

THE CONDUCT OF MUSLIMS WITH THEIR NON-MUSLIM FELLOWS IN PREDOMINANT MUSLIM REGIONS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: Islam is a religion of love and peace, which teaches its followers to live in amicable and harmonious relationship with non-Muslims. Its policies of coexistence and cooperation with people of other religions entitles equal rights to all people irrespective of their race, and religion. As a result, non-Muslims residing in predominant Muslim countries enjoy equal citizenship rights like their Muslim brothers, such as the right of practicing the religion of their own choice. Indeed, Islam is a preaching religion; nonetheless, it never allows its followers to force others to embrace Islam. Instead, its propagation follows the rules of wisdom, equality, moderation, tolerance and preaching with best and gracious (glorious) ways. Islam teaches that religion is about willingness and freedom of choice, its elation is with heart and soul that cannot be won through force. In accordance with these teachings, historically, Muslims in Muslim ruled regions usually exhibited religious freedom to the extent to their non-Muslim fellows that various well-known and independent non-Muslim historians could not hide this fact and openly mentioned in their books. The set precedence of living with harmony and peace continues in Muslim dominated countries. The focus of this study is to present the stance of Muslims about religious freedom by narrating their gentle conduct with their non-Muslim fellows throughout history.

KEYWORDS: Religious Freedom, Religious Tolerance, Rights of non-Muslims.

Introduction:

Faith is defined as strongly believing in the existence or truthfulness of something. The Quran's stance on religion is: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error" (*Al-Quran*, 2:256). Even the Messenger of Allah, who was the best preacher of Islam, was given the same rules and regulations for propagating Islam. "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" (*Al-Quran*, 16:125). Therefore, it is compulsory to use wisdom and best words while preaching and propagating. The job of a Prophet is just to convey the message and not to convince people forcibly. "If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed,- all who are on earth! wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!" (*Al-Quran*, 10:99). It is clearly said about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that his job is to convey the message. If people turn their faces away from him, then it would be a loss only for them. "Say! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, but if ye

turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and ye for that placed on you. If ye obey him, ye shall be on right guidance, the Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear [Message]" (*Al-Quran*, 24:54). Therefore the Holy Quran and Sunnah have categorically prohibited from using any kind of force and torture to convert non-Muslims to Islam, have forbidden the interference in the religious affairs of non-Muslims and have declared any such practice as being against the teachings of Islam (Syed Shuiab Akhtar 2005: 177).

Even the non-Muslim researchers and historians appreciate this balanced rule of Islam. Robertson, in his book *History of Sharlkan*, writes: "I declare that Muslims are the only nation, who kept aside their religious sentiments while dealing with people of other religions, even though they had wish to propagate and convert more people to Islam, but they gave those people freedom of choice who didn't want to leave their religion and embrace Islam" (al-Qarzavi, n.d: 16)&(Le Bon 2012: 137). In Islam, not only Jews and Christians have been given freedom of choice, but all people have freedom to follow any religion and have any religious belief. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) had many treaties with idol worshippers and the messenger of Allah maintained those treaties with them through words and in practice. Many of those non-Muslims embraced Islam even before expiration of those treaties, not because of fear of Muslims' swords, but solely because of good behavior and best conduct of Muslims. It is very clearly mentioned in the Quran that: "To you is your religion and to me is mine" (*Al-Quran*, 109:6). These few verses quoted above are the best example of charter of tolerance that has been unique in its nature. This charter clearly permits the idol-worshippers and pagans to carry on with their religious practices and beliefs. The verse (109:6) is openly announcing a charter of tolerance and open heartedness, which is not being practiced by any nation on earth today. It is because of those clear teachings of Islam about religious freedom that the Muslim jurists have set the rules of allowing non-Muslims living in Islamic countries to follow and practice the principles of their faith in all walks of life, particularly the laws of personal and family matters. Therefore, in an Islamic state, the non-Muslims would be allowed to deal with their personal and matrimonial issues in accordance with the teachings of their religion. Islamic laws will not be imposed on them and the Islamic Courts will be bound to give decisions according to the laws of their faith.

1. Freedom of Expression:

Along with religious freedom, the non-Muslims also have freedom of expression in an Islamic state, just like Muslims. In this regard, the rules and regulations are the same for both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens:

- (i) A non-Muslim can freely criticize the government, its orders and head of the state by staying in the jurisdiction of law.
- (ii) The non-Muslims have equal permission to have religious dialogue just as Muslims as permitted by the law without hurting anyone's sentiments.
- (iii) They are fully permitted to propagate and preach their religious doctrines; Islamic state would have no objection on that.

- (iv) A Non-Muslim would not be forced to adopt any belief or perform any religious ritual without his consent. He will have liberty to do anything that is not in conflict within the laws of the land.
- (v) Non-Muslims would completely be allowed to perform their religious rituals (Alvi, Dr. Khalid 2009, 606).
- (vi) In light of instructions given in (*Al-Quran* 6:108), it is necessary for both Muslims and non-Muslims to not use foul language for each other's religion and God(s).

(Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall 2003: 127-128) writes that after conquering Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Iran and North Africa, the Muslims not only gave full political independence to inhabitants of these lands, but they gave them freedom of choice and self-determination. The outcome of the spread of Islamic teachings was that people got rid of monopoly of the priests who had control over the ability of thinking of the masses. He further writes that Christians were given the right to protect their language and traditions. They were allowed to establish their religious schools; no restriction was imposed to meeting with foreign Christian missionaries or preachers.

2. Freedom to Practice Religious Rituals:

The Prophet's migration to Medina is supposed to be the beginning of the establishment of Islamic state. Upon reaching Medina, he made a treaty with the Jews of Medina which was known as Mithaq-e-Medina (Treaty of Medina). This treaty laid the foundation of Islamic society's ideology based on religious tolerance, peace and co-existence with the people of other religions. In this historic treaty, Islam's basic principles regarding rights & duties of both Muslim & non-Muslim citizens of Islamic state, religious tolerance and maintenance of peace in society were set. It was clearly written in that charter:

"Muslim and non-Muslim citizens would be entitled of political and religious rights equally. Similarly, entire nation would have all religious rights and autonomy".

As a result of that treaty, Jews and other non-Muslim minorities enjoyed all rights and privileges.

Once a Christian delegation from Najran was allowed to stay at Masjid-e-Nabawi and they were also allowed to conduct their prayers inside the mosque (al-Jauziyyah, Ibnul Qayyim 1982:3/639). Similarly, the Prophet gave in writing a charter for peace to the delegation of Najran which contained: "This is guarantee of messenger of Allah that Allah's protection will be with the people of Najran. Their lives, properties, country and religion will be under protection of Muslims. They will not be declined of their basic rights and there will be no interference into their religious affairs (al-Baladhuri 1983:76; al-Jauziyyah 1982:3/635). After the Prophet, the rightly guided caliphs and their successors carried on with the same policy. Therefore, Hazrat Umar gave in writing to the people of Æliathat that their lives, properties and churches were to be protected, no one would take over their worship places and nor anyone would interfere in their religious affairs (Arnold 2004, 80).

Many Christian churches had in them jewels and other precious items worth millions of pounds at Sinai, but due to freedom given by the Prophet of Islam and being under Muslim rule, they were protected and flourished (Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall 2003, 125). During the period of rightly guided caliphs and caliphs after them, when the Islamic conquests expanded and many new areas entered in the Islamic empire, the Muslim rulers gave freedom of choice of religion to people of those areas and their worship places were respected. According to Arnold in his book *Preaching of Islam*, there are many examples which have been quoted by both Muslim and Christian historians. During the reign of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik in the city of Al-Raha, one wealthy Christian named Atnasus built a church in the name of Mary, mother of Jesus in his native town. He also built famous churches in Palestine and in Egypt while in many other cities, monasteries were built. Many Christians were in the service of Abdul Aziz bin Marwan, the governor of Egypt, who established a church named Quadees-e-Youhana in the city. In the days of Caliph Mehdi Abbas, a church was built for Christian prisoners of war in Baghdad. In the time of Haroon al-Rashid, a church was built in Baghdad for Somalis; during his time again NastoriMAtranSarjous built a church in his native town. Likewise, a huge church was built in Babel and the coffins of Prophet Daniel and Ezekiel were kept therein. During the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (685-705), a wealthy Christian of Edessa, named Athanasius, built a church in his native city and many others in various parts of Egypt (T.W 1913, 56).

When Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833) was in Egypt, he gave permission to build a church at al-Muqaṭṭam, a hill near Cairo. During the same caliph's time, a wealthy Christian, named Bukām, built in Būrah, Egypt (T.W 1913, 57) several churches with fine architecture plan.

It wasn't only Jews and Christians who were allowed to build and maintain their places of worship but other religious groups, like Hindus, were also treated in the same way by Muslim rulers. When Mohammad bin Qasim invaded Sindh during the time of Great Raja Dahir, he announced that no one should interfere with each other's places of worship. The people of Brahmanabad were allowed to rebuild their temples, nobody was to be forbidden or prevented from following his own religion, and the people were permitted to exercise their own creeds and laws. Muslims not only allowed establishing churches, but they allowed Hindus to build temples. Many Muslim governors donated lands for the construction of Hindu temples (T.W 1913, 206).

The same tradition was followed in Iran. (T.W 1913, 161) writes: "That this widespread conversion was not due to force or violence. This is the evidence of the toleration extended to those who still clung to their ancient faith. Even to the present day there are some small communities of fire-worshippers to be found in certain areas of Persia, although they have in recent years had suffered persecutions, their ancestors in the early centuries of the Hijra enjoyed a remarkable degree of toleration, their fire-temples were respected, and we even read of a Muhammadan general (in the

reign of al-Mu'taṣim, A.D. 833-842), who ordered an imam and a Mu'adhdhin to be flogged because they had destroyed a fire-temple in Sughd and built a Mosque in its place. In the tenth century, three centuries after the conquest of the country, fire-temples were to be found in Iraq, Fars, Kirman, Sijistān, Khurasan, Jibāl, Azerbaijan and Arrān, i.e. in almost every province of Persia".

In short, in accordance with the true spirit of Islamic teachings, people from every religion and sect have been enjoying their rights of freedom of religion, expression and worshipping in the Islamic reigns all over the world.

3. Islamic Teachings About Relationships with non-Muslims:

In (*Al-Quran*, 60:8), Allah says: "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity" (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 990).

No doubt, Islam is an eternal and divine religion; the weak and neglected are honored in it. Islam joins people of different races and classes together and teaches how to live together and it also teaches interfaith harmony among different religions. Through its teachings, Islam creates the greatest civilization; in worldly affairs Islam doesn't discriminate on the basis of caste, color, race or religion. Islam has laid the foundation stone of splendid civilization based on equality among human beings in basic rights of freedom of religion, protection of lives & properties and assurance of safety of others honor. There is no place for discrimination in Islam based on faith, race, language or ethnicity. All citizens have equal opportunities of having standard life and enjoy all privileges. Islam not only has permitted to have relations with non-Muslims but there are some aspects which have been stressed upon especially in terms of interaction with non-Muslims. Such as:

3.1. Marrying women from people of the Book:

In (*Al-Quran*, 5:5), Allah says: "This Day (all) good things are allowed to you; and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them; and the chaste from among believing women and the chaste from among those who have been given the Book before you (are Lawful for you); when you have given them their dowries, taking them in marriage, not fornicating nor taking them for paramours in secret" (Shakir, n.d., 66). In this verse, Allah clearly mentions that you can marry women from people of the book. In light of this verse, the companions of the Prophet, their successors and Muslim scholars in general agree on the legality of establishing matrimonial relations with non-Muslim women (al-Qurtubi 1967, 6:78). It is narrated from Jabir bin Abdullah that the messenger of Allah said: "We marry women from people of the book, but they don't marry ours"; also narrated from Umar that Prophet said: "A Muslim can marry a Christian woman" (al-Suyuti 1983:3/25). A great number of companions of the Prophet married Christian women and they found no harm in it (Ibn Kathir 1984, 2:20). This also shows that the dignity and prestige of a non-Muslim woman is taken in account just like a Muslim woman and the same kind of rights have been proclaimed for them for

which a Muslim woman is entitled.

3.2. Eating with People of the Book or Accepting Their Invitations:

In (*Al-Quran*, 5:5), Allah has clearly mentioned that one can eat the food of people of the Book (The Jews & Christians) and animals slaughtered by them are also allowed for Muslims to eat. There may be difference of opinion among the Muslim scholars on the issue of legality of animals slaughtered by people of the Book and that is purely based on the slaughtering procedure. However, Imam (al-Qurtubi 1967, 6:77) has mentioned the Muslim scholars unanimously agree on the issue that there is no harm in eating the food items of people of the Book other than the meat (in which slaughtering is involved) like fruits, veggies and cereals. The messenger of Allah's life proves that he accepted invitations from non-Muslims and ate from their food and he also invited them (Nisar Ahmad 2008:415).

3.3. Hosting non-Muslim Guests and Giving Gifts to non-Muslims:

The Messenger of Allah's life proves that he warmly welcomed the delegations from other areas; he was keenly interested in this, that he himself welcomed them with official protocol. He used to wear his best clothes at the time of meeting foreign delegations and ordered his accompanying officials to do the same. For example, at the occasion of welcoming a delegation from Kandah, the Prophet (PBUH) was dressed in fine garments. Hazrat Abu Bakr and Hazrat Umar were also dressed in similar garments (al-Kattani, n.d. 2/452).

As previously mentioned that a Christian delegation from Najran was allowed to stay in Masjid-e-Nabwi and they were allowed to conduct their prayers inside the mosque (al-Jauziyyah 1982:3/629). The companions of the Prophet followed his footsteps and exhibited the same kind of conduct to non-Muslims. In the caliphate of Hazrat Umar, on the occasion of the Conquest of Egypt, Hazrat Amr bin- al-A'as, set aside the grievances of the battlefield and accepted invitations from the Christians and also invited them (Nu'mani 1991:1/120).

3.4. Giving and Accepting Gifts from Pagans and People of the Book:

Exchanging of gifts is a good way to establish and maintain friendly relations with others. This practice brings love and affection in the hearts of people and helps remove personal grudges. The Prophet S.A.W knew this fact very well. He not only urged the exchange of gifts but he himself used to receive and give gifts and he did not show any discrimination in that practice. It is proven from Hadith that whenever the pagan relatives of the messenger's wives sent gifts, he allowed them to accept those gifts (Abubakr Siddique, n.d:272).

3.5. Visiting Patients and the Sick:

Among social activities, Islam requires and urges its followers to visit people who are sick. This is to encourage them to fight against illness and to show sympathy towards them in their difficult time. Visiting patients, asking them about their health's progress and praying for their prompt & lasting recovery was a regular activity of the messenger of Allah and he never discriminated in this matter based on color, caste, creed, race or religion. He occasionally visited sick people who were pagans. It is

reported that, even on the busy occasion of Hajjat al-Weda (His last pilgrimage), he visited the sick people and inquired about their health (Al-Bukhari, Abu Abdullah Muhammad b. Ismail, 1981:2/844-846).

3.6. Helping Those Who are in Need Without Discrimination of Religion:

There are countless examples from the life of the Prophet (PBUH) that he helped pagans and people of the book in time of need. Before the conquest of Mecca there was a drought and the messenger of Allah sent a huge amount of money of 500 gold coins to Abu-Sufyan and asked him to distribute them among the poor and needy people of Mecca (al-Sarukhsi 1993, 10:92).

Before the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which opened the trade door for people of Mecca, the Quresh (the bitter opponents of the Prophet), were passing through difficult times due to a constraint of economic conditions. The Prophet did a business deal with Abu Sufyan by exchanging the best dates of Medina with the leather of Taif which was rotting due to the suspension of the Syrian route for trade (Muhammad Hameedullah 2009:204). Note that this is the same city in which its dwellers compelled the Prophet to migrate from it. It was a city where he was born, grew up and lived most of his life there. But when they were in difficulty, he came forward to help them. He overlooked the past atrocities he received from them and the fact that they had not accepted him as a prophet yet.

Conclusion:

The messenger of Allah not only taught tolerance, good conduct and patience to people without any discrimination of religion and race, but he practically showed it. Despite getting trials and tribulations from others, he dealt with them with good conduct and due to that, people in groups embraced Islam; enemies became his admirers and the practical example of the following Quranic verse was shown to the entire world:

“Remove sin with virtue, then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity, will be as though he was a close friend” (*Al-Quran*, 41:34).

The above discussion shows that Muslims in general have been tolerant, broad-minded and bear good behavior for people of other religions. They have showed good conduct individually, collectively and on a governmental level as well. The Muslims of today need to know the spectacular past of their ancestors and be tolerant to the followers of other religions. That is the only way one can conquer the hearts of people, develop a harmonious society and ensure humanity prospers.

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