

## Teachings of Islam for Peaceful Coexistence: Lessons for Conflict Resolution in Pakistani Society

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### Abstract

*Pakistan since its independence has faced various incidents of violence against minorities and people of different faiths. Political instability, dictatorships, conflicts with neighboring India, conflicts in Afghanistan and militancy in Baluchistan province has always been a threat to stability and development in Pakistan. During the cold war era, the interpretations of the teachings of Islam influenced by political gains have caused widespread problems in our society and specifically the war-ridden areas. The consequences of which we are bearing even till today. This study will have an overview of the history of violence and conflicts in Pakistan, and the underlying causes of these conflicts. This research investigates the historical data from the teachings of Islam and the conflict resolution illustrations from the life of the Prophet of Islam, Peace be upon him.*

**Keywords:** *Peace, Peaceful Co-existence, Conflict Resolution, Islam, Pakistan*

### Introduction

Ethnic diversity plays a significant role in political change and development (Kareem, Saeed & Akber, 2019). Ethnic and cultural diversity in a region is a sign of growth and development in a society or a country. Diversity is not a reason for conflict. Conflict arises when an ethnic group with a specific identity feels that their rights are compromised. They observe that their identity is threatened. This is the situation that raises conflict and violence in society (Majeed, 2017).

Pakistan since its independence has faced various incidents of violence against minorities and people of different faiths (Saikal, 2001). Pakistan is a country founded in the name of Islam but has witnessed political, economic, and ethnic crises. Islam in its true essence believes in peace and affection and strictly opposes the notion to kill someone for their beliefs or thoughts. However, religious teaching of Islam in Pakistan in general and particularly in war-hit areas misinterpreted and misrepresented by different sect-based associations terrorist groups for their interest (Nasr, 2002).

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The lack of education and religious teachings and specific interpretation of religion has driven violence and conflicts. Sectarian violence and compromising the rights of minorities had widespread and far longer consequences on the development and international image. In the 1970's the military dictator General Zia affinity to a particular religious group disturbed the ethnic balance and proved a way to sectarian violence (Ahmad, 2013). After the invasion of Afghanistan, by the former USSR and then America, the misinterpretation of Islam for personal and political gains have given rise to widespread violence.

It will be very difficult or almost impossible to find any state in the world that is ethnically not plural. Pluralism is a symbol that the various cultural and ethnic groups understand each other and have agreed to work together to live a peaceful life in society (Majeed, 2017).

Ethnic conflicts are the most common source of violence in the world. The same is the case in Pakistan. As an example, in 1970s West Pakistan used the resources produced by East Pakistan, which disturbed the politico-economic balance in the country. It disintegrated Pakistan (Majeed, 2017).

After the end of British rule in the subcontinent, India and Pakistan emerged as two independent states. Pakistan created on the two nations theory had Islam and its teaching as a guiding principle to rule.

The word Islam derived from "Salam" which means "Peace". Islam as a code of life not only guide personal affairs but for relations within the society and conduct with national and international affairs. It advocates for the rights of minorities. Islam orders to protect minorities and this is very clear in the teachings of Islam and the life of the Prophet of Islam.

The Holy Book of Islam, The Quran says in Chapter 41, Al Fussilat verse 34, "And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better, and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend."

In Chapter 10, "Al Yunus" verse 9 and 10, "Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds - their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Beneath them, rivers will flow in the Gardens of Pleasure. Their call therein will be, "Exalted are You, O Allah," and their greeting therein will be, "Peace." And the last of their calls will be, "Praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds!"

These verses from the Holy Book give the message of peace and to have good deeds and to live in harmony with others. Islam as a way of life and as a guidance for civilizations have a history of efforts to confront violence and to work for peace building in the society.

### **Background of Violence and Conflicts in Pakistan**

Violence and conflicts in Pakistan have extremely negative and far-reaching effects on development. The growth, peace and security have been compromised because of these crises in the name of religion. According to (Murphy, 2018), the upsurge in

sectarian violence specifically after the 1970s is not because of the theoretical differences among various sects of Islam but is because of the cultural, demographic, economic, social, and political changes, which have existed since the birth of Pakistan. According to (Haleem, 2010), the division in society in Pakistan is due to the political instability and the military interference in politics, which has driven the sectarian and ethnic violence.

The violence, religious extremism and sectarian conflicts in Pakistan is not a novel phenomenon but it has increased post 9/11 attacks. The Afghan War, the Red Mosque Operation, the drone attacks, military operations in North and South Waziristan, and Swat valley are the contributory factors towards, intolerance, violence, and extremism. The “Afghan Jihad” sponsored by the state elements had divided the Pakistani Society. It has increased intra-faith and inter-faith violence resulting in thousands of human lives (Ahmar, 2018).

Trans-national and local militant groups use violence and sectarianism for their interests. Militants in newly merged tribal areas have nexus with the local sectarian groups resulting in violence and loss of human lives (Khan, Khan & Ullah, 2018).

Humans as living beings have certain universal needs for the continuity of life. The need for Identity, security, safety, a sense of belonging, recognition, and self-esteem. The state institutions and political system must identify the violation of these needs. They should have subtle strategies to address them. The loopholes and weaknesses of the political system result in violence and conflicts in society (Majeed, 2017).

### **Causes of Conflict in Pakistan**

Pakistan as a developing country is struggling on many fronts. The national security problems due to militancy and war in Afghanistan and its effects on Pakistan, low literacy rate, lack of jobs and religious extremism are a few to name. Here some of the main causes of conflict in Pakistan are elaborated.

#### ***Afghan War***

The Afghan war has had a direct impact on Pakistan, casing thousands of Human lives. The economy is drastically impacted by the loss of billions of dollars. The instability in Afghanistan has a negative spillover effect on Pakistan’s security situation. A large influx of Afghan refugees is hosted by Pakistan since the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan (Borthakur, 2017).

When the Soviet Union attacked Afghanistan in 1979, America with the support of Muslim countries particularly Pakistan forced USSR to withdraw in 1988. Thus, the country was a ground for proxy wars among the regional and outside powers. After 9/11, Afghanistan once again became a battlefield for world powers (Karim, 2017). These had a direct drastic effect on the national security of Pakistan. The economy is impacted, and foreign direct investment and domestic investment are reduced due to the war on terror. (Zakaria & Ahmed, 2019)

#### ***Poverty***

According to a study about half of Pakistan's population is below the age of 30 but due to security, economic and political challenges, the country failed to utilize the available demographic resources for development (Ahmad, Yousaf & Zeb, 2018). Poverty is the main problem in the Pakistani economy that is hindering development and economic growth (Jehan & Jan 2020). Microfinance banks by providing loans on flexible terms and conditions can reduce poverty to a substantial extent (Khan & Khan, 2020). By providing jobs and opportunities especially to the youth, can help them to use their energy in positive and developmental activities and bring prosperity to their families.

### ***Religious Extremism***

In Pakistan, Islam acts as a guiding authority for the political system and constitution. At the same time, some political forces have used religious beliefs for their own pursuit and attaining power. As a result, it has risen sectarian disputes and religious extremism. Also, the controversy of the interpretation of religious teachings prevails in the country. It has been observed that the country follows a pluralistic type of Islam, with different spiritual and devotional believers (Karamat, Muzaffar & Shah, 2019). Pakistan faces the issue of religious extremism. It has been regarded as the most challenging problem. Islam is deeply rooted in Pakistani society, but militancy, politics, extremism, and the instrumental use of Islam led to its violent manifestation (Khan & Shah, 2020).

Pakistan has been a victim of religious extremism through self-religious misinterpretations by the religious factions, used for their interests. These self-centered religious interpretations and their effects and consequences in extremist narratives have always been a problem and challenge for the governments in Pakistan's history (Asghar, 2020).

### ***The role of Media***

Private Television networks are the most famous and influential media for information and entertainment. Social media networks are also popular in Pakistan. Based on research it was observed that around 2 percent of the social media users have social media accounts related to extremist propaganda, while the rest of the large population have no concern for the extremist's news stories. Most of the people were looking for positive news stories (Hassan, 2018). Various media networks, having a vast exposure and audiences, civil society, religious groups, political parties, and sectarian groups need to develop consensus on the complete rejection of militarism and extremism in society (Mani, 2019).

### **Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam**

The Universality of Islam and its applicability to any situation and conflict resolution makes it a global religion. Islam, derived from the word "Salam" which means peace. The self-centered and interest-based interpretation of Islam has given rise to sectarian violence and extremism. The peace and conflict resolution methods and philosophies are in Islam which can be applied to the Pakistani society for conflict resolution.

Islam gives and respects the rights of women, children, the poor, neighbors and even birds and animals. Islamic Shariah orders peaceful coexistence with people from all backgrounds and cultures (Babagna & Tukur, 2020). For forgiveness and conflict resolution, Quran says,

“And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation - his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers.” (Al Shura, Chapter, 42, Verse 40).

Quran further says,

“...and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good [words] and establish prayer and give zakah.” (Al Bakara, Chapter 2, Verse 83).

Islam also stresses upon the confirmation of information, and not be believed, if the source is not satisfactory. The Holy book of Islam says,

“O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.” (Surah Al Hujarat, Chapter 49, Verse 6).

The Islamic ethical framework for peaceful coexistence presents a security-oriented common platform for cultural and socio-political integration in pluralistic and multi-religious societies (Gul dar, 2013). Islamic law and Shariah provide welfare to the society and provides Justice (Vehapi,2013). Islam is not just a religion, but a principle and code of life for everybody, irrespective of religion.

Islam respects all religions and does not differentiate people based on race, ethnicity, color and identity. The Charter of Madina, in the first Islamic State of Madina, gave freedom to people of all religions. The Charter of Madina provided an example of Peaceful coexistence for a pluralistic society. The Rashidun Caliph followed the footsteps of the Prophet of Islam and made efforts for peaceful coexistence (Islam, 2018).

Islam stresses the inner-self-purification which interacting with others. Islam orders to make peace between people by reconciliation and settlement. In one place, the Quran says, “Reconciliation is best, even though people are often swayed by greed (Abdullah et al, 2016)”.

Islam also emphasizes the role of arbitration for coexistence and agreement. In the Quran, the role of the arbitrator for marriages and marital issues can be applied to other peace initiatives.

“And if you fear dissension between the two, send an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Acquainted” (Surah An Nissa, Chapter 4, Verse 35). Islam adores forgiveness and it is mentioned in the Quran to that to practice patience and forgive (the wrong done to one) is the proof of true determination (Quran, Chapter 42, Verse 43).

The Life of the Prophet of Islam provided many examples of peaceful coexistence (Vehapi, 2013). It is mentioned in the Quran that if there is an issues or problems between you, refer them to Allah and His Messenger (Suarh an Nissa, Surah 4, Verse 59).

The treaty of Madina is an ideal example of Peaceful coexistence. According to this charter, everyone enjoyed the freedom to follow any religion and belief system and practice their justice system. This treaty considers Muslims, Jews, Christians, and heathens as one society working for the welfare of all.

The Prophet Signed the Treaty with the Christians of Najran. They were free to pray in their way in the Mosques of Madinah. This treaty conferred on the non-Muslims both administrative and religious and autonomy.

At the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet, peace be upon him, forgave the people of Makkah. An example of human respect is narrated in the traditions. Once, a funeral procession passed by the Prophet, and he stood up for it. People said that it was the funeral of a Jew. He replied: Was it not a human life? (Islam, 2018).

### **Conclusions**

Islam as a way of Life have solutions for conflict management and resolution, and there are examples from the Holy book of Islam and the life of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Islam stresses on interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence. The Charter of Medina and the peace treaty of Najran are a few examples from the life of the Holy Prophet.

Secondly, Islam is a religion of peace, and anything wrongly attributed to Islam is wrong and contextless. The political powers and militant groups give the wrong interpretation of Islam. The blind following without knowledge leads to a wrong way.

As the Holy Quran says.

“And when they commit immorality, they say, "We found our fathers doing it, and Allah has ordered us to do it." Say, "Indeed, Allah does not order immorality. Do you say about Allah that which you do not know?" (Quran Chapter 7, Verse28).

Only authentic and verified sources of knowledge should be accessed to have a true and broad picture of Islam as a religion and code of life.

### **Recommendations**

Through the culture of promoting education, research and reasoning, cognitive ability can be developed and hence debate, discourse and discussion can end violence and established norms (Ahmar, 2018).

As a country formed under the mane of Islam, Pakistan has many religious political parties. Islamic political parties should cooperate on provincial and federal levels with national and local political parties to eradicate religious extremism in Pakistan (Karamat, Muzaffar & Shah, 2019). Also, the knowledge of Religion should only be accessed from authentic sources. Moreover, the Curriculum in educational institutes should have content on interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence.

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