations as :

“We (Christians-Muslims) believe in the One God, who sent many Prophets into this world for the guidance of humanity. We both also believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and as the Word of God, which is denied by the Jews.”⁹

Islam is the religion of cooperation and understanding so it offers plenty of dialogue to all faiths and communities for peace and mutual cooperation. Hence as a result according to the Islamic point of view, Dialogue with wisdom (*Hikmah*) is a good tool of Islamic *Da'wah* (Preaching). As Allah says in the Holy Quran;

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ¹⁰

“Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.”

On another place the Holy Quran discusses the manners of dialogue with people of the Book in a special way and recommends a modest and humble way to interact with them;

وَلَا تَجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ¹¹

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us”.

In addition to it, many Noble sayings (Ahādīth) of the kind Prophet ﷺ also describe its vital role. interfaith dialogue has gotten all of its fertility and productivity mainly because of preaching and spread of Islam, because Muslim plays an active role in participation of Dialogue is due to mutual understanding, peace and preaching of Islam. The Messenger of Allah Muhammad ﷺ said about good communication, “Convey the message even if it is only one verse.”¹² It is also required to be noted that It is also noted, Muslim participation in interfaith dialogue is due to mutual understanding and preaching . Muslims are

not font of just dialogue for dialogue in any phase of the history they are interested to join a fruitful and productive discussion It is the historical fact that Muslims have always promoted dialogue through fruitful and meaningful discussion. Here, Dr. Muhammad Ataullah Siddīqī expediently commented; "Muslim participation in dialogue needs to be seen first in a theological perspective and secondly as an encounter with Christianity in the contemporary situation. Furthermore, the dialogue is about communicating with other faiths, with other community to create better understanding."¹³

It has also been frequently observed that interfaith dialogue is also significance in Christian theological and social perspective because they put it their religious survival, missions and preaching of Christianity in all over the world. A renowned Christian scholar and remarkable Christian dialogue expert Father James Channan whispered about the need and importance of interfaith Dialogue in Pakistani Christian perspective, "There is a need to help our people realize that a dialogue with Muslims is must in Pakistan. There is no future for the church in Pakistan without dialogue".¹⁴ Another important contribution of Christian in interfaith dialogue is spread of Christian missions. Positively or negatively, the spread of Christian mission under the umbrella of interfaith activities have always been important activities of church. Although Muslim scholars have been sow their concerns and reservations but throughout the history these missionary activities are the major constituent of Christian church. According to a research study of their own witness; "Dialogue in its very nature is a missionary activity. It is, to Catholic Church a means to expand the mission of Christ and lead the people to eternal salvation by converting them to Christianity."¹⁵

It is perceived that in modern ages, the Muslim- Christian dialogue has emerged with all of its importance and necessity especially being the part of civilized society and age of religious diversity all kinds of conflicts and clashes are managed and tackled through a meaningful dialogue and constructive discussion. Here, Prof. Dr. Israel Fāroqī rightly argued about the contemporary significance of interfaith dialogue;

"In contemporary era the world is passing through an ideological clash and encounter. Every civilization, faith and thought is trying to make self-dominant it on the others with the usage of available resources and powers Sometimes this clash of civilization becomes the core reason of practical bloodshed wars and controversies. In this crucial situation, the meaningful and constructive dialogue is a right direction to overcome these serous issues".¹⁶

Consequently, in future Interfaith dialogue will be the necessary activity for the both communities, Muslims as well as Christians for peaceful co-existence and mutual cooperation on national and international levels, thus the scholars and representatives of both of the communities Christians and Muslims should try to get sufficient knowledge with deeper understandings and to improve their skills and representations in this important field of research, study and practice.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES;

Contemporary era is counted as the era of globalization and most developed shape of thoughts, civilizations and faiths. Every faith and community want to become supreme and superpower on the surface of the earth. Specially the global powers want to run and implement their laws, rules and regulations as world order. They want to rule the world dominantly by hook or by crook. Their socioeconomic, sociopolitical and geostrategic interests made the world's politics a pile of ammunition where a minute mistake can destroy it. Thus, in this hard situation, doubtlessly, interfaith and inter civilization dialogue is key solutions of these huge national and international issues and problems with common sense wisdom and spirit. For that purpose there is need to analyze the contemporary challenges and obstacles in terms of mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, interfaith dialogue and harmony. According to a research study on interfaith dialogue objectives; "The basic goal of interfaith dialogue is to establish an ideal society where people have compassion for the suffering of others, where people can care the each other, where they do not hurt each other, where the system of production and distribution are humane, rational and ethical".¹⁷

This kind of understanding and objectives of dialogue may help to solve the serious issues and controversies of the contemporary world. For that purpose there is call of hour to discuss the obstacles and challenges to solve them in accordance with common wisdom. In the following points I would like to throw light upon some most important contemporary obstacles and challenges of interfaith dialogue and their solutions in light of the Noble Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

1- Historical conflicts and clashes;

One of the most important obstacle and challenge for the betterment of interfaith dialogue especially in case of Muslim–Christian dialogue are historical clashes and conflicts. These clashes have been part of the Muslim–Christian history throughout the history and foundations of Islam. They can keenly be observed as the battles of Islamic and Roman empires since the advent of Islam in the global era of Prophet ﷺ and later on in the era of righteous caliphate of Hazrat Abu

Bakar Siddīque and Hazrat Umar Fārūq (RA). First of all the roman governor kill the ambassador the Prophet ﷺ and after it the caliphs of Islam Hazrat Abu Bakar and especially Hazrat Umar conquer the majority areas of the Roman empire. With the passage of time the ottoman empire conquered the capital of Byzantine Constantine in 1452 AD. That was a time when tension and conflicts between Islam and Christianity was on its peak . According to Ismael Ibrahim Nawāb arguments;

“The Christian and Muslim civilizations are geographical neighbors, and there is long diversified history of frequent tension, acute rivalry, armed conflict, military alliance across religious lines, (as well as) peaceful cultural exchange, economic traffic and occasional cooperation. Some would have us believe that the past of these two civilization necessarily fixes their future”.¹⁸

The story does not end here but later on the war of crusades presented the worst shape of clashes and conflicts between Islam and Christianity. This was the era of bloodshed and huge loss of of human lives in the name of religion. Though it was right or wrong but it is the recorded fact of history and cannot be excluded from the Muslim-Christian history. After that the era of colonialism starts from West after renaissance in modern Western history. In this crucial period of history West exploited the ideology and resources of the Muslim world with both hands. in contemporary era the West had eaten the resources of Muslim world after 9/11 in the name of so called war on terrorism . These historical conflicts and clashes destroyed the self-confidence of both Islamic and Muslim world, Muslim and Christian communists on large scale . Maclean quantified about relations of Islam and West;

“A major problem in the relations between Islamic and “Western-type” cultures is a deficiency of mutual understanding. An especially negative specific effect of this incommensurability is the frightening image of Islam. Islam is perceived in many cases as intolerant, and culturally inflexible; that is, it is unready to make compromises for the sake of peaceful coexistence with Western types of social behavior”.¹⁹

In this constant state of tension and conflict situation between both communities of Muslims and Christians, Islamic and the Western world, it is challenging that we have to initiate some flexible, positive and successful steps for a meaningful interfaith dialogue.

2- Challenge of the religious and cultural identity:

The second most relevant challenge to Muslim-Christian dialogue is sensitivity of the identity on theological grounds, especially in majority populated area of both of them. Doubtlessly, Muslims and Christians are the largest community of the world population since advent of the Islam, especially in contemporary era when the Muslims comprise 25% of the world's population and Christian are the 31% population of the world. It means the both religious communities are more than half of the existing population of the contemporary World. In this regard both communities are proud of it and sensitive to their religious identities. According to the most important document of WCC on interfaith dialogue;

“Christian-Muslim relations have been an issue since the historical rise of Islam, more than fourteen centuries ago, from the beginning there have been two dimensions to the question. The first is related to the practical living together of individuals and communities of the two faiths, and the second to theological challenges. These include questions of Christian self-identity and self-expression in relation to Islam as well as those of understanding its significance.

These issues have engaged Christians through the centuries”.²⁰

This aggressive identity issues have arisen some questions on religious understanding and peaceful coexistence on the majority of community. For example, this complaint is common in Muslim countries from non-Muslim minorities as well as from Muslim minority in Christian Europe and Hindu India that their identity is being vanished from main stream of socioeconomic and sociopolitical spheres. They do not trust on majority due to some serious reasons. According to an interesting and informative study on minority behavior;

“Our experimental results show that it is status based on religion rather than religion in itself that dictates behavior of the minority, on average,

irrespective of religion, behaves differently than the majority. Individuals from the minority religion trust their own religion group more than they trust the other religion group. However, they do not show such behavior when they constitute majority”.²¹

The situation would be continuous As far as the relationship between Islam and West ; Christian and Muslims are not so good but worst and tensed even in the civilized, modern and so called plural Europe and America. According to the research study of W. Shahid and PS Van Koningsveled;

“Daily events in which both the relationships between the Western and Muslim world and between Muslims and non-Muslims of Europe and North America is the central issue when combined it with the various publications on this topic show that the relationship with the groups concerned is a tense one. Mutual contacts mainly based on stereotype and prejudices, which are clearly observable in various reports in which the Muslims are described as fanatics, irrational, primitive, belligerent and dangerous”.²²

These are only some examples the rest of the complete picture is the ugly depiction of Muslim Christian interfaith dialogue though out the centuries the history. Thus, the identity and image of both the communities is not good. In this tense and difficult situation the starts of dialogue is really a difficult task but obviously not impossible.

3- Lack of consensus on objectives, issues, approaches and direction;

Another most important hurdle and challenge in reading interfaith dialogue is lack of consensus on common religious and social issues, objectives, approaches and direction of interfaith dialogue. moreover the definition and common understanding of interfaith dialogue is different from person to person and

collective as well . Even though the definition and objectives of the dialogue in East and West are entirely different from each other. The basic reason of this difference is that the Islamic and Christian objectives to participate in interfaith dialogue are entirely different from each other. A research study of Mr. Farjān elaborates it alike;

“Whether calling dialogue conversation, debate or polemics, it requires elaborate reasoning to prove and establish it. Otherwise, it could be fatal to the very objectives of dialogue among religions. This study considers, first of all, the analysis of different concepts and meaning known throughout history and what the researcher understands by dialogue to work out a comprehensive understanding that could help understand how dialogue is perceived in Pakistan”.²³

Definitely if the definition and objectives of the dialogue are so far from each other than how can we get unanimous results of this dialogue. Furthermore the issues, approaches and direction of interfaith dialogue also differs from community to community in every country and society, especially in Muslims and Christian perspectives. Another research study elaborates it in this way;

“The main reason regarding controversy of this dialogue is that every individuals and parties have involvement in this dialogue for its own interest and objective. It is found in a study that many groups of scholars, institutes, organizations and even governments have involved in it. Everyone has its own objectives and agenda even many secular, liberal and political parties are also promoting this dialogue”.²⁴

The Muslim and Christian scholars also does not agreed up on the approaches and direction of the contemporary interfaith dialogue. Muslims concern is theological and preaching based while the Christian involvement is due to sociopolitical , harmony and missionary purpose. This kind of difference creates a kind of obstacles and challenges to starts a successful and meaningful dialogue among different communities. Here, I am agreed with the suggestion of a dialogue of comparative religious scholar Dr. M. Moddassir Ali. He once articulates ;

“If we want to establish a fruitful dialogue between Muslims and Christians Communities of Pakistan, we should completely revise the present direction and strategy and approach of the dialogue because it does not match with the temperament and interests of Pakistani Muslim society.”²⁵

4- **Misunderstanding and misconception and lack of awareness:**

Another most significant hurdle and challenge for interfaith dialogue in Pakistan is lack of awareness, knowledge, and misconception about interfaith dialogue. There are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about interfaith dialogue found in Muslim-Christian spheres of Pakistan. Due to these challenging and issues Muslim community is not ready to actively participate in interfaith dialogue activities in Pakistan. There is need of clarification of these issues and obstacles with the consultation of Muslim-Christian scholars. Many academic studies have exposed them but actually the result is not fruitful. One important study directs it as ;

“ It is a fact that Pakistani Muslims scholars hardly play a role in interfaith dialogue whenever and wherever it was organized. There are some misunderstandings regarding dialogue in Pakistan. There is a huge gap between followers of Islam and others. No proper interaction is founded among the people. The followers of every religion have their own ideologies which obstruct them from mixing with others”.²⁶

One of the most considerable confusion from Christian community is that Muslims scholars (specially traditional ‘Ulamā) are not interested to take part in dialogue actively. I think it is nothing but a wrong perception. Practically, I visited many Muslim scholars academicians as well as traditional Ulamā. They are not disagreed with interfaith dialogue but they have some reservations about methodology of dialogue. Here, I would like to share a research study which was conducted on respective issue. Once Qazi Zia-ul-Haq, a traditional Muslim scholar of a religious school of thought in Rawalpindi said about it;

“Interfaith dialogue in itself is a good activity but the modern movement of dialogue has negative impact on Pakistani Muslim society and one of the most important negative impacts of this dialogue is to spread liberalism and secularism in Pakistani Muslim society.”²⁷

Here, question arises why these kinds of misconceptions and misunderstandings are being created? According to my humble opinion, sometimes use of less careful language creates such situation . For example, when Christian community says that interfaith dialogue and missionary activities are equal to each other but a

sense of reservation is created from Muslim side especially in Pakistani context. As an example; a Pakistani Christian scholar Michal Nazir Ali writes bravely in a research paper likewise about objectives of the dialogue;

“Encounter with other religions has been an important element in the history of Christianity in every age. The study of these encounters may contribute to our understanding of current encounters in the form of inter-religious dialogue.”²⁸

if we want to initiate and carry interfaith dialogue in a legally announced Islamic country then I think there is no need of the usage of this kind of demonstration in an academic or public forum. It is also noted, some serious efforts have found to be done in order to remove these misconception from the mind of Muslim scholars but they have reservations and show concerns that these activities intestinally are used to promote this kind of scenario.

5- Lack of comprehensive participation, spirits, skills and eligibility:

One of the most challenging to interfaith dialogue, especially in Pakistan is lack of comprehensive participation, spirit, skills and eligibility of participants and administration of interfaith dialogue. Many national and international dialogue experts show their concerns towards this issue. According to a dialogue expert opinion;

“One of the biggest challenges posed to the interfaith struggle in Pakistan is the inadequate understanding of interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution, and what they really mean. (Really) , the involvement of religious leaders in an interfaith seminar but if the goal is to strengthen the interfaith movement in Pakistan and create a real impact for different faith communities, the involvement of young people in this struggle holds a crucial position. (So), they need to be trained and educated in interfaith dialogue, and should be well equipped with the ideas, knowledge, and techniques to promote interfaith harmony in Pakistani society”.²⁹

It's really a challenge in interfaith dialogue process that sometimes inexperience and untrained person create a serious problem and conflict in the process of peace and harmony. It is the foundational success of dialogue depends upon the common sense, intellectual capacity and spirit based interesting in interfaith dialogue activity but unfortunately these qualities lacks in this context . A Christian scholar and dialogue expert understand this critical situation alike;

“The ground reality is that the common people do not know anything about the spirit and nature of this interfaith dialogue. They are rather confuse about it (or do not take part actively). Some people consider it mixing of different religious faiths. Some people consider their first and foremost duty to oppose this dialogue and declares statements against it”.³⁰

It is noted that due to nonsense and non-academic issues, the interfaith dialogue and social harmony have been interrupted and the national peace and development process in Pakistani society have failed to achieve their goal and height. For that purpose there is need of time to arrange special workshops and training program from public and private sector higher education institutions of Pakistan to promote meaningful dialogue process.

6- Lack of Pluralism, mutual confidence, tolerance, equality and respect:

Every religion specially revealed religious claims and promoted peace, harmony, love and welfare but in contrast the actual situation is different in all over the world. It is a great dilemma for all religions that their teachings promote peace and love but their conduct is the witness of chaos, terror and instability. I think the actual issue is that the followers of different religions do not act up on the real teachings of their religions. Moreover, there are founded lack of mutual confidence, tolerance, equality and respect. This deficiency influenced the mutual relations, interfaith peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue badly. According to the majority of dialogue scholars and experts the lack of mutual confidence, tolerance, equality and respect have proved to be a big challenge and obstacle in the way of the promotion of constructive interfaith dialogue movement. According to a scholarly discussion regarding to this on this issue;

“Religious pluralism must be distinguished from religious diversity, the reality and presence of a variety of types and forms of religious expressions. This is minimal religious pluralism. The essence of religious pluralism is not regalia but relationships. What is the relation of the content of the various faiths in a community? What is their common history, if any? What are their status and power relations? How do they

relate to each other? What are some common humanity efforts that can be planned and worked on jointly?”.³¹

In most of the societies, rather they are in the east or the West, the religious minorities face disrespect, intolerance and inequality. These things are very dangerous and creates hurdles and obstacles in the way of constructive dialogue among different regions and communities. The study of original sources of the religion is necessary for that purpose but unfortunately the religious scholars of both faiths are not paying proper attention on this most pivotal problem of the society. An Islamic scholarly opinion on this foremost issue;

“The source of information for the followers of other religions living in Pakistan about the other religion is (often) based up on prejudiced and partial religious literature which creates confusion and apprehension among them. The young followers and learners of any religion begins to considers the other religions and their followers inferior”.³²

The undue misconceptions, lack of mutual conference and active interfaith relations, absence of reasonable tolerance and mutual cooperation are the biggest challenges in the way of promotion and conduction of fruitful interfaith dialogue in all over the globe and especially in Muslim-Christian opponents of the East and the West.

7- Resistance against Sharī’ah Laws and Islamic identity of Pakistan:

Undoubtedly, Pakistan is a legally declared Islamic republic of the contemporary world. Obviously, majority of Muslim public like being identified by this title and some of them are more sensitive in this regard. Unfortunately, a number of Christian scholars with the help of national and international secular lobby are running regular campaign against it. These unnecessary activities are damaging the spirit and role of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan. In current scenario these issues have become big obstacle and hurdle in the way of Muslim-Christian dialogues and good relations. Some years before these activities were under the cover of human rights and minority rights but now a days, these issues are being highlighted openly under the banner of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan. A seminar report in collaboration with Christian Study center pronounced;

“Since the creation of Pakistan, there has been a long debate in the country whether Pakistan should be a secular or theoretic (Islamic) state? In this

background we organized this dialogue between the representatives of various schools of thoughts in the country. This international seminar was held from 10-12th December, 1998 at the Christian Study Centre with the collaboration of the Christian Study Centre and Fredrick Neumann-Foundation Islamabad (FNF). 40 participants attended this seminar from all over the country.”³³

Obviously, it is an irresponsible activity and as a result majority of Muslim population show their concerns and reservation on this type of interfaith dialogue and in this way the process of interfaith harmony, tolerance and peaceful co-existence is in danger. According to a published research paper on impacts of interfaith dialogues illustrated most likely;

“If we intensively study the socio-political influences of this interfaith dialogue movement, we may openly observe, this interreligious dialogue has some undesirable political effects and positive also in Pakistani Muslim socio-religious context. Therefore, according to some Muslim scholars the CSC(an active representative of modern interfaith dialogue) is hidden promoting a secular political agenda in Pakistan in the name of interfaith dialogue”.³⁴

Additionally, the campaign and resistance against blasphemy laws is also a big challenge and obstacle against Muslim-Christian dialogue. It is noted that Christian scholars with the special help and academic assistance of secular Pakistani scholars actively running a campaign against blasphemy laws and Islamic identity of Pakistan. In most of the programs they start and finish with the demand of complete abolishment of blasphemy laws. Many reasonable Pakistani scholars of Islamic studies have given them guarantee and argument but they are not ready to agree. Once Dr. Mahmud Ahmad Ghazi, a top most Pakistani scholar (ex-minister of religious affairs and president of International Islamic University) said;

“The Law of Tohīn-e-Resālat(Blasphemy of Prophet-hood) is merely to ensure legal protection of the Prophets. It is not a law of blasphemy in the sense we find in different Western countries, nor is it comparable with the laws governing heresy and blasphemy against religious people in medieval Europe, nor has it anything to do with the kind of inquisition we come across in post Muslim Spain. The law, in fact, aims at protecting the sanctity of the very source of

guidance on which the entire legal, constitutional, social, and cultural edifice of Islam rests”.³⁵

Maybe the leaders of the interfaith dialogue movement are not considering it as a big deal but these issues are creating disturbance in majority of Muslim scholarly opinion and as a result most of the senior Muslim scholars, rather they are modern or traditional, are avoiding to participate in this kind of interfaith dialogue. This is a challenging factor and serious obstacle for the promotion of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan. Moreover, this is not a good sign for interfaith relations and mutual cooperation in Pakistan like countries. Therefore, it is dire need of time to take some vital steps and important preemptive measures to overcome this issue.

SOLUTION IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROPHET’S SEERAH:

It is a front seen reality that there are many issues, problems and obstacles in the way of Muslim-Christian dialogue, relations and harmony. We cannot ignore or absolutely finish them but we can play an active role to resolve and minimize them for fruitful and meaningful interfaith dialogue and engagement. If we do not try to understand these modern issues and obstacles in the way of interfaith relations and dialogue then we cannot establish a fruitful interfaith interaction. Therefore, it is obligatory to know about hurdles and issues regarding interfaith dialogue and relation in this contemporary era of global, plural and multiethnic world. According to a valuable opinion of a renowned Christian scholar and expert opinion ;

“Nonetheless, not all interfaith experiences turn out well. Those who are engaged in the lengthy experience in dialogue understand that there are traps into which even the most ardent advocates of interfaith exchange may fall, and problems that must be addressed if real progress is to take place in mutual understanding”.³⁶

The Noble Islamic teachings and model conduct of the Holy Prophet ﷺ Hazrat Muhammad provides us a strong base to overcome the challenges and obstacles that come in the way in the way of interfaith dialogue and relations. According to the Glorious Qurānic teachings and guidelines when the Christian delegations of Najrān came to visit the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the meanwhile some theological discussions were started and there none of agreed up view on the result of these long discussions then the Quran recommends to the Prophet ﷺ to call them for common words. The Quran announces;

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا³⁷

“Say: O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; ”.

It was not only a religious or political slogan but the prophet ﷺ call them to the essence of this verse and allow them to made their prayer in his Holy Masjid. They have been offering their prayer many days towards their own Qiblā (Jerusalem). Many Islamic sources prove it. I think we should follow it according to its true sense and spirit because Prophet ﷺ was the founder of this call and Muslim history is successor of this precious tradition. So there is a need of time to adopt this beautiful tradition in contemporary Muslim societies. Here, Dr. Muhammad Attaullah Siddiqī commented likewise;

“Muslims has enough resources to redefine their position in the contemporary world. A society based on interreligious independence, tolerance and respect can be built so that those involved, Muslims or otherwise, can feel to engage and participate fully, in the society that they are living in”.³⁸

The second most important principle and recommendation towards the solutions of the contemporary interfaith challenges and hurdles is religious freedom. This Nobel principle is also found in the Glorious Qurānic teachings frequently. Allah commands in the Quran;

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ
الْوُثْقَى³⁹

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things”.

The divine conduct of the prophet ﷺ and impact of Islamic teachings is witness of that behavior that non-Muslims had availed complete religious freedom and protection throughout the Islamic history. Methāq-e-Madīnah a peace pact between Muslims and others faiths of Madīnah is an ever green example and model of this conduct. It was the salient feature of the pact that every party shall enjoy its religious freedom with complete spirit. According to an important clause of this peace pact;

“And the Jews of *Banû ‘Aw’f* shall be considered as one political community along with the believers-for the Jews their religion, and for the Muslims theirs, be one client or patron. He, however, who is guilty of oppression or breach of treaty, shall suffer the resultant trouble as also his family, but no one besides.”⁴⁰

On the behalf of this golden principle from the Holy Prophet ﷺ it can be said the non-Muslims have enjoyed complete religious freedom under the Islamic rule (Khilafat and later on empire). If we want to establish and conduct constructive dialogue we should also adopt this most significant principle of Islamic Shar’iah in contemporary era also.

The third most significant code of conduct and solution for modern interfaith challenges in Pakistan is ‘provision of interfaith respect, equality, tolerance and mutual confidence to the minorities’. According to Islamic teachings respect and equality is most necessary right for all human being without any social, religious, ethnic and racial discrimination. The book of Allah confirms to all humanity for many times

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
أَتْقَاكُمْ⁴¹

“O mankind! We created you from a single of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise . Verily the most honoured of you in sight of Allah is most righteous of you”.

The paramount understanding of this verse of the Glorious Quran is a sayings of the kind Prophet ﷺ which is narrated by a famous Imam of Hadith Ahmad bin Hambal. The messenger of Allah Prophet Muhammad ﷺ announced on the day of the last sermon;

“O People, Your Lord is one, your father is one. So, be aware, there is no superiority of an Arab over non-Arab, White over Black and Red over Black except for piety (*al-Taqwā*)”.⁴²

The jurists has consensus up on this issue if the non-Muslim lives under the protection of Islamic state they will enjoy all legal rights as well as sociopolitical. According to the landmark judgment of a classical Hanfī jurists;

“If the non-Muslim chose to live under the Muslim State and agree to pay it taxes, they will enjoy the same rights and privileges as are enjoyed by the Muslims at large. Similarly, they will be asked to discharge same obligation as the Muslims are required to discharge”.⁴³

The fourth most vital principle is the crucial solution to improve and promote meaningful interfaith relations and dialogue in contemporary era so that the Islamic principle of communication must be adopted in all levels. The first most thing is to call the people with most respectable and wise manners. Many verses of the Holy Quran discuss this core principle of discussion, dialogue, and communication. Here, just recommended one of them in surah an-Nhal in a most beautiful way;

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ⁴⁴

“Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.”

The Holy take another most vital step and prohibit the Muslim believers to involve with non-Muslims without any concern and need.

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ⁴⁵

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong”

Another place Almighty Allah strictly prohibit to abuse the fake idols of the non-believers.

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ⁴⁶

“Reville not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings”.

Here, the Prophet ﷺ whispered about the way of discussion and advised to talk in the most vigilant manner with non-Muslims specially with Christians;

“Do not believe the People of the Book and do not deny them. Say: “We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we have submitted”.⁴⁷

Another place the Nobel teachings of the kind Messenger of Allah ﷺ guides us toward good communication most likely; *“Whoever believes in Allah and the Dooms Day let him say good words or otherwise keeps silent”*.⁴⁸ Thus, it can be comprehended as the ethics of disagreement with other (non-Muslims) for promotion of interfaith relations and dialogue. Here, Prof. Dr. Tāhā Jabir al-Ulwānī gives valid justification on difference of opinion;

“If differences of opinion operate in a healthy framework they could enrich the Muslim mind and stimulate intellectual

development. They could help to expand perspectives and make us look at problems and issues in their wider and deeper ramifications, and with greater precision and thoroughness”.⁴⁹

These are some most important solutions and cures of contemporary challenges and obstacles regarding interfaith dialogue , harmony and relations specially in Pakistan and generally worldwide . Definitely the interfaith challenges and issues are increasing day by day all over the world due to polarization and hate against religion and minorities but we cannot sit idle and helpless. We must show our commitment and capacity to solve these issues. For that purpose we must follow the divine instructions of the Book of Allah and model of excellence of the beloved Prophet ﷺ to overcome all these issues and hurdles.

CONCLUSION:

It is perceived from the above academic discussion that interreligious dialogue and relations is most important activity and need of time for a plural and multiethnic society. in addition, it can play a vital role to come closer the different faiths, communities and religions of Islamic republic of Pakistan and unite them on one common agenda of national peace and development. We must provide opportunity and assistance to non-Muslim minorities to play a fundamental role in solution of their socioeconomic , sociopolitical and socio-religious issues. It can be said without any doubt and suspicion that interfaith dialogue activities act as a bridge between both counties of Christians and Muslims and rehabilitate their mutual confidence for their better national role and peaceful coexistence . It is also noted that the most of the issues of minorities and challenges are due to majority laziness and ignorance from the core issues and problems at local and national level both. Majority of the representative and leaders of minorities are not willing or not illegible to solve the core problems. Moreover they are deeply involved in party politics and try to get more and more benefits in the name of interfaith problems. They highlights crucial events occurred in Pakistan and exploit the interfaith communities. It is also noted that the scholars of Muslim mainstream are not interested in interfaith dialogue due to some misunderstandings and misconceptions moreover the social activist are exploiting and using this interfaith activity for their secular and liberal agenda. However, the awareness about the importance of interfaith relations and dialogue increasing day by day and hopefully with the passage of time all issues and hurdles will be removed. Therefore, it is recommended that we must set out the

code of conduct for interfaith dialogue in the light of the Seerah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ .

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