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**SIGNIFICANCE AND NEED OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE FOR INTERFAITH
HARMONY (IN THE LIGHT OF QURAN AND OTHER DEVINE SCRIPTURES)**

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ABSTRACT

The term interfaith harmony means that all the divine religions have the same origin which is coherent and matchless. The rules and regulations prescribed in all religions stand as equal in comparison with each other. When Hazrat Jaffer recited the verses of Surah e Maryum in the court of Najashi, his courtier praised it with these words: 'verily, the origin of these verses and those of Christ's is same' and Najashi said, 'indeed, this light of revelation emits from the same flame' [1]. Due to this harmony, society flourishes and every individual contributes in its diversity with his creativity and individuality. This divine message brings people together and makes them learn tolerance, forgiveness, moderation, patience and unity. And keeps them away from spiritual diseases such as violence, anxiety and extremism. The manifestation of life in every particle of the universe shows that everything is intimated with each other. In the stagnancy of mountain, flow of rivers, fragrance of flower and blow of the wind one finds the reflection of life in many folds and colors. Allah descanted man as his representative and divided

them in different tribes. He can be seen scattered all around the globe holding different positions, but as Allah's representatives they all are equal. In today's modern world where distances mean nothing to us, we can promote peace and harmony in the light of Quran and other divine scriptures. We can also promote positive behaviors and should curb ill behaviors such as anxiety, extremism, anger and violence. Unfortunately, Pakistan has become the victim of such social evils. It is duty upon her citizens to create the environment of harmony and tolerance.

Keywords: Religious tolerance; Interfaith Harmony; Quran and other divine scriptures

INTRODUCTION

The literal and terminological meaning of Religion:

Literal Meaning

The literal meaning of the word 'mazhab'(religion) in Urdu dictionary is method, path, opinion, faith etc. Its root words are 'zahab', 'yazhab', 'zahaban' [2]. Plural of 'mazhab' is 'mazahib' and in English it's equality to a word 'Religion', which has its origin in French word Religion and Latin word Religio which means creed, method of worship or to afraid from supernatural forces or to be associated with these powers [3].

Terminological Meanings

As the literal meaning of word 'mazhab' is manifold so the scholars have explained it in many ways. Bronite in his definition of Mazhab writes, 'Mazhab is that name of power of faith which brings revolution in human character unless it's accepted and understood with honesty and vision' [4]. Sir E.B Tailor defined mazhab as, 'The belief in

spiritual being' [5]. Famous psychologist Prof. James H. Leuba has defined mazhab in various ways some of them are as follow:

'Mazhab is the name of that reality which transcends human faculties and has deep roots in human affairs'.

'Religion is curiosity which guides us to know the real objective of life' [6].

These definitions tell that initial concepts of God was based on oneness, as Sehimadt said, 'there is no doubt that initial ideologue of human was religious and the concept of God was based on its oneness. Consequently, the concept of oneness of God evolved' [7].

Quran explains this concept of religion, thus:

﴿الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا...﴾

[8]

This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.

Meaning and understanding of Religion from Islamic point of view

In Islam, Religion is termed as Deen which means “code of life or system of life”. In this regard Molana Modoodi writes:

‘According to Quran, Deen is that code of life which means to conform to some omnipotent being and to follow his instructions and lead a life guided by His principles, one should expect His blessing when he follows His orders and His rage when he is away from His teachings. There is nothing equalent to this term in the world which covers all dimensions” [9].

The difference between Mazhab and Deen

Apparently both the terms are closely related in meanings; however, there is subtle difference between both of them. Deen covers the broad aspects of God’s will to human while Mazhab deals with the more explicit deed related to Ibadaa. This is confirmed by this saying of Prof. Muhamad Yousaf, he writes, ‘One difference between Deen and Mazhab is that Deen is the name of those rules and principles which are same from Hazrat Adam to Hazrat Muhamad (SAW) while Mazhab is the name of promotion of these rules’ [10].

Religious Harmony Meanings and spirit

The term ‘Hum’ahangi’ is used in coherence with equality and proportion. Syed Ahmad Dehlvi elaborates the meaning of harmony as, ‘Harmony means to be part of any

opinion, or companion etc [11]. Dr Syed Ali Raza Naqvi writes on its meaning, ‘Adding two or more things in equal proportion in such a way that they are united whole, strong and vibrant’ [12].

Hum’ahangi is combination of two words. ‘Hum’ is prefix which means togetherness or equal. In Arabic, we have words for ‘hum’ahangi’ such as unity(Itehad), togetherness or alliance.

“Itehad”(Unity): We use the word ‘itehad’ for ‘Hum’ahangi’ then we can form such words in Arabic,

”اتحاد الشيء بالشيء، اتحاد القوم اتحاد الشيئان او الاشياء: اى

صارف شيئاً واحداً“ [13]

One thing merged into another as if a nation combines together or mixture of two or more things forming one. So it means once things got merged they no longer have separate identity.

التسويته والسواء: If these words are used for ‘hum’ahangi’ then meanings will be of equality or justice

[14] التسويته والسواء: اى العدل والنصفه

Means dividing two things in equal proportion. In this context Allah’s words are established:

[15] ﴿تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ تَعَالَوْا﴾

Translation: Come to a point which is common with us , it is based on justice and is equal for us.’

It is mentioned in MUJAMUL WASEET,”

[16] “السواء: اى المثل والنظير“

Means equal is synonym with Alike and to assimilate [17]. It is said

[18] “ساوى الرجل قرنه، وتساوى فى كذا“

Meant to say that somebody is like his friend or equal to him. ‘

[19] “وهذان سيمان وهما سواء“

Means they both are similar and are accordance to each other.

اتفاق (unity):

If we use the word Ittefaq for ‘hum’ahangi’ we will have these meanings:

”اتفق الاثنان، اى تقاربا واتحدوا وتوافقوا فى الامر: اى

تقاربوا“ [20]

اتفق الاثنان means that they both came closer and got united, and meaning of being united is that they got closeness.

القرب و التقريب و التقارب :

If these words are used for ‘hum’ahangi’ then according to Ibn e Manzoor Africi meanings would be thus:

[21] “القرب نقيض البعد والتقريب اى التندى الى الشئى“

Qareeb is antonym of بعيد and تقريب is in the meaning of closeness of something it’s antonym to Taqarab tabeed.

In short, ‘hum’ahangi’ is all about harmonizing two or more things, it can be used variously as making companion, maintaining justice ,bringing close to,

adopting balance approach or be persevere in the way of justice.

By Mazhab we mean all the divine Deens whose essence and origin is revelation which means all religions in their actuality are one and united. As Allah says in Quran:

[22] ﴿لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ...﴾

TRANSLATION: We sent our messengers with clear signs and guidance and revealed scriptures onto them so that they steadfast on justice.

It is clear from the next verse that mission of Prophets and the scriptures revealed on them was same that’s to bring divine revelation which is for certain from Almighty.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the teachings of all religions are same. However, in present times it seems impossible to combine all these divine religions for the reason that most of the religions cannot be found in its original form, but efforts can be made to bring them closer and an atmosphere of tolerance and harmony can be created. Keeping in view this, we should perceive interfaith harmony as an effort to make the global world more vibrant.

Respect for Religion and its importance in the light of Divine scriptures:

Having established the fact that the religion is all about rules and regulations which have been commonly followed from Hazrat Adam

to Hazrat Muhammad SAW, it ends dissention between people belonging to different religions. These very commonalities dissolve all the discussions and leave behind no point of distinction. Here, human can be seen in line with each other. Human long for peace for it is the only way by adopting which we can progress and it's not possible without realizing the lesson of mutual respect and harmony. When we respect each other's religion ,creed and ideology, we get rid of violence, extremism and intolerance from society. Keeping in view this fact, Islam has laid emphasis on the respect of difference of opinion, infact, it has encouraged to cooperate with them in social, economic and political arena where they could be helpful to face the challenges of the time.

The Quranic principle about Respect of Religions is as;

{لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ} [23]

Translation: There is no compulsion in religion.

And further it goes like,

{وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ} [24]

Translation: Do not curse on their false Gods; in return they will curse your God.

Where Islam instructs us to follow Allah and his prophet Saw, there we are ordered to have

faith in the scriptures and prophets who came before the last prophet.

Allah says,

{قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ} [25]

In the verse ” لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ ”, there is negation of distinction among prophet which gives the message of respect of all religion.

If Allah himself didn't make any difference among them so we should also give them high regards and protect their honor. At another place Allah gives the example of interfaith harmony as, He says,'

{شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا...الخ} [26]

The messenger of peace, Hazrat Muhammad SAW said, ‘

«مَثَلِي وَمَثَلُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ كَمَثَلِ رَجُلٍ بَنَى بَيْتًا فَأَحْسَنَهُ وَأَجْمَلَهُ، إِلَّا مَوْضِعَ لَبْنَةٍ وَاحِدَةٍ فَجَعَلَ النَّاسُ يَطُوفُونَ وَيَعْجَبُونَ وَيَعْجَبُونَ لَهُ، وَيَقُولُونَ: هَلَّا وُضِعَتْ هَذِهِ اللَّبْنَةُ، وَقَالُوا اللَّبْنَةُ وَأَنَا خَاتَمُ النَّبِيِّينَ» [27]

“I and other prophets are like as if there was beautifully built house to which people visited to see it ,but the house was yet to be completed by putting the last brick in it,

seeing vacant space people insisted as to why this space had been left out. So let me tell you that I am that last brick of that house and I am the last messenger of Allah.’

This also subscribes to the notion of interfaith harmony that the life of Hazrat Muhammad SAW was devoted to the same cause which other prophet had brought with them. The practical life of the last prophet is the golden example of it, may it be the Jews of Misaq e Madina or the Christians of Catherine, whether it was an occasion of Sulah Hudaibia or were these Jews of Khaiber, the prophet has always given the message of peace. This is the reason that even those who conspired against Islam, can be seen praising him.

Sir William Mayor writes about Misaq e Madina in these words, ‘Muhammad (PBUH), being a great political leader, has skillfully gathered the scattered people of Arab under one slogan that was the oneness of Allah. He succeeded in making such a vibrant society which has an international appeal.

It is absolutely natural that if somebody hurts the sentiment of people by disgracing the scriptures of Allah Almighty, he loses the patience towards that person. Then it happens that his emotions dominate him and driven by these motifs he starts thinking about giving him exemplary response so no one

would ever think to do so. But the teachings of these holy books guide him not to take law in hands so that the message of love may not be converted into hate.

The society will be peaceful if human being respects the creed and religion of others which is the very essence of Quran and other divine scriptures. Quran not only teaches to protect the teachings of other religion but also gives full rights to spread these teachings. That was what the objective of Muhammad (PBUH) when he permitted Christians to perform their worship freely, he wanted to send the message around that Islam doesn’t prohibit the practices of other religions; instead, it is there to protect them. Islam guaranteed and secured the rights of other religions in an Islamic state.

Islam and other divine religions consider humans as one family and try to bring them together. On the other hand, the western philosophy draws distinction among people which is the cause of hatred, differences and schism. An English poet describes it as, ‘*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet*, [28].

Respect for Religion and Concept of God in the light Of Quran

Quran says, ‘

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ﴾ [29]

Translation: (Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah")

There is no doubt about it that all divine religions believe in the oneness of God, every one of them has one God who is the creator and provider of livelihood. That's why Quran says that all messengers have one agenda ,that is,

﴿يَقُومُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ أَتَقَرُّوْنَ﴾

[30]

Translation: (O my people! worship Allah! you have no other god but Him)

This message was brought by each prophet.

﴿قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاصْبِرُوا﴾ [31]

Translation : (Musa said to his people to ask Allah for help and be patient)

About Hazrat Eisa, the Quran says,

﴿وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا﴾ [32]

Translation: (They were not ordered to worship other than one God).

While, when Quran addressed this subject,it said,'

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾ [33]

Translation: (oh people, be submissive to the one who is the creator of you and those who have passed before so that you become pious.')

Respect for Religion and Concept of God in the light of Divine scriptures

In the Bible and Torat, we find that the conception of God and interfaith harmony are addressed in such words,' Oh people of earth, be cheerful in front of God and worship him with joy'[34].

At another place, it is expressed as thus,' O people win the praise of thy lord and worship him with fear'[35].

The Torah says: Israel remained there where they were and spent one fourth of their day in reciting of God's book. Fatehana said to stand up and praise the lord who is eternal and everlasting' [36].

Similarly, yaisaya has it,' God, save us from them (enemy) so that all the states may know that you are the only God' [37].

Bible says,' Though there are several blessings but there is only one purified soul, and there are many guides but the God is only one who leaves his impact upon everything' [38].

Preaching of oneness in yasyah is mentioned as thus,' I am the only God and there is no other one, there is no God but me. I am the inventor of light and the creator of darkness, It is only Me who do all this' [39].

In Zaboor, we find the mention of God's omnipotence in these words,' The God is my defense, protector and savior' [40].

From the above quotations of divine books, it is cleared that the God of all creations is one

and He is the solo creator of this universe. All the religions believe in this common attribute which is the pivotal point on the basis of which they tend to respect each other's religions.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

It is suggested that the world and especially Pakistan and its institutions should follow the instructions prescribed in the Quran and other divine scriptures regarding interfaith harmony. Following are some recommendations which need to be prioritized in order to establish this agenda more effectively.

1. A demand from united nation to include the section of blasphemy in the penal system of all the countries and in united nation itself.

It cannot be allowed to commit blasphemy of prophets in the name of freedom of speech. This is against the teaching of every religion and also against the international law.

The section of blasphemy must be included in the penal system of every country.

The section 3 of an Article 1 of charter of UNA should be reviewed and blasphemy of religion must be considered out of freedom of speech.

There should be code of conduct for social media in which the projection of blasphemous content should be declared prohibited and violation of it must be dealt under the provision of Terrorism Act.

2. The protection of lives:

Pakistan is centre attraction to the Muslim world where the spirit of Islam can be seen in practice. Every act against minorities is exploited by the West to distort the image of the country. Therefore, there is needed to take measure to ensure the lives and freedom of minorities in the country. In this way we can curb the propaganda against Islam.

3. Need to make the laws more effective to discourage mobster element:

Today is the world of social media through which we can be able to restore the peace in society also we can make an environment full of interfaith harmony. An action against elements who are active in publishing blasphemous material according to article 153-A of the constitution.

4. Activation OF Evacuee Trust Property Board

The worships places of minorities are the heritage of our history, the

protection of which is the responsibility of the state. Though the government has established ETPB for this purpose but it needs to be activated. Its responsibility includes the restoration of illegal occupation of worship places and the door to them should open for the minorities.

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