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**The Teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ: Peace, Co-existence and Reconciliation**

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## The Teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ: Peace, Co-existence and Reconciliation

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### ABSTRACT:

In the current age, the world has turned into a multi-ethnic and multi-religious planet where different communities live side by side. The incident of 9/11 has escalated the conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, especially the Muslims are the victim of Islamophobia. In the given context, some groups started an armed struggle against the oppression in the name of Islam. As the backdrop of this reaction, western media have started stereotypical propaganda against the Islamic belief system and Ideology. It is commonly believed that Islam is against modern progress and personal freedom. On the other hand, some extremist non-Muslim individuals and organizations have increased the religious and political temperature by carrying acts like the publication of the Prophet's ﷺ caricatures, New Zealand massive killings, burning of the holy Quran in Norway etc. So, in this article, it has been discussed in detail that only the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and his practical model of the state of Medina provide the solid guidelines to create peace, reconciliation and the true spirit of co-existence among pluralistic societies. However, the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ propose guiding principles to establish an ideal society where both Muslims and non-Muslims exercise their civil and religious rights. This article deals with concepts such as peace, coexistence and reconciliation between Muslims and non-Muslims in the context of the strategies of the Prophet Muhammad. In Medina, citizenship and equal rights were recognized for all peoples, regardless of religious beliefs or practices. Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad are used with non-Muslims as an analytical framework which can be used to create an acceptable narrative for democratic partnership among Muslims and non-Muslims.

**Keywords:** Islam, Peace, Coexistence, Reconciliation, Equal rights, Islamophobia.

### Introduction

After the incident of 9/11, the issue of religious-coexistence has drawn the attention of distinguished thinkers and scholars and overpowered the social debates. Such obsession is owing to the critical nature of the given topic that goes beyond the predictable challenges and social scope of our society. It involves questions significant to intellectual thoughts and discussions largely. In the western world, Islam is blamed for intolerant behavior towards non-Muslim culture and beliefs. The West frames this stereotypical narrative as an undeniable truth. The intricate nature of this subject requires a factual based study that can remove deliberately proliferated fallacies against a true Islamic doctrine of coexistence. This paper will uncover the Islamic view of religious-coexistence in the context of the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Prior to dealing with the core issue, it would be pertinent to dig into the concept of

coexistence first.

### **The Idea of Coexistence**

The idea of coexistence is an ideal state in which people, belong to different religious or ethnic groups, live together and respect each other's beliefs. In other words, it is "to exist together at the same time or in the same place and also to live in peace with others despite differences, especially as a matter of policy."<sup>1</sup> Coexistence denotes to "a tolerant behaviour for others' faith, culture and to solve conflicting issues mutually without any violent manner."<sup>2</sup> For a better understanding, the concept of coexistence can be summarized into the following points: To live together at a same place and to develop a friendly relationship without asserting their own ideology and culture on others.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, It means to apply the Relativist approach that promotes tolerance, acceptance of foreign codes and diversity.

### **The Islamic Doctrine of Coexistence**

The Arabic word "salam" or "silm" is the root word of "Islam" which means submission towards the will of God. As every Muslim is directed to say these words when greeting to each other, God also refers Himself in the Quran as "salam" peace. So, Islam on purpose inspires the spirit of harmony and peace in its followers for this is one of the basic needs of a society. In the next section of our study, we will discuss the Islamic precepts which promote the idea of coexistence for creating a peaceful society.

Commonality of Human Origin: As the Holy Quran says "O mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted"<sup>4</sup>, all the humans are created from the same parents and the divide of humans based on race, colour, language etc., is to identify each other but to discriminate others or to be proud to these short-lived associations. Instead, Islam declares this divide as the sign of God's creation and a tool for knowing each other. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his speech on the conquest of Makkah announced that "O people! Verily your Lord is one and your father is one. All of you belong to one ancestry of Adam and Adam was created out of clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for non-Arab over an Arab; nor for white over the black or not for the black over the white except in piety."<sup>5</sup>

Other Divine Scriptures and Prophets: For the completion of Muslim faith, it is obligatory to believe in previous divine scriptures and prophets. The Holy Quran states, "Say, [O believers], „We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."<sup>6</sup>

Protection of Worship Rights and Places: Islam protects worship places and assures the right of non-Muslim inhabitants to freely perform their religious practices. The

Holy Quran itself reveals the fact that “if God had not driven some people back by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where God’s name is mentioned much, would have been pulled down and destroyed.”<sup>7</sup>

Right to Exercise Religion: Islam believes in free will and rejects forced conversion under any circumstances. As the Quran categorically announces, “There shall be no compulsion in acceptance of the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in false gods and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.”<sup>27</sup> At another place, the Quran reiterates the same principle in different words: “And if you [people] deny [the message] – already nations before you have denied. And there is not upon the Messenger except [the duty of] clear notification.”<sup>8</sup>

Good Behavior with Neighbors: An important element of coexistence is to have good relations with fellow humans and neighborhood. Islam teaches its adherers to be well-mannered and helpful towards their neighbors without considering their religion, culture and other differences. The prophet Muhammad says that “The best friend in the sight of Allah is he who is the well-wisher of his companions, and the best neighbor is one who behaves best towards his neighbors.”<sup>9</sup> “*He whoever passes his night satiated and restful in his home with his family, while he has poor neighbors passing their night hungry, has no true belief in the Messenger of Allah and is denying him too. Had such a man been a true believer, he would have given food to his neighbors and not let them pass the night in hunger.*”<sup>10</sup> “The angel Gabriel continued to enjoin upon me good treatment of the neighbor, so much so that I thought he would make him heir to one’s property.”<sup>11</sup> According to Islamic injunctions, a true Muslim should be kind and extend his support to his neighbor if needed, provide security to him in danger etc.

Islamic Treatment towards NonMuslims: Islam strictly forbids any kind of discrimination towards non-Muslims founded on religion, ethnicity or colour. The state of Medina is the prime example of this pluralistic approach. Islam provides the following religious and civil rights to non-Muslim dwellers who are settled in Muslim states.

- An Islamic state is responsible to protect their lives, dignity and properties.
- They are free to worship and impart their religion within the worship places.
- They can lead their lives according to their cultural and religious beliefs.
- They are independent to settle their personal disputes in the light of their religious and customary laws.
- An Islamic state is bound to maintain all its agreement with them.
- Similar to Muslims, their poor and needy ones are eligible to receive financial support from the Islamic state.
- Muslims are instructed to be supportive and tolerant of non-Muslims.

These are the core principles of Islamic dogma for making reconciliation and coexistence within a pluralistic society. The above-mentioned standards are not just restricted to a Muslim state, but every nation and society can benefit from them. The Quran and the

tradition of the Prophet ﷺ are the primary sources of Islamic beliefs and values for understanding the concepts of reconciliation and coexistence. So, it would be pertinent at this juncture to discuss the strategies of the Prophet ﷺ, especially, in the city of Medina where the first Islamic state was established by him. In the subsequent part of this paper, these strategies are discussed extensively.

### 1. Fixing of the Blackstone

The Prophet ﷺ, before the commencement of his prophet hood, played a key role during the fixing of sacred Blackstone in the wall of Ka'abah. As every tribe of Makkah thought it to be an honour to lay the stone on its previous place, almost they were near to a bloody war to perform this ritual. To solve this dispute, Muhammad ﷺ who was placed as a mediator, wisely spread a piece of sheet on the ground and put the stone in the middle of it. Then he asked the leaders of each tribe to hold onto one side of the cloth, they all collectively moved the stone to the site of construction. There, Muhammad ﷺ fixed the stone in the wall himself.” The possible war was turned aside and the conflict was settled peacefully”.<sup>12</sup>

### 2. The Charter of Medina

After the migration to Medina, Muslims desperately needed a safe place where they could strengthen their roots and peacefully spread the message of Islam to other nations. Under the wise and charismatic leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ Muslims achieved this target successfully. The first-ever written charter was introduced to create peaceful coexistence among different religious fractions who were settled in Medina. Several groups such as Jews, Pagans and Muslims became a single body and established an ideal multi-religious pluralistic community which was previous involved in bloody wars. According to demographic details of Medina at that time, non-Muslim Arabs were in the majority with 45%, Jews were the second largest population with 40% and Muslims were in the minority with only 15% of the total number. Although Muslims were less in numbers, the Prophet turned a scattered influx of people into a unified state. However, this charter had total 47 clauses; some import articles are discussed briefly in the following section.

**Article 25:** Both the Jews and Muslims shall be free to practice their religion and it will also apply to their clients and, to themselves but anyone who does wrong or acts treacherously; he brings evil on himself and his family members.

**Article 37:** Signatories of this agreement are liable to help each other against the invaders. Mutual advice and consultation are necessary between both the parties. Loyalty is protected against treachery. An individual is not responsible for his ally's misdeeds. The mistreated must be provided with justice.

**Article 40:** The protected neighbor (jar) is as sacred as the protector himself as long as he harms and acts treacherously.

**Article 42:** If any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise among the people of this document, it must be referred to Allah and Muhammad. Allah will guarantee the observance of this document.

**Article 46-47:** Whoever among the Jews follows us shall have assistance and equality; they shall not be injured nor shall any enemy be aided against them. The Jews maintain their religion and the Muslims theirs. Among the Jews (belonging to different tribes) and their adherents, those who transgress and behave unjustly and sinfully hurt but themselves and their families. The close friends of Jews are as themselves. Each, if attacked, shall come to the help of the other. The valley of Yathrib (Medina) shall be sacred and inviolable for all who join this treaty. Strangers under protection shall be treated on the same grounds as their protectors.<sup>13</sup>

Under the domain of this treaty, every group was free to adhere and to practice its religious beliefs independently. It eliminated century's old tribal structure which was previously founded on blood-relations and kinship. Divided into ethnic, religious and regional factions, all of them joined hands for the welfare of their society. "The charter replaced the traditional tribal kinship with a new social order and created a nation-state with a new social fabric. This epoch-making innovation ... brought an end for all times to the chaos of tribalism and laid the basis for a wider institution, viz a State."<sup>14</sup> At that crossroads of the history, the state of Medina emerged as the pioneer of coexistence and reconciliation among different belligerent religious groups. Peace was restored through the Islamic principles of coexistence, tolerance, and belief in God.

#### **The Treaty of Najran with the Christians**

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ signed a historical treaty with the Christians of Najran who were led by the monastery of St. Catherine. As a gesture of goodwill, the Prophet ﷺ allowed them to offer their religious services in the Nabvi mosque. Through the treaty of Najran, the Christians were given the full religious and administrative autonomy of their lands and properties. This covenant with the Christians of Najran describes the relevant details as:

The lives of the people of Najrān and its surrounding area, their religion, their land, property, cattle and those of them who are present or absent, their messengers and their places of worship are under the protection of Allah and guardianship of His Prophet ﷺ. Their present state shall neither be interfered with, nor their rights meddled with, nor their idols deformed. No bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, nor any monk from his priesthood, and they shall continue to enjoy everything great and small as heretofore; no image or cross shall be destroyed, they shall not be oppressed or suppressed. They shall be punished for any past crime. No tithes shall be levied on them nor shall they be required to furnish provisions for the troops, nor shall troops be quartered on them. Whatever has been written in this pact, Allah and Muhammad His Prophet ﷺ are guarantors of it.<sup>15</sup>

This historical document shows how the Prophet ﷺ secured liberty and religious rights of the Christians and extended their privileges under the Islamic state of Medina. It also gives an idea that coexistence and reconciliation are core values of the Islamic belief system which provides security to Churches, priests and monks. In the state of Medina, Christian women who married Muslim men were free to follow their religion



in parallel. No non-Muslim man or women were forced to convert and leave their previous faith. It is worthy to note if any Muslim violates this agreement, will be deemed noncompliant of God and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

### **The Treaty of Hudaibiyah**

The treaty of Hudabiyah is another example of Prophet ﷺ strategies to create coexistence and peace among the Arab nation. In the sixth year of Hijra, the Prophet ﷺ went to Makkah with the intention of Umrah (a lesser type of pilgrimage). He was accompanied his wife Umme Salmah and nearly 1,500 companions. At that time, the Quraish resisted the Muslims and barred them from entering Makkah. Although Muslims were in great numbers, the Prophet ﷺ returned to Medina without offering Umrah and concluded a treaty of coexistence and reconciliation with the Quraish. Some important articles of this treaty as follows:

1. The Muslims shall return this time and come back next year, but they shall not stay in Makkah for more than three days.
2. They shall not come back armed but can bring with them swords only sheathed in scabbards and these shall be kept in bags.
3. War activities shall be suspended for ten years, during which both parties will live in full security and neither will raise a sword against the other.
4. If anyone from Quraish comes to Muhammad ﷺ without his guardian's permission, he should be sent back to Quraish, but any of Muhammad's followers return to Quraish, he shall not be sent back.
5. Whosoever to join Muhammad ﷺ, or enter into a treaty with him, should have the liberty to do so; and likewise, whosoever wishes to join Quraish, or enter into a treaty with them, should be allowed to do so.

At that moment, some lesser disputes arose while writing the preamble of the treaty, but the Prophet ﷺ approved all the demands in favour of Quraish.<sup>16</sup>

### **Summary of Prerequisites for Coexistence and Reconciliation in Modern World**

**First: Recognition of Diversity:** People differ in their religious beliefs, ideologies, and perceptions. There is a need to recognize and respect others' beliefs and ideologies wholeheartedly.

**Second: Unity of Religions:** All divine religions are originated from a single divine religion and all the Jews, Christians and Muslims confirm the Prophet Abraham as their ancestor. The laws of God have emerged from a single divine light, and therefore all the followers of the divine religions must believe in all the prophets and divine books.

**Third: Religious Tolerance:** Although humans are different from each other in their physical appearance, language and habitual attitudes, they are united in their origin and are needed to live together in groups and communities who ensure their survival and development. The purpose of diversity in humans is to get to know each other and fulfill their needs. As man is a social animal, who avoid living in solitude, coexistence and reconciliation is necessary for maintaining existence.

**Fourth: Mutual Respect:** The value of mutual respect truly manifests in acknowledgement of differences, acceptance of diversity and recognition of changes. There is a need to adopt the relativistic approach within diverse societies because the world is changing perpetually and the previous knowledge is fading away in modern discoveries. In violation of other rights, we are deemed to lose our respect.

**Fifth: Freedom of Speech:** This is the basic right of every human being to freely express his ideas and hold his beliefs. Every independent and developed society supports this essential right. However, at the same time, every individual is entitled to exercise this liberty with extra care and cautiously, otherwise its violation may cause disastrous consequences. There is a thin line between freedom of speech and criticizing others' beliefs. Our expressions must be based on logical and factual evidence. If our discourse hurts others' religious beliefs, especially, then it spreads hatred and anger in a society or community which is against the concept of coexistent and reconciliation.

**Sixth: Need to Dialogue** Today as we advance into this new millennium, our society facing new challenges so, there is an ultimate need of tolerance; therefore, we have to learn how to reconcile with new existing challenges, conflictions and contradictions. This can be achieved through constructive dialogue, which is the only way to bring peace and peaceful co-existence between the peoples at societal and global scale.

- 1) Successful dialogue is the global solution to stop polarization, extremism and radicalization; therefore, it ultimately promotes global tolerance and peace
- 2) Dialogue opens the doors of new opportunities b/w the countries, with the expansion of science and technology the world has converted into a global village.
- 3) Successful dialogue b/w the countries are always good for promoting education, science and technology can drastically improve the global literacy rate.
- 4) Successful dialogue b/w the countries increase collaboration and cooperation which ultimately promotes to open the new doors of opportunities and increase the trading rate.
- 5) Successful dialogue b/w the countries promote socio-cultural activities.
- 6) Successful dialogue b/w the countries promote socio-economical activities.
- 7) Successful dialogue b/w the countries promote sociopolitical activities.

## Conclusion

The above-mentioned details and strategies adopted by the Prophet ﷺ clearly reveal that neither Islamic ideology supports nor promotes religious intolerance and extremist attitude for non-Muslims. At several times in history when Muslims were strong enough and victorious, they took the path of peace and tolerance towards their bitter enemies. Especially, on the occasions of Hudabiya and Conquest of Makkah the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exhibited the true spirit of Islam that confirms coexistence and reconciliation process. The Prophet ﷺ granted equal rights to non-Muslims without any differences based on religion, caste or culture. The Charter of Medina as “the first constitutional document provided equal rights to its citizens.” Through different treaties and practices, the Prophet ﷺ presented the best ever examples of communal coexistence



and religious tolerance during his lifetime. From the historical experience, it can be said that the treatment offered by Muslim states to other religious communities particularly to the Christians and Jews was far superior to the treatment that Muslims received at the hands of Christians and Jews. Robert Haddad in his book *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society* writes that “Islamic tolerance served to ensure Christian survival.”<sup>17</sup> “No Muslim government ever attempted to oust the non-Muslims from their lands.”<sup>18</sup> Zachary Karabell states that “for a millennium and a half, until the end of World War II, Jews under Muslim rule enjoyed more safety, freedom, and autonomy than they ever did under Christian rule. The Muslim states over the course of fourteen centuries have allowed for religious diversity and not insisted on trying to convert those who follow a different creed.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, it can be concluded that Islam promotes religious coexistence and the process of reconciliation.

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