

DEVELOPING TOOLS FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE: A QUR'ĀNIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study highlights the past and potential Qur'ānic role in establishing peaceful inter-cultural interactions among nations. Today's world has shrunk into a global village. Therefore, basing standards and protocols for peaceful coexistence according to guidelines and principles of the Holy Qur'ān is appropriate, so every nation, while preserving its cultural values, may play its role in human development and ensure peaceful coexistence. In this regard, this study encompasses, points of harmony among societies, providing suggestions for formation of an organized, cultural and ideological platform from the Qur'ānic perspective. The study addresses a problem: Many people believe that Islamic civilization was influenced or affected by pre-Islamic civilizations like the Greek, Persian and Roman, therefore, Islamic civilization must have derived some principles from them. On the contrary, the Holy Qur'ān has already discussed fourteen centuries earlier, various aspects of different civilizations in detail. It mentions at various places the cosmic *Sunnahs* (Laws) and their impact on ancient civilizations. This research clarifies a fact, that guiding principles regarding moderation and peaceful coexistence are derived from the Holy Qur'ān and impact of these Qur'ānic teachings are clearly visible in all aspects of Islamic civilization. Therefore, this research study clarifies the Holy Qur'ān's important role in establishing and strengthening peaceful coexistence among nations in all eras.

Keywords: Peaceful coexistence, Qur'ānic perspective, world civilization

1. Introduction

In its aims and style, the Holy Qur'ān is a complete code for life.

It removes any doubt in the human heart by offering solutions to all problems, both religious and secular. As Allah Almighty says:

*“Allah Almighty even knows the sly glances of the eyes and whatever the hearts conceal”.*¹

Persons’ souls, Creator, families and societies organise their lives. In fact, the Holy Qur’ān is a highly systematic and reformative plan.

Studying the foundations of peaceful coexistence to strengthen social relationships has become a foremost priority in today’s small world because only through peaceful coexistence can better ties be built among civilisations. Indeed, peaceful coexistence plays a decisive role in a nation’s development. Therefore, principles of peaceful coexistence should be studied in an organised and scientific way, so all the world’s civilisations can draw close to ensure humanity’s progress and well-being. In the light of the Holy Qur’ān, dialogue with others, based on moderation and aimed at harmony, can be a personal and general strategy for building relationships. Disharmony among human beings has remained an important historical and philosophical problem still a focus of attention for today’s researchers. Therefore, this study, from the perspective of Qur’ānic principles, aims at developing understanding of relationships between Islamic and Western civilisations.

2. Objectives

Through the analysis of Qur’ānic verses and other evidence, the study aims to remove doubt and confusion about Islamic civilisations based on misunderstanding of Islamic teachings. Global media’s accusations against Islam regarding human rights need to be answered according to actual Qur’ānic content, which enjoins harmony, tolerance and peace. Here, the researcher attempts to find those answers from the Holy Qur’ān’s actual content.

The study also aims at understanding Qur’ānic standards in order to promote peace among civilisations through resolution of conflicts and eradication of social disintegration. In globalisation’s wake, the importance of peaceful coexistence has gained impetus, so the study attempts to search out basic principles that form religious foundations, that Muslims must follow, in order to establish ties of peaceful coexistence with other civilisations.

3. Literature Review

Altaweel (1991) described peaceful coexistence as a concept in the field of international relations intended for the formulation of frameworks to ensure the acceptance of the multiplicity of human ideologies towards international issues. The concept insists on peaceful coexistence among followers of different religions. After World War II, the term was also used to refer to cooperation among nations in the distribution of commercial interests on the basis of mutual respect and justice.²

Updated communication tools have shrunk today's world, transformed it into a small village, minimised distance and exploded knowledge and information and have promoted understanding and peaceful coexistence among people from various ideological backgrounds.

The Qur'ānic approach towards peaceful coexistence with all human beings is demonstrated under a chapter entitled "*Kāfirūn*" (كافرون). The chapter mentions pagans and disbelievers who persecuted Muslims on the basis of religion. In this chapter, the Holy Qur'ān accepts ideological diversity and states,

"You have your way, and I have my way".³

The Holy Qur'ān deals with human beings on the basis of unity under one creator and insists that Muslims should peacefully interact with fellow human beings to maintain a peaceful world. It discourages forceful compulsion into accepting Islam. In the Qur'ānic perspective, one can accept Islam according to his conviction and will.

The basic principle for the relationship of Muslims with others is based on peace and tolerance. Muslims' commitment to their human relations is based on several moral principles, the most important of which are honour, mercy, love, equality and trust.⁴

From this standpoint, Baraka concluded the legal aspect of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Furthermore, the author demonstrated the principle of equality with non-Muslims in constitutional rights throughout the various eras of Islamic history. Within these eras, all public authorities in the Islamic state were committed to the rights and freedom established by the Holy Qur'ān in the field of constitutional issues for citizens other than Muslims.⁵

Zaidan (1987) summarised the provisions related to non-Muslims in Islamic countries since the inception of Islamic law, which takes the Holy

Qur'ān as the basis for building society and establishing state. The state of Islam prevails in the provisions of Islam but does not restrict non-Muslims. Instead, it ensures fundamental rights for non-Muslims.⁶

In the same context, Badran (1983) highlighted the Qur'ānic approach in dealing with non-Muslims in certain social situations, such as relationships between Muslims with non-Muslims in contracts, crimes, food and so on.⁷

Moreover, Bardakoglu (2008) aimed to demonstrate how the relationship between religion, secularism, Islam and democracy has been shaped in Turkey and the relationship between various cultures over time. The author discussed the perception of Turkish Muslims and their position on freedom of religion and coexistence with different religious sects. The study concluded that the Turkish case succeeded in managing diversity despite isolated events of disharmony.⁸

The brief literature review clearly indicates that previous studies focused on social aspects of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims and presented opinions on issues specific to such a relationship. However, the present study focuses on clarifying the Qur'ānic position about coexistence with various human circles in the same manner that previous studies lacked the required clarification on the applications of peaceful coexistence in the contemporary scenario. The current study precisely addresses the practical aspects of peaceful coexistence in its various types from the Qur'ānic perspective.

4. Definitions of Cultural Interaction

The Holy Qur'ān was revealed as a complete code of life so that people could be guided towards the true path. Allah Almighty says:

*“The Book We have revealed to you O Prophet is the truth, confirming what came before it. Surely Allah Almighty is All-Aware, All-Seeing of His servants”.*⁹

*“Say, O Prophet, “Surely my Lord has guided me to the Straight Path, a perfect way, the faith of Abraham, the upright, who was not one of the polytheists”.*¹⁰

In this age of globalisation, interaction among civilisations has gained immense importance, but relationships among civilisations are not a

commonplace matter rather an organisational and strategic matter based on different principles. Thus, the relationship among civilisations should be studied, keeping in mind organised strategies. The objective of this research is in-depth study of cultural and civilised relationships among nations. Therefore, the study analyses the process of building harmonious and moderate ties among civilisations by applying a methodological academic approach before tackling the actual topic. For clarification, some relevant terms are defined below.

In the Arabic language, the word *Ta'āruḥ* (تعارف) is used to describe human interaction. Therefore, *Ta'āruḥul Qaum* (تعارف القوم) is used when people are introduced and mix socially (Al-Jawhari, 1974). The word *Ta'āruḥ* has also been used with the same meaning in a *hadīth* of our Holy Prophet (Ṣal Allāh-u-‘alaihe wa sallam):

«الأرواح جنود مجندة ما تعارف منها ائتلف وما تناكر منها اختلف»¹¹

The arwāḥ (souls) are a massed army. When they already know each other, they are friendly. When they do not know each other, they disagree.

Nawawi (Raḥmat Allāh ‘alaiḥ), after quoting several *ulemas*’ (scholars’) opinions, writes:

Ajnād Mujanda means a large group and varied assemblage. Introductions of souls (*arwāḥ*) with one another purports that souls were created together. However later on when they entered into human bodies, they introduced with each other according to their characteristics and dispositions. In the beginning souls were of two types. But when they mixed with bodies, they parted ways because pure souls transferred into pure bodies and evil souls entered into impure bodies.¹²

While defining (*tagħaḥaḥ*) (تفاعّل) and (*taḥāwūḥ*) (تعاشّ) according to the Islamic point of view, Al-Tuwaijri (1998) concludes:

”وأما من المنظور الإسلامي فهو: ذو سعة يُمكن أن يشمل كلّ المعاني التي تدلّ على التعاون والتساكن والتعايش ويُمكن أيضًا أن يستوعب التفاعل قيم الحوار والجدل والتي هي أحسن والاحترام المتبادل“¹³

In the Islamic perspective, *interaction* is a comprehensive term that comprises all meanings related to living in society. Similarly, it denotes principles of discourse and rebuttal based on mutual respect.

An enlightened and peaceful future needs a practical, long-lasting, systematic strategy for laying a foundation for civilizational interaction, which in turn can help in establishing firm relationships among religious groups and civilisations.

4.1 Literary Meaning of Civilisation

In the literary meaning of civilisation in the Arabic language, *Haḍarah* (حضاره) is used for civilisation when it indicates urban life. Its opposite is *Bādiyah* (باديه), indicating rural life. Thus, *Haḍarī* (حضرى) means city dweller, while *Budwī* (بدوى) means a village dweller or a rustic (Al-Jawhari, 1974). As a term, ‘civilisation’ has been defined differently by many scholars. It refers to powerful plans and systems to spread order, peace and happiness and to humanity’s intellectual and literary development¹⁴. Ilm ud Din defines civilisation as the following:

”الحضارة هي نمط عيش مجموعة بشرية معينة ، في بيئة معينة
يتمثل في النظام الذي تعتمد عليه المجموعة وفي سأم القيم
الاجتماعية التي تحيدها لنفسها.“¹⁵

“Civilisation is actually a way of living of a specific people in a specific area according to their social standards and pre-determined system of life.”

This last definition clarifies that every society is closely related to a civilisation. As such, different societies give birth to different civilisations. Accordingly, the Islamic civilisation is a practical example of Islamic society and Islamic values¹⁶. Similarly, the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee¹⁷ states that “Because human history is a history of civilisation, it is also a history of human societies”. In this context, civilisation and society are two sides of a coin because society is a group of organised individuals and civilisation is a systematic collection of organised principles practiced by a society.¹⁸

4.2. Diversity is the Qur’ānic Perspective

Both implicitly and explicitly, the Holy Qur’ān places great importance on cultural diversity in its teachings and motivates people to accept differences among them. Even in the matter of faith, the Holy Qur’ān

admits the existence of other factions and holds dialogues with them, creating conducive environments in which both parties can accept the findings. In this way, parties succeed in finding truth either by acceptance or rejection. In fact, the Holy Qur'ān calls differences of colour and language among human beings a sign and a marvel of God's creation. Allah Almighty says:

*“And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. Surely in this are signs for those of sound knowledge”.*¹⁹

In this holy verse (اختلاف السنينه), *Ikhtilaf-al sinah* means differences of languages, while *Ikhtilaf-al alwān* (اختلاف الألوان) means differences of colours since human beings can be astonishingly different from one another in shape and complexion²⁰. Clearly, from the mention of language and colour the Holy Qur'ān marks no essential difference among human beings. Differences occur only in colour, language or other external attributes. It is an admitted fact that essence is reliable, while attributes, being temporary, have no credibility. In the verse quoted above, the Holy Qur'ān has implicitly prioritised the equality of all humans' essence. Accordingly, differences of faith and thought among human beings have been acknowledged. In this perspective, Allah Almighty, while acknowledging civilisational differences among human beings says in *surah Hūd*,

*“Had your Lord so willed, He would have certainly made humanity one single community of believers, but they will always choose to differ”.*²¹

In other words, had Allah Almighty wished, He would have created all human beings according to the same pattern, but He wished them to differ and so included differences even in religion.

Acknowledging cultural diversity means introducing human groups to one another and allowing them to become acquainted with each other's lifestyles and varied life experiences. Such interaction can eliminate doubt and confusion among societies and civilisations about each other, and the idol of sectarianism can be demolished. Humankind often speculates about other civilisations and societies and in ignorance, becomes suspicious of them. But when other civilisations are introduced, and as one society grows close to another, they can both learn, finally, that all the speculations

are just fabrications of mind²². For example, the Islamic state of Madinah was based on principles of ideological equality that did not determine decisions and policies on the bases of religion, gender and colour. This equality and peaceful coexistence resulted in establishment of Islamic civilisation through active participation of all religions followers.²³

In light of these Qur'ānic principles, serious academic efforts should be made in strengthening enduring relationships among current civilisations.

5. Impact of Qur'ānic Teaching on Developing Coexistence among Civilisations

The Holy Qur'ān not only greatly emphasises strengthening relationships with others but also provides principles for positive relationships and peaceful coexistence. The following analyses Qur'ānic teachings relevant to strengthening relationships.

The Holy Qur'ān stresses adopting a path of moderation and balance in all life situations, so there will be harmony between soul and body as human nature demands. Analogously, moderation is highly emphasised for ensuring peaceful coexistence among civilisations. According to some scholars, this characteristic distinguishes Islamic civilisation. H.A.R. Gibb states.

“I believe that even today Islam is inevitable for humanity because it stands as a moderator between East and the West. Whatever Islam has done for peaceful coexistence among human beings, no system has done that yet. Therefore, if any mediator is needed to resolve the conflicts between East and the West, that moderator is Islam only”.²⁴

The Holy Qur'ān enjoins us to follow moderate thoughts and a balanced, middle path in matters of religion. It strictly condemns extremism. In the Holy Qur'ān, word (غلو) *Ghulū*, has been used for extremism. In Surah Mai'dah, Allah Almighty says,

*“Say, O People of the Book! Do not go to extremes in your faith beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of those who went astray before you. They misled many and strayed from the right way.”*²⁵

Furthermore, Ibn-e-Abbas (*Raḍi Allah 'anhu*) has quoted our Holy Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihe wa sallam*) saying: “People, beware of exaggeration in religious matters for those who came before you

were doomed because of exaggeration in religious matters”²⁶. In the same way, the Holy Qur’ān forbids extremism. Allah Almighty says,

“Ask, O Prophet, “Who has forbidden the adornments and lawful provisions Allah Almighty has brought forth for His servants?” Say, “They are for the enjoyment of the believers in this worldly life, but they will be exclusively theirs on the Day of Judgment. This is how We make Our revelations clear for people of knowledge”.”²⁷

The Holy Qur’ān has named Islami nation (Ummah) as a mid-most (Ummat) nation.

*“And so We have made you believers an upright community”.*²⁸

This verse asserts that abstaining from exaggeration and violence is required by every Muslim, and thus Muslims need to practice wisdom and moderation by establishing an environment of peaceful coexistence among other religions and civilisations. Extremism opposes moderation, of course. Islam enjoins its followers to moderation and forbids extreme behaviours. Balanced behaviours unite human beings and call for dialogue among nations and religions by eschewing controversy. As perceived by scholars, Islam’s universality emerges, in that its message is not meant for specific people.²⁹

Balanced behaviour unites human beings and calls for dialogue among nations/religions by ignoring controversies. Universality of Islam as perceived by the scholars is that its message is not meant for specific people.³⁰

5.1. Qur’ānic Principles for Establishment of Peaceful Coexistence

The Holy Qur’ān prefers peace to war in Islamic societies’ relationships with other civilisations. The word ‘Islam’ itself is derived from the Arabic root *Salāmah* (سلامه), meaning peace. As has been said in the Sūrah ‘Baqarah’ of the Holy Qur’ān States,

*“Fight in the cause of Allah Almighty against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah Almighty does not like transgressors.”*³¹

Islam allows war against persecution. It does not promote war against the peaceful unbelievers just on the basis of their religion. Terrorism is an act of aggression perpetrated by any individual or group for achievement of its personal, collective or political objectives and, in fact, terrorism is abhorrent in light of the Holy Qur'ān because it exploits others for political gain. Because of its targets, methods and objectives, it is un-Islamic. Islam expressly forbids fomenting riot both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries in the name of religion³².

Conversely, Qur'ānic principles for establishment of peaceful coexistence are laid on the foundations of mutual cooperation, compromise and justice. The Holy Qur'ān clearly writes in this regard,

*“O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another.”*³³

Therefore, relationships among civilisations should be built on peaceful coexistence in which all human beings have security of rights³⁴. This is evident from the following Islamic principles.

5.2. Freedom of Religion

Islam teaches its followers to treat non-Muslim inhabitants in an Islamic country very well, and they should enjoy all facilities and privileges granted to (national) local Muslims. In this way, they also have all the responsibilities that Muslim inhabitants have. Thus, rights related to security of life, property, religion and self-respect are equally shared by non-Muslims.³⁵

5.3. Tolerance towards Other Religions

Islam emphasises tolerance towards other religions on moral grounds for establishment of peaceful coexistence because liking differences in language and colour, differences in thoughts and ideologies are the ingrained demands of human nature. In this regard, the Holy Qur'ān mentions,

*“Had your Lord so willed O Prophet, all people on earth would have certainly believed, every single one of them! Would you then force people to become believers?”*³⁶

Indeed, the Holy Qur'ān testifies for all sacred texts. Just as Islam acknowledges all religions, so Muhammad (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) believed in all undistorted divine scriptures as revealed on Moses, Jesus Christ and David (*‘Alaihim As-Salām*), Allah Almighty says in this connection that,

*“The Messenger firmly believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. They all believe in Allah Almighty, His angels, His Books, and His messengers”.*³⁷

Similarly, the Holy Qur'ān also admits that the books revealed on Mūsa (*‘Alaih As-Salām*) and ‘Īsa (*‘Alaih As-Salām*) were guidance from Allah Almighty and His divine lights.

*“Indeed, We revealed the Torah, containing guidance and light”.*³⁸

There can be no higher degree of acknowledgement, tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence than this, as mentioned in the verses above³⁹.

5.4. Guarantee of Non-Muslims’ Rights

In the light of Qur’ānic teachings, in an Islamic state, all non-Muslims’ rights must be safeguarded. Non-Muslims must not be treated with prejudice or injustice thus, the Holy Qur’ān commands the political establishment to administer governance with justice for every citizen.

*“Allah doth command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when ye judge between man and man that ye judge with justice”*⁴¹

In an Islamic state, therefore, establishment of an independent judiciary is essential for administration of unbiased and pure justice in which non-Muslim parties have equal opportunity to pursue their cases⁴².

The concepts and information presented above demonstrate that the Holy Qur’ān presents principles based on tolerance and peace for coexistence with non-Muslims. In fact, Islam advocated peaceful coexistence fourteen hundred years before the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴³ This information also discredits the misconception

that Islam spread by dint of sword. On the contrary, Islam spread by virtue of peaceful invitation (propagation) based on tolerance and respectful dialogue.

6. Establishment of a Peaceful Environment for Non-Muslims in an Islamic Society

Islamic scholars of jurisprudence have clarified that it is incumbent upon the Islamic state to be responsible for the security of the life, property and honour of every citizen, Muslim or non-Muslim, against any kind of danger (Afifi 1991, 317).⁴⁴ This also comes from the *Holy Qur'ān*, which has enjoined exemplary principles for the protection of a stranger. It says,

*“And if anyone from the polytheists asks for your protection, O Prophet, grant it to them so they may hear the Word of Allah Almighty, then escort them to a place of safety, for they are a people who have no knowledge”.*⁴⁵

Therefore, scholars of Islamic law have explained that when non-Muslims enter Muslim territory for trade, exploration or delegacy, they must be provided security by the Islamic state until they safely return to their home country⁴⁶. Experts of Islamic jurisprudence have also clarified that a man taking refuge in an Islamic country will not be returned to his own country against his will even if a Muslim prisoner is exchanged for his return⁴⁷.

6.1. Keeping Promises/Fulfilling Treaties

In consequence of a treaty, if non-Muslim prisoners of war are to be given security, the Muslims are bound by *Shari'ah* to honour the pledge in letter and spirit. As Allah Almighty has decreed,

*“Honour Allah Almighty's covenant when you make a pledge, and do not break your oaths after confirming them”.*⁴⁸

In another place, Allah Almighty says,

*“Honour your pledges, for you will surely be accountable for them”.*⁴⁹

Muslims are therefore obliged to contact their enemies in war in a breach of the Muslims' pledge to notify the enemy of their treachery before nullifying the treaty. The Holy Qur'ān exhorts in such cases and states:

*"If thou fearest treachery from any group throw back (their covenant) to them (so as to be) on equal terms: for God loveth not the treacherous."*⁵⁰

However, when we thoroughly study Islamic history, we do not find any incident in which Muslims have broken promises or covenants. Similarly, in Islamic history, there is hardly any example of Muslim treachery against international pacts⁵¹.

It is evident that Islam attaches great importance to development of relationships with other global civilisations, provided the relationship is based on justice and equality. Balance and moderation carry high value in Islamic teachings because they are prerequisites in every aspect of life. If a human body loses equilibrium because of illness or a society is disrupted when harmony among its various peoples is gone, in the same way, when balance and moderation do not exist in international bilateral relations, riots and wars find away⁵². In brief, the Holy Qur'ān lays immense emphasis on peaceful coexistence and has advanced ever-lasting principles in this regard. In Islamic history, examples of peaceful coexistence are found in the form of the 'Madinah Treaty' (ميثاق مدینه) and the 'Hudaibiah Pact' (صلح حديبيه) there is may be found as various covenants implemented during the time of Muhammad (Sal Allah-u-'alaihe wa sallam) or as Muslims' historical treaties with opponents in later times when Islamic civilisation was at its zenith.

7. Conclusion

To ensure peaceful coexistence among civilisations, the Holy Qur'ān presents a complete code with everlasting principles based on tolerance, humanism and moderation. This study reveals that diversities in colour, race, language or religious interpretations benefit humanity. These diversities offer an environment of constructive competition that can and will be used for humankind's development. The Holy Qur'ān emphasises interactions and dialogues to create and strengthen an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence. Similarly, by condemning extremism and terrorism

in strict terms, Islam stresses propagation of a culture of dialogue, peace and peaceful coexistence. Irrespective of underlying differences among civilisations and cultures, the Holy Qur'ān has indicated and highlighted universal values and principles related to human beings and civilisations. Whatever the differences among civilisations and whatever their intensity, values of justice, truthfulness and trustworthiness are common to all, and these values can sufficiently strengthen an environment of peaceful coexistence within a context of diversity and plurality. Islamic civilisation aims at developing peaceful coexistence among human societies and strengthening ties among cultures by promoting values of justice, truthfulness and trustworthiness. The Holy Qur'ān stresses sensitisation of individuals to tolerance, peace, security and stability so that they can develop working relationships with all civilisations. The message of Islam is universal; it therefore, acknowledges all divine religions and respects them by accepting all apostles and prophets (*'Alaih As-Salām*). Islamic civilisation based on moderation and harmony is part of human civilisation, providing universal principles for building confidence and cooperation with nations, mutual understanding among civilisations and a culture of constructive discourse with other religions and nations. From the Qur'ānic perspective, peaceful coexistence, building relationships and methods of communication, with diversity and respect for others' opinions, are the best alternative remedies for resolution of conflicts among civilisations. This study finds that the Holy Qur'ān can play a pivotal role in establishment of relationships among nations internationally. In this regard, Qur'ānic teachings' foundation is laid on mutual understanding, dialogue, and common interest, protection of sanctities and assurance of liberty. These relationships are highly important for the security of human existence on planet Earth. Western scholars and media should eradicate suspicions regarding Islamic history and civilisation so that gaps between eastern and western civilisations can be bridged and an environment of peace and peaceful coexistence may prevail globally.

Recommendations

Especially in light of the discussion above, the concepts of justice and peaceful coexistence should be studied in the context of Qur'ānic injunctions. Moreover, the works of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars regarding peaceful coexistence from the Qur'ānic perspective should be incorporated into various countries' educational curricula.

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