

The Concept of Tolerance in Islamic Perspective

[A research analysis]

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Abstract

This research analysis highlights the concept of Islam about tolerance, harmony, permissiveness and sympathy to all humanity. It also rejects the negative propaganda of those who wrote that Islam is a religion of cruelty and extremism, the passion of Jihad spares the Muslims to exercise any kind of cruelty with the people of other religions. Although the reality is other way round. This research explains the reality that Islam is not only the religion of peace and love but also teaches the lesson of the rights of other religions and emphasizes to give them religious independence with great tolerance.

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

Islam gives us 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 others as well as stresses on religious tolerance. It reveals on us through deep study of The Holy Quran and Hadith that Islam not only has accentuated on religious tolerance but also has stressed on moral, economic and social tolerance.

Islam gives the lesson of 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

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religions as Islam does. It is the specialty of Islam who gave the rights to the Non Muslims with tolerance. Islam is the religion of nature. Its taste is to give respect and profit to mankind. According to the Holy Quran Muslim Ummah is created for the welfare of humanity [1] who 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. Unfortunately, some people have realized that to offer prayer, to keep fast, to pay zakat and to perform Hajj is the worship only, and they have eliminated the other moralities, matters and other good deeds from the religion practically.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ has ordered all above mentioned deeds as well as he also preached human rights. It means clearly that to act upon Islamic worships is not all about but human rights have more importance than Allah's rights. Islam teaches to deal the people of every color, religion and race with great tolerance.

Lexical Meanings of Tolerance:

According to Syed Ahmad Dehlvi meaning of tolerance:

“Tolerance means to bear pain or hardships with patience. It also means to bear the things you don't like.” [2]

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 them. [3]

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 bear.” [4]

Under the light of this definition it becomes clear that ‘روداری’ is a Persian word originally and currently it is also used in Urdu. In Urdu language it means to make permissible and acceptable.

Definition of Tolerance in “The Collins Dictionary”

“Broad mindness, charity, forbearance, indulgence, lenity, magnanimity, open mindness, patience, permissiveness, sufferance, sympathy.” [5]

Definition of Tolerance in “Oxford Dictionary”

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

Under the light of all above mentioned different Urdu, Persian and English lingual definitions explain that the fact that 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 also can be social concepts. So tolerance is such an essence in which a man keeping on his ideas and beliefs tolerates the ideas of other with patience.

Conventional & Traditional definition of Tolerance

The conventional and traditional meanings of Tolerance are it is the name of such a quality which is against the prejudice, individuality and cruelty and in which an action is made permissible. And also in which the concepts and theories of the individuals of the other religions are borne with patience. [7]

Tolerance is such a terminology which was firstly used by the scholars of different religions in the end of 18th century. Ibn-e- Ashoor who was the great scholar of modern age who has talked a lot on the topic of tolerance.

Likewise Allama Majid Gharbavi writes about the history of word ‘روادری’ he says:

“That the word of ‘روادری’ was introduced as a terminology in the 17th and 18th century.” [8]

This is an admitted fact that tolerance is the name of sound behavior among different religions.

Conventional Definition of Tolerance and Dr. Jameel

”أن تترك لكل إنسان حرية التعبير عن آرائه وإن كانت مضادة لآرائك.
وقريب من هذا المعنى قول (غوبلو) إن التسامح لا يوجب على المرء التخلي
عن معتقداته، أو الامتناع عن إظهارها، أو الدفاع عنها، أو التعصب لها،
بل يوجب عليه الامتناع عن نشر آرائه بالقوة والقسر والقدح والخداع.
هو أن يحترم المرء آراء غيره لاعتقاده أنها محاولة للتعبير عن جانب من
جوانب الحقيقة، وإنما هو واجب أخلاقي ناشئ عن احترام الشخصية
الإنسانية.”

“It is compulsory for you that you must spare someone to express his views and opinions independently, although his opinions are against you. Famous philosopher ‘Goblo’ says like above mentioned definition ‘It is not compulsory for a man that should give up his faith or he should abstain from expressing it, or he keep prejudice about others. But it is compulsory for him that he should abstain from spreading his views by means of power, lie and dodge. A man should respect the faith and opinions of others. It is a duty binding for him for the personal, ethical and moral respect of human being.” [9]

According to all above mentioned definitions tolerance means that we should bear the faiths and deeds of those who are different from us. We should respect their feelings and should neither criticize on them nor should

adopt the ways and means to stop them. It is necessary to keep peace and harmony among the people.

Moral Importance of Tolerance

Tolerance is a great quality. It is a fact that all human beings cannot be made united over a single point of view because of different reasons. 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 patience.” [10]

Religious Importance of Tolerance

The concept of easiness of Islam is not the matter of today but it is the concept of 14 hundred years ago. The Holy Prophet a had been taught his Ummah the lesson of easiness, blessings and affection. The narrow minded persons of today having limited knowledge don't want to listen these things and on the other hand the Non Muslims and Muslims and modern generation of both also think that perhaps Islam has no concept of affection, gentleness and tolerance.

Abu Hurayrah g reported that Allah's Messenger a said,

”إِنَّ الدِّينَ يُسْرٌ وَلَنْ يُشَادَّ الدِّينَ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا عَلَيْهِ“

“Indeed, the religion is ease, and no one makes it hard on himself save that he will be overpowered.” [11]

He said on another occasion:

According to Abd Allah b. Masood g Allah's Messenger a said thrice,

”هَلَكَ الْمُتَنَطِّعُونَ“

“The extremists have perished.” [12]

It means that Islam is merely religion of tolerance, love and peace. The religion of Islam never bore a person having exaggeration and extremist point of 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 Quran describes to convey the true message of Islam like that.

﴿ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ﴾

“(O Glorious Messenger!) Invite towards the path of your Lord with wisdom and refined exhortation and (also) argue with them in a most decent manner. Surely, your Lord knows well the one who strayed away from His path, and He also knows well the rightly guided.” [13]

Islam forbids the way of preaching which affects the religious independence of some one. Islamic governments always protected and secured the worship place and Non-Muslims and also facilitated them.

Tolerance was the major cause of the success in preaching

When the Holy Prophet ﷺ started preaching of Islam, he had only a few followers with him. But with the help of Allah Almighty, his great helper was his great human character. 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 the rights of Allah. People saw all aspects of his life slowly. His kind behavior, justice, mercy, kindness and tolerance with the enemies all were his great characteristics that caused the spread of Islam. [14]

Islamic concept of tolerance in inter-religious collective guardianship

Islamic Bait-ul-mal guards a Muslim who is cripples or becomes old or in poverty as well as Islamic Bait-ul-mal provides guardianship to a Non Muslims. Islam takes this responsibility of guardianship as a duty binding for the followers of all religions.

Abu Ubaid reported from Saeed b Musayyab g in Kitab-ul-amwal that:

“إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ تَصَدَّقَ صَدَقَةً عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ مِنَ الْيَهُودِ فَهِيَ تُجْرَى عَلَيْهِمْ”

“The Holy Prophet a gave charity to a Jewish family and after the death of the Holy Prophet a this charity is being continue.” [15]

Zaid b. Haad g reports that:

“إِنَّ صَفِيَّةَ زَوْجَ النَّبِيِّ تَصَدَّقَتْ عَلَى ذَوِي قَرَابَةٍ لَهَا، فَهِيَ يَهُودِيَانِ، فَبِيعَ ذَلِكَ بِثَلَاثِينَ أَلْفًا”

“Verily, the mother of believers and modest wife of The Holy Prophet, Hazrat Safya j gave charity to her relatives they both were Jews and the charity was sold out in thirty thousand Dirhams.” [16]

Neighbor rights and Islamic concept of tolerance

Since there is no tolerance is a society, there would be no peace and love in the society. It becomes clear after pondering over the excellent model of The Holy Prophet a that he always ordered to behave good with the neighbours. There is no discrimination of a Muslim, non muslim, enemy or a traveller. According to Anas b. Malik g, Allah’s Messenger a said:

“مَا آمَنَ بِي مَنْ بَاتَ شَبَعَانَا وَجَارَهُ جَائِعٌ إِلَى جَنْبِهِ وَهُوَ يَعْلَمُ بِهِ”

“If someone spends the nights satiated while his neighbour is hungry beside him and he knows about that, he has not believed in me.” [17]

He also said on another occasion:

“ليس المؤمن الذي يشبع وجاره جائع”

“That person is not a true believer who saturates himself with food while his neighbour starves.” [18]

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

The Mention of Tolerance in The Holy Quran

When there is no concept of tolerance in a society, there couldn't be think of human respect and honor. Because it is tolerance that provides honour for the rights of others. The Holy Prophet a taught about tolerance at individual and collective level of life. The Holy Quran gave the lesson of tolerance in many verses, a few of them are mentioned below. The Holy Quran describes tolerance at individual level in such a way.

﴿الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

“They are the ones who spend in the cause of Allah whether they are affluent or indigent (in both the conditions), sublimate their anger and tolerate (the faults of the) people; and Allah loves those who are benevolent.” [19]

Whereas at collective level of life Allah Almighty says:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ﴾

“There is no compulsion in *Dīn* (Religion). Surely, the guidance has been evidently distinguished from error.” [20]

It has been theory and 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 Quran:

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

“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.” [21]

It means that the Muslim should not have any enmity with anyone for nothing. Whoever has no enmity with you, it is the demand of justice you too have no enmity with him. But behave him with great morality so that he may embrace Islam by the impression of your morals. Where Allah Almighty ordered moderation, tolerance and kindness with others, He also forbade the Muslims to use abusive words about their fake gods.

﴿وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

“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 do.” [22]

Allah Almighty taught the Muslims in this verse to behave non muslims with great morality and tolerance and also too respect their beliefs. [23]

Tolerance in light of Hadith

Islam teaches the lesson of love, affection, tolerance and good treatment. There are so many indications in hadith which highlights the importance of high morals and tolerance. The following hadith of the Holy

Prophet a indicates the importance of the rights of the minorities. The Holy Prophet a says:

”أَلَا مَنْ ظَلَمَ مُعَاهِدًا أَوْ انْتَقَصَهُ أَوْ كَلَّفَهُ فَوْقَ طَاقَتِهِ أَوْ أَخَذَ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا بَغَيْرِ طَيِّبِ نَفْسٍ فَأَنَا حَاجِبُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ“

“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 judgement.” [24]

The delegation of the non muslims who come to the Holy Prophet a, He himself served them. So when a delegation of Christian of the Habasha came to meet the Prophet a, He made them stay the mosque of Prophet and took the responsibility of their hostality himself.

”إِنَّمْ كَانُوا لِأَصْحَابِنَا مَكْرَمِينَ، وَإِنِّي أَحِبُّ أَنْ أَكْفِيَهُمْ“

“These people have a prominent importance for our companions, that is I liked it to respect and serve them myself.” [25]

Once a deligation of Fourteen Christians of Najran came to Madina, He a made them stay in his mosque, and He a allowed them to say prayer according to their ways. So they offered their prayer facing towards east. [26]

At the conquest of Makkah an Ansari commander Saad b. Ubada said to Abu Sufyan:

”اليوم يوم الملحمة“

“Today is the day of battle.”

It means that today revenge will taken upon non believers. The Holy Prophet a got angry at this and He a took the flag back from him and hold it to his son Qais and said to Abu Sufyan:

”اليوم يوم المرحمة“

“Today is not the day of revenge but the day of Mercy.” [27]

What will be the great example of the peace, love, affection and tolerance more than this that The Holy Prophet a not only forgave them but he a granted them with his great characteristic of Mercy.

“There is no revenge upon you and you are totally free.” [28]

Promotion of Tolerance in the era of Rightly-Guided Caliphs

Islam is a religion which holds human dignity in honor. It is a religion that aims to ascertain, uplift and sustain the honor and dignity of man. A religion which commands fair dealing and good conduct, do not possess in itself any principle opposing human esteem. Islam emphasizes on ensuring the rights of minorities in an Islamic state or domain. The era of caliphates is the continuation of Muhammadan Era. In the light of Prophetic teachings, caliphs established and enforced Islamic law in their respective empires.

Interfaith Harmony in the Era of Hadrat Abu Bakar Siddique

There are numerous pacts and treaties which were signed with non-Muslims in the era of Hadhrat Abu Bakar. To elaborate and to make explicit the concept of interfaith 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 needed. [29]

Hadrat Umer Farooq and the meaning of tolerance

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

“When the tribe of *taghlab* was defeated, they were not convinced to leave their creed. On this, hadrat Umer commanded that the people of *taghlub* 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 him.” [30]

Tolerance & Harmony in the Era of Hadhrat Uthman

We find glorious exhibits of interfaith harmony in the era of Hadhrat Uthman.

For instance, if we see:

“In your Caliphate, a Jew in a court of governor Walid was performing juggling tricks. Hadrat Jandab bin Kaab, 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 Walid arrested him and sentenced him to death for the crime he committed. Jandab asked jail keeper if he could help him to escape. Agreeing with Jandab the keeper replied: *Escape from here! (Verily) Allah will not inquire me about you.* When governor Waleed was informed about the entire episode, he sentenced keeper to death for not performing his duty well.” [31]

Hadrat Ali on Minority rights and Interfaith Harmony

The era of Hadhrat Ali 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 Hadhrat Umer. (or passed his judgment according to the fatwa of

Hadrat Umer). But the successors agreed to set the offender free by taking restitution (blood money) from him. When this came into the notice of Hadhrat Ali, 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 that neither were they persuaded nor were pressurized to do so. After knowing this Hadrat 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 state.” [32]

Modern Researchers and their ideology regarding Interfaith Harmony and Tolerance

Islam is a religion that teaches and instills peace and harmony, demonstrating examples in every era. Following are the theories set forward by Muslim scholars and researchers regarding harmony and tolerance:

Mulana Modudi 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 behavior.” [33]

Syed Sulayman Nadwi

Syed Sulayman Nadwi described the biography of the Holy Prophet a 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 mutually.” [34]

Syed Sabah ud din

Mutual harmony is a great and dominant attribute of Islamic creed. Regarding interfaith harmony Syed sabah ud Din states:

“Can you find any example of interfaith harmony and tolerance other than of Prophet? that Wahshi who killed his paternal uncle fled to Taif after Conquest of Mecca but when he returned and accepted Islam, Prophet a pardoned him.” [35]

Syed Siddique Shah

Tolerance is a vital part of human personality without which social structure as a whole become restless and fanatical. Regarding this ideology syed siddique 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 peace.” [36]

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

“Due to the influential teachings of Prophet, Islamic societies became the safe domains where minorities feel more safe and secure comparatively to non-Muslim states.” [37]

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 Muhammad Siddique 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 intolerance”. [38]

Conclusion/Findings

1. Islam is a religion of peace, love, tolerance and forbearance. As like other human rights, Islam gives great emphasis on interfaith harmony and minority rights.
2. Quran and hadith significantly emphasize on interfaith harmony and forbearance.
3. In every era of Islamic history, interfaith harmony was demonstrated explicitly.
4. 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.
5. Leading scholars, Jurists, Saints and Shyukhs of Islam, all not only taught the teachings of harmony but also demonstrated it widely and set forth the examples.

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