

The Impact of Islamic Teaching towards Peaceful and Conflict Resolution on Social Development

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Abstract

In Islam peace is achieved through sincere acknowledgement of people's rights and their freedom to use them as well as sincere and utmost discharge of individual and collective responsibilities. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to emphasize on the teaching of Islam towards peace and conflict resolution. The findings show that with the existence of peace in the society conflict or disagreement can be managed and subsequently resolved among the groups. It adopts both historical and analytical methods. The paper concludes and recommends that if an individual follow the Islamic teaching concerning peaceful co-existence there will be peace and mutual relationship among one another in the state.

Keywords: Islamic, Teaching, Peaceful, Conflict, Resolution, Social and Development.

Introduction

The peace in which Islam tolerates other religion is of immense rate. The initial meaning of Islam which means "peace" is not limited to a certain race, clan, colour or belief (Hashimi, 2007). Indeed, loving others as you love yourself that the Prophet (SAW) clamours for does not exclude the non-Muslim. The emphasis laid by Islam on peaceful and harmonious co-existence which is more of practical than the theory is another feature that distinguished the Islamic doctrines on human relations from other doctrines. However, conflict is a phenomenon which is an important part of human existence as well as a natural part of our daily lives that no society can say to be free from one form of conflict for another (John, 1990). Therefore, Islam enjoins Muslims to conduct any dialogue or even disagreement about religious matters in a spirit of gentleness, sensitivity and good will and never with hostility or violence.

Meanwhile, Muslims are encouraged to approach all such of conflict or disagreement or discussion with gentleness. Likewise, they are encouraged to take the path of goodness, peace and unity and to respond with patience and kindness. Allah instructs the believers to;

...and no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint none but persons of the greatest good fortune (Q41:34).

Islam teaches zero conflict, injustice, oppression and violation of the rights of other human beings. Moreover, Islam advises the Muslim that; if any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise it must be referred to Allah and His messenger” (Al-Hashimi, 2007). This clause maintained that all inhabitants of the state recognize a higher level of authority, and in those matters which involved various tribes and religious, justice could not be meted out by individual leaders, rather it must be adjudicated by one leader of the state himself or his designated representatives (Jensen, 1817).

A central teaching of Islam is that there is a purpose of and meaning in the creation of the universe including mankind. Allah says;

And if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the lives of the whole people (Q45:32).

Conceptual Clarification

The flexibility and uncommon definitions accorded to terms such as peaceful and conflict clearing grounds for appropriate contextualization of ideas. Hence, the below definitions depict the operational use of the terms as applied herein.

Peaceful

Peaceful is an objective describing a person or condition characterized by peace (Webster Dictionary of English usage). Peace is the state of harmonious relations, general security of public places, absence of war, mental stress and anxiety. The manifestations of peace include: Absence of Individual and public fear, sorrow, misery, grief, anxiety and war, and the prevalence of harmony, mutual cooperation, tolerance and respect among various human groups and nationalities.

Peace

The word “peace” is derived from the Latin word which literally means a pact, a contract, an agreement to end war or any disputes or conflict between two people, nations or antagonistic groups of people (Asseffa, 1995). A situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area is often described as peaceful. Peace can be a state of harmony or absence of hostility (Falet, 2010). Peace can be a non-violent way of life. It often depicts cessation of violent conflict a state of quite or tranquillity or an absence of disturbance or agitation.

From the above, peace can pertain to an individual relative to his or her environment, because the use of the word peaceful could be to describe calm, serenity, and silence. This latter understanding of peace can also pertain to an individual sense of self, as to be “at peace with oneself would indicate the same serenity, calm and equilibrium within oneself, that is, a life devoid of worries, bitterness or pain.

In most cases peace is used to refer to absence of hostility. However, the term also represents a situation where there is, among others healthy or newly healed interpersonal relationship; safety in matters related to social or economic welfare; the acknowledgement of equality and fairness in political relationships and in world matters (Wachira, 2006).

Conflict

Conflict is a state of disagreement or argument between people, groups, or countries; chosen between two or more opposite needs as well as lack of co-existence between opposite ideas, beliefs and opinions, according to dictionary contemporary English.

Isaac (2001) sees conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize injure or eliminate their rivals. In his submission (John, 1990) consider conflict as “a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both. Each part is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each party perceives the other as barrier or threat to that goal.

Islamic Teaching towards Conflict Resolution

It is clear to explain that all conflicts whether they are interpersonal, or within the family and community or national and international can easily disturb the relationship of peace. Islamic principles of peace keeping enunciated in the glorious Quran affirm that all human beings have common origin (Nafsin Waidatin). In fact, this basic concept is enshrined in the very first words that a Muslim says when he/she is born or non accepting Islam common affirmed as *Shahada*: Meaning that; there is no deity worthy worship except Allah (SWT). It should be understood that, peaceful coexistence in Islam also encouraged compassion and forgiveness, and also discourage greed, egocentricity, gross materialism and harming others, and work to live peacefully in cooperation with each other. Islam also encourages the use of “*Sulha* in resolving all types of conflicts. It means seeking peace, reconciliation compromise and settlement. According to (Nimer, 2003), the purpose of “*sulh*” in peace keeping is to end conflict and hostility, so that parties can conduct a relationship in peace and amity. It is a form of legal contract.

Peaceful co-existence in Islam also requires not only outward human effort, but also a spiritual attitude and receptivity and continual inward cleansing, purification of the self, remembrance of the divine and proper attention to relationships which creates a space for the presence of peace to manifest.

According to Mufti (2003), early Muslim jurist developed a number of legal structures and institutions, using a variety of a technique to resolve conflicts amicably, and achieve peace. These include;

- i. Appointment of a justice of peace (*Qadi as sulh*) to oversee the processes of mediation, arbitration and reconciliation to achieve settlement and peace.
- ii. Parties in conflict have the option of resolving their disputes through a “*wastah*” or third-party mediator who would ensure that all parties were satisfied with the outcome.
- iii. The use of “*Tahkeem*” or using intermediaries to represent the parties. These intermediaries should be able to represent the party’s position as clearly as possible to negotiate on their half and guarantee that the parties receive a fair settlement.

Some of these settlements include the following:

- a. Financial compensation
- b. Service to the people
- c. Service to the community
- d. Specific gestures of sympathy or public demonstration of reconciliation

Dialogue as the most Effective means of Conflict Resolution

Islam welcomes dialogue as an effort to attain mutual understanding (Abd Al-Ati, 2003). According to Bidmus (4), it connotes “an exchange of ideas in which the participants make proportionately equal contributions. The Glorious Qur’an is full of dialogue with non-Muslim and especially the people of the book, Jews and Christians. It has commanded the believers to use dialogue in resolving ideological conflicts between them and other religious groups. It says;

O people of the book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah. That we associate no partners with him; that we erect not from among ourselves. Lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back say you. “Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah’s will) (Q3:64).

The Qur’an also instructed that dialogue must be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and through ways that are best and most gracious (Q16:125). Allah says:

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)”. (Q29:46).

Commenting on the verse Ali postulates that mere disputations are futile. In order to achieve our purpose as true standard-bearers for Allah, we shall have to find true common grounds of belief, as stated in the later part of this verse, and also to show by our urbanity, kindness, sincerely, truth and genuine anxiety, for the good of others, that we are not cranks or merely seeking selfish or questionable aims. If this principle is adopted between and among every group, their peaceful co-existence is guaranteed.

Causes of Conflict and Islamic Perspective

Islam is not mere creed, but a comprehensive way of life. It is concerned with the moral, intellectual, psychological and physical development of man. It does not encourage violence or conflict to humanity, but rather enjoins Muslim to maintain peace and emphasise on sanity of life (Abdul-Rahman, 2004). It forbids all soul destroying task and had taken all necessary measures to protect it. However, society must accept violence as an essential part of human nature, essentially not because it is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. In a situation where conflict occurred, this has to be managed and subsequently resolved through Islamic injunctions that govern the Muslim Ummah (Q2:86).

For better clarification, Islamic ideas of conflict and its resolutions focus on the following issues;

- i. Unauthenticated information – this is purposely for those that spread rumour that has no basis and never make investigative research to discover the genuineness of it. Allah says in the glorious Qur'an:

O you believers, if an unrighteous person comes to you with information (Q49:5).

- ii. Misunderstood information/interpretation: this aspect of information/interpretation from religious sources like Qur'an and Hadith can create or lead to destructive conflict among the believers. Some Muslims would count other Muslims as unbelievers because they do not follow the Qur'an injunctions.

This is affirmed by the Glorious Qur'an that:

Whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed are unbelievers (Q5:44)

- iii. Selfish information to maintain status – today injustice and selfishness debar some people from ensuring social justice and equality. They want to maintain status-quo and rejected the teaching of Islam. This is because they have accustomed to certain norms and practices they got from the fathers as beneficiaries. Allah reveals in His book:

And when it said to them follow what Allah has revealed, they said, rather we shall follow the way of our father (Q2:170).

Islamic leadership has serious impact on conflict resolution. A leader must at all try maintaining justice as it affords the installation of a legitimate and humane government and facilitate sustainable development. He should keep to consultation because it is one of the traits of Islamic leadership in the society. It is among his responsibility to maintain equal rights, liberties, public duties etc without discrimination. All these will help social relations among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Islamic Teaching Towards Social Development Inhuman Society

Politically, religion has challenged members of the society to employ values of leadership like justice, love righteousness and so on in directing the affairs of the state. It has also fought policies evolved in governments of the day which do not favour the good of the citizenry. In the economic parlance, religion has contributed a lot in improving the material wellbeing of people through empowerment programmes, employment and so on. The social sphere has religion foster the virtue of integration by teaching humankind about their universal brotherhood. Spiritually, religion has contributed a lot of feeding the spiritual dimensions of the human person since humans are both material and spiritual. It is the spiritual function that has given development that emerges from the religion a holistic status. Ecologically, religion has emphasized on the need to protect the environment to sustain life in general. This is the connection that is always made with the command given to humankind by their creator to protect and presser the earth and all in it. There are many other ways religion has contributed to development.

From the above dimensions that religion engenders development, it could be said with Udo among others things that “religion serves as an agent of social values and change”. Looking at our society in general, it is easy to see that it exhibits multifarious dehumanizing and degrading forces which militate against the realization of unquestionable human values. The social atmosphere of our society poses a serious obstacle to justice, unity and development. It is deeply poisoned and violently charged with social discrimination, nepotism, tribalism, killing and host of other vices. Religion as an agent of human values has the duty of proclaiming dignity of human right, peaceful co-existence, unity and mutual trust and understanding. All of the above roles play out the functions of religion which Glynn has identified as an instrument of social stability and change, unity, divine justice, hope for the downtrodden

and a basis for human conduct. Religion can only play above roles very when it is positively employed. Here lies the connection between religion and sustainable development. Where religion is unable to yield the above benefits, it becomes a bane to development. In an atmosphere of religions plurality, there is need for peaceful co-existence of the existing religions to ensure that efforts at development are sustained. It seems one of the best ways of ensuring peaceful co-existence in an atmosphere of many religions is a cooperation that emphasizes common values among the religions.

Conclusion

Conflict is inevitable in human interaction. It is the out of action and reaction in human relationship. Conflict therefore is a normal process of interaction, particularly in complex society in which resources are usually scarce, injustice prevailed and ideas are diverse. However, Islam yield a set of peace keeping values that, if consistently applied, can transcend and govern all types and levels of conflicts, values such as justice (*adl*) beneficence (*ihsan*) and wisdom (*hikmah*) which constitute core principles in peace building strategies and framework. Meanwhile, Islam provides a strong base for solid peace keeping in the society and permit conflict resolution among others.

Human variety and diversity is viewed as part of the blessing and bounty of Allah. People are urged to go beyond mere coexistence and to actively seek mutual understanding and relationships of cooperation with one another. The prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught that all people are considered part of the family of Allah and that Allah loves the most those who are most useful to His family members, friends, neighbours and nation.

Recommendations

The foregoing are some Qur'anic principles for peaceful co-existence among mankind on the earth. They are perfect principles that need sincere and diligent implementation to bring about sustainable harmony and cordial relationship among people across religious cultural, national and international divides;

- i. Peace and dialogue are enshrined in Islam should form part of school syllabus to be taught at all levels of education to Muslim children by competent Islamic scholars.

- ii. All religious bodies and especially national umbrella bodies should train their officials on methods of religious and inter-faith dialogue
- iii. Inter-faith dialogue and peace mission committee should be formed within religious bodies for resolutions of intra-faith disputes and inter-religious and cultural conflicts
- iv. Periodic seminar sessions and conferences should be organized on peaceful co-existence and the resolutions and communiqués should be spread widely and implemented with sincerity and due diligence.
- v. Government should establish an inter-faith committee under a ministry or directorate of religious affairs with an all-inclusive membership of competent representative of religious bodies and empower them with relevant laws to implement resolutions of peaceful co-existence in the society.

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