

Interfaith Dialogue from the Perspective of Quran and Sunnah: A Solution for Peacemaking & Interfaith Harmony in Pakistan

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Abstract

It is evident that Inter-faith dialogue is a tremendous initiative towards achieving harmony and building peace in the Society. It is recognized in the Holy Qurna and Sunnah that all human beings are basically equal. Respect for human dignity is the fundamental principle of Islam. From the perspective of Quran and Sunnah it is emphasized that dialogue should be promoted between Muslims and Non-Muslims to achieve harmony among the individuals belonging to various nations. Dialogue is based on various factors including culture, civilization and other valued principles. Interfaith dialogue is a base where mutual tolerance, respect and love is promoted. This research focuses on interfaith dialogue from the perspective of Quran and Sunnah with particular focus on peace building and interfaith harmony in Pakistan. It presents point of views of various scholars on the concept of interfaith dialogue. It also highlights that Pakistan is making its efforts for achieving the objectives including creating the social awareness in the society regarding interfaith harmony. The

study ends with the concept that interfaith dialogue must be encouraged at all levels for promoting interfaith harmony and peace in the society.

Keywords: Interfaith, Dialogue, Quran, Sunnah, Pakistan

Introduction

Islam emphasizes peaceful coexistence, showing respect to others and their rights so that the individuals of human societies may live with happiness, prosperity and freedom. Islamic texts including Quran and Sunnah address notions of peace, harmony and coexistence. Inter faith dialogue is most substantial activity in the contemporary world due to its vital role in peace making process and coexistence. Pakistan is also one of the countries that are promoting interfaith dialogue for seeking a way forward to achieve goals regarding interfaith relations. Kadayifci-Orellana mentioned that Islam addresses the concept of peace and conflict focusing on interfaith dialogue which plays vital role in resolving conflicts in the society. At the same time, Islam also pointed out some basic principles in case of justification of war. The concept of peace and harmony is accredited through an understanding of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.¹

Definition of Dialogue

Meaning of the word "Dialogue" has been mentioned in various dictionaries including Online Etymology Dictionary, Merriam Webster, Clark Dictionary, and Encyclopedia of Religion.

3. In Clark Dictionary

Dialogue means concentrated and intended discussion by hearing views of others in the society. By doing so new perspectives and comprehensive ideas based on wisdom are emerged to resolve conflicts in the society.²

4. In Encyclopedia of Religion

Dialogue means exchange of views although in Western wide-ranging history its central sense has been a piece of written effort carried out in the procedure of a dialogue.³

5. In Miqyas ul. Lughah

Ibn e Faris mentioned the word Hiwar “حوار” i.e. dialogue that it means reviewing speech and deliberating it, dialogue: arguing and dialogue: responding and they debate, i.e.: they review speech.⁴

5. In Taj ul Uroos

Hiwar” indicates to something exchanged between the two persons as each one responds to other.⁵

6. In Lisan ul Arab

Dialogue refers to an act of a dialogue or an ability to respond to something. Dialogue will not be carried out if both do not respond to each other.⁶

To sum up, going through the above-mentioned definitions it is perceived that dialogue is an exchange of views or discussion among the individuals or parties to exchange of their stances in a way to resolve conflicts in the society. It is also perceived that dialogue is established in a formal and strong-minded atmosphere which contributes to achieve the determined results through conversation. In addition to that dialogue is established with open mindedness and in a skillful environment based on mutual respect for both parties. The basic aim of the dialogue is to listening point of views and exchanging ideas which contribute to resolve conflicts among the individuals or parties.

Types of Dialogue

Various types of dialogue have been mentioned by scholars for instance Discursive Dialogue which means which includes exchanging of views in a meeting at the levels of mutual understanding based on intellectual inquiry. Secular Dialogue means a dialogue which emphasizes on actions which should be performed in the society and individuals share them with approach to move forward for taking mutual action. Spiritual Dialogue which is established with thoughtful approach to achieve required goals and an emphasis is put on reaching extensive and comprehensive approach and thinking.⁷

To conclude that dialogue has various types in terms of action and approaches for achieving basic goals towards resolving conflicts prevailing among the individuals of any society. It is also observed that a dialogue must

be taken place in a way that both parties should adhere to an environment of mutual respect and response to each other for achieving their goals.

Scholars Views on Dialogue

Many Scholars have explained the concept of dialogue like Kimball, Karim, Swidler and Kurucan. The detail of these views is as under:

1. Kimball's Viewpoint

According to Kimball's point of view, dialogue is a procedure of mutual transfer of a message to other party by maintaining a shared relationship for expressing their views on a certain matter of conflict accurately and effectively.⁸

2. Karim's Viewpoint

According to karim's point of view, dialogue is a mutual discussion and talk among individuals or groups of various societies for sharing and learning from each other for reaching determined mutual objectives.⁹

3. Swidler's Viewpoint

Swidler defined dialogue as a mutual talk carried out for a mutual goal between two individuals or more who have different point of views on a certain matter of conflict.¹⁰

4. Kurucan's Viewpoint:

Dialogues is defined as effective and positive communication among individuals from the society having varied cultures for resolving conflicts by adopting mutual approach among the individuals or groups belonging to diverse cultures. It is not necessary that both parties will reach an agreement while the process of dialogue.¹¹

It is concluded from the above-mentioned concept of dialogue expressed by various scholars that dialogue is a process of communication carried out among individuals or groups belonging to diverse societies with an intention to reach a mutual approach for resolving their conflict. It is also perceived that dialogue may results into resolving various types of conflicts provided that some sincere efforts should be carried out by both parties. In addition to that dialogue process contributes to transfer various point of views of

individuals on a specific conflict which is to be resolved for achieving certain goals like making peace and achieving harmony in the society.

Dialogue from the Qur'anic Perspective

Pondering over various Qur'anic verses it is observed that the Holy Qur'an presents dialogue as a distinct character of human being as it stresses that human being has been created by Allah Almighty to face all types of conflicts continuously in his life. It is also observed that various words have been used for dialogues like Hiwar (حوار) and Jadal (جدل) in the Holy Qur'an. The word Hiwar has been mentioned in Surah Kahf as Allah Almighty said:

وَكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِمَّنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا¹²

“(Abundant) was the produce this man had: he said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument: "more wealth have I than you, and more honour and power in (my following of) men”¹³

And Allah Almighty said in another place:

قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكَ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ رَجُلًا¹⁴

“His companion said to him, in the course of the argument with him: "Dost thou deny Him Who created thee out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned thee into a man?”¹⁵

The word Jadal (جدل) has been mentioned in various places of the Holy Qur'an as Allah Almighty said in one of the below Qur'anic verse.

قَالُوا يَا نُوحُ قَدْ جَادَلْتَنَا فَكُتِرَتْ جِدَالُنَا فَاتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ¹⁶

“They said: "O Noah! thou hast disputed with us, and (much) hast thou prolonged the dispute with us: now bring upon us what thou threatenest us with, if thou speakest the truth!?”¹⁷

Allah Almighty said:

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَالْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ ۖ وَهَمَّتْ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ بِرَسُولِهِمْ لِيَأْخُذُوهُ ۖ وَجَادَلُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ فَأَخَذْتُهُمْ ۖ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عِقَابِ¹⁸

“But (there were people) before them, who denied (the Signs), the People of Noah, and the Confederates (of Evil) after them; and every People plotted against their prophet, to seize him, and disputed by means of vanities, therewith to condemn the Truth; but it was I that seized them! and how (terrible) was My Requital!”¹⁹

Allah Almighty said:

وَلَا تُجَادِلْ عَنِ الَّذِينَ يَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَنْ كَانَ خَوَّانًا أَثِيمًا²⁰

“Contend not on behalf of such as betray their own souls; for Allah loveth not one given to perfidy and crime”²¹

Allah Almighty Said in another place:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ²²

“Yet there is among men such a one as disputes about Allah, without Knowledge, without Guidance, and without a Book of Enlightenment”²³

Allah Almighty has warned Muslims not to argue with the people of the scripture except in the way that is best as He Said:

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ²⁴

“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 and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)”²⁵

Allah Almighty said in Surah Al Nahl:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُنْتَدِينَ²⁶

"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: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance”²⁷

Ibn Kathir explained the word Jidal (جدال) in the context of interpreting the above-mentioned Qur’anic verse that this word contains both constructive and inspiring meaning. The phrase of Bittati Hiya Ahsan (بالتي هي أحسن) i.e. by decent behavior is attached with the word Jidal (جدال) to mention the significant rule of da`wah.²⁸

To concluding, it is observed from the above-mentioned Qur’anic verses that dialogue can be demonstrated into two ways positive and negative. Context of the text will determine the intended meanings in the verses in this regard.

Dialogue from the Hadith Perspective:

The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is a perfect model of positive engagement with the people through dialogue. The charter of Madinah for the citizens of Madinah city state in the life of the Holy Prophet and the Treaty of Hudaibiah made with the people of Makkah are two significant documents that affirm the significance of dialogue. People of Madinah regardless of their religions lived in peace, harmony and coexistence under the jurisdiction and authority of the Charter of Madinah.

Going through the History of Islam it is known that the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) has engaged during his early stay in Madinah to sign the charter of Madinah with several tribes of Madinah. According to this charter all tribes were considered as members of a united Ummah.²⁹ Commenting on this, Kurucan & Erol Said that this charter determined various objectives including political, economic and common objectives for maintaining peaceful co-existence among the individuals of various tribes.³⁰

Husain clarifies that the Charter of Madinah is the leading and primary written constitution which contributes to form a varied and open minded society on the soil of Madinah indicating that it may be considered as the modern manner of good rule of law.³¹

It is observed that conflict resolution element was evident in the various treaties, agreements and truces with non-Muslims. The agreement between Muslims and Non-Muslims as per the Constitution of Medina guaranteed that once a treaty is made, all people in that area are protected.

Another modal of achieving interfaith harmony is the agreement carried out between the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and Christians of Najran through which they have been allowed by the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) to pray in his mosque.³² It is worth noting that this agreement was sustained in the era of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) and in the era of his companions from Abu Bakar to Ali (May Allah Be Pleased with them)³³ It is proved in Islamic history that interfaith dialogue was imitated with the treaty carried out between the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and Najran Christians.³⁴

In addition to that, there was another agreement carried out between Ibn Harith ibn Ka'b and his people. According to this agreement his people were allowed to enjoy freedom by exercising their religious norms. Their places of worship, properties and lives were protected. No one can be forced to embrace Islam. Muslims will help who faces discrimination.³⁵

Apart from the above-mentioned examples of agreements carried out between the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon) and other tribes, there were some other treaties which were carried out with the people of Yemen and Bahrain. These treaties guaranteed freedom for exercising their religious norms, and their religious institutions were protected.³⁶

To sum up, it is observed that The Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) initiated several agreements with various tribes to guarantee the freedom of exercising their religious norms. In addition to that the lives and property of Non-Muslims were protected.

So in the light of all accords and agreements, it is emphasized that good conduct must be observed towards others without considering their religious affiliation. The best example for this attitude towards others is a Hadith narrated by Jabir bin Abdullah as he said that once we were accompany the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and passing by a funeral procession of a Jew. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) stood up when he saw the funeral procession. We said to the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him): it is the funeral procession of the dead body of a Jew. On this, the Holy Prophet said that you should stand up when you saw a funeral procession.³⁷

There is another Hadith which indicates that once a funeral procession passed by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and He stood up even though He was informed that it was the funeral procession of a Jew. On this, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said that he was a human being.³⁸

Peacemaking and Interfaith harmony in Pakistan:

Interfaith harmony brings peace among people. It encourages the approach that we should live peacefully and let others live peacefully as well. Pakistan

came into being on the base of ideology of Islamic teachings but it does not mean that Pakistan is only for Muslims but it is soil where fundamental rights of non-Muslims have been protected and the minorities of Pakistan were given the right of exercising their norms with freedom. It is worth noting that The Constitution of Pakistan adherences to safeguard the all type of basic rights of non-Muslims as well.³⁹

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah also emphasized on the adherence to the basic rights of minorities living on the soil of Pakistan by indicating that the religion of minorities must be protected. Any sort of interference should not be allowed as they possess their own rights and freedoms.⁴⁰

On another occasion Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Janah announced that the newly born Pakistan can be run in an adequate way by only those who are aware of both western and Islamic societies. Basic rights of minorities should be protected equally. Adherence to tolerance and democratic norms should be the basic incentive of this newly born Pakistan. Sectarianism and extremism should not present in any place of Pakistan.⁴¹ As a multi-religion state, Pakistan cannot afford any discrimination, misbalance and ignoring attitudes towards religious minorities. So, on this Pakistan is making intensive efforts for building peace by promoting interfaith harmony.

Keeping in view the importance of interfaith dialogue for making peace and harmony, Pakistan is striving to promote interfaith dialogue through educational seminars, universities, media, workshops and conferences. On this the thought of interfaith harmony has achieved an immense significance for the understanding, interpretation and propagation of the healthy religious and civilizational thought in Pakistan.

Through promoting interfaith dialogue, Pakistan is making its efforts for achieving the objectivities including creating the social awareness and improving collective common sense in the society regarding interfaith harmony, developing mutual understanding among different religious sects of the society, eliminating the sense of insecurity and justice among the religious minorities and creating an environment of tolerance and coexistence in the society. In addition to that the role of media, universities, religious

institutions, regional governments, religious scholars, civil societies, judiciary and legislation Institutions and ministries including Ministry of Religious Affairs is highlighted to address the challenges of interfaith harmony in Pakistan.

To sum up, it is said that inter faith dialogue is an excellent initiative towards harmony and peace in the society; Interfaith dialogue process is facing many challenges. Pakistan is continuing its efforts at all level by adopting various strategies to eliminate all type of hurdles causing challenges to interfaith harmony and peacemaking in the society. On the other hand various institutes, universities and media outlets are playing their vital role to achieve the goals for creating interfaith harmony and making peace in Pakistan. The efforts made by Pakistan are being appreciated at international level as well.

Findings

1. Dialogue means a discussion and consultation among various parties having diverse approaches aiming at sharing their views on conflicts.
2. Dialogue plays dynamic role in interfaith harmony and peacemaking in the human society regardless the individuals of the society have different approaches and thoughts regarding a certain issue.
3. The objectives of a dialogue cannot be achieved without state of mind and willingness from both parties.
4. It is proved that the dialogue in the perspective of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah is established on the features based on tolerance, respectable conduct and clear approach of thinking.
5. The Holy Qur'an introduces dialogue as a distinctive characteristic of mankind as it emphasizes that man has been created in way to consistently encounter all sorts of issues.
6. It is evident that there are many Hadiths which stress on the importance of dialogue with a view that tolerance and open mindedness is prerequisite for building peace and interfaith harmony in the human society.

7. The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is a perfect model of positive engagement with the people through dialogue.
8. The charter of Madinah for the citizens of Madinah city state in the life of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) is a significant document that affirm the significance of dialogue.
9. Pakistan came into being on the base of Islamic Ideology. It does not mean that the soil of Pakistan is only for Muslims but it is soil where fundamental rights of non-Muslims have been protected and liberty has been given to the minorities of Pakistan. Pakistan is making its efforts for achieving the objectivities including creating the social awareness and improving collective common sense in the society regarding interfaith harmony.

Recommendations:

1. Comprehensive efforts at various forums are required by addressing all hurdles and obstacles for achieving the objectives of dialogue.
2. Inclusive strategy should be opted from the perspective of Quran and Sunnah for continuing the efforts towards achieving the goals for maintaining peace and harmony in the society.
3. It is imperative to develop mutual understanding among different religious sects of the society through interfaith dialogue.
4. It is necessary to eliminate the sense of insecurity and justice among the religious minorities by adopting comprehensive strategy for ensuring dialogue process among various sects of the society.
5. The dialogue process at national and international level must be ensured for creating an environment of tolerance and coexistence in the society.
6. Initiatives must be taken effectively to investigate and eliminate the challenges for achieving the goals of peace making and interfaith harmony in Pakistan.

7. An effective policy must be devised at governmental level to analyze the causes and effects of the absence of inter faith harmony and coexistence in Pakistan.
8. Various effective and fruitful strategies and solutions for interfaith harmony and making peace in the society must be devised in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Quran and Sunnah.
9. The efforts made by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) must be followed as a model of dialogue to achieve the objectives of dialogue including creating environment of peace, harmony, co-existence and tolerance in the society.
10. It is imperative to highlight the role of all segments of the society including media, universities, religious institutions, governments, religious scholars, civil societies to address the challenges to peace making and inter faith harmony in the light of teachings mentioned in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.
11. For creating awareness among the individuals of the society about interfaith dialogue operative struggles must be put in an organized way by taking all segments of the society on board so that interfaith dialogue may be perceived as a platform to chart an effective action plan which may bring benefits to all regardless Muslims or Non-Muslims in the human society.
12. The dialogue should be used as a platform for candid discussion about the differences without being insulting to achieve the real goals for creating interfaith harmony and peace.
13. For achieving the real objective of the dialogue process, dialogue must be action oriented in the light of the teachings of the Holy Quran and Sunnah by addressing all challenges to interfaith dialogue and peace building in the society.

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