

## Prophet Muhammad and his Treatment of Non-Muslims

- Sartaj Ahmad Sofi

### Abstract

*Islam enunciates a concept of faith that includes a sense of social obligation towards the well-being of all members of one's community, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. The Quran obligated the followers as; "worship God and associate nothing with Him, and treat with excellence your parents, and relatives, orphans, the needy, the neighbor, the further neighbour, the companion at your side, the traveller, and the slaves". The Prophet said, "Whosoever believes in God and the Last day must treat his neighbour with excellence". After the 9/11 onwards, it became quite essential for Muslim scholarship to exonerate how Islam deals with non-Muslims living at par with Muslims in the global world. Does Islam create a barrier between Muslims and the followers of other religions, what is the status of non-Muslims, and how Prophet of Islam used to deal with non-Muslims during his lifetime? These are questions of immense significance. The present study takes a look at how Islam deals with non-Muslims, especially depicted in the Sirah of Prophet Muhammad.*

**Key Words:** Islam, Humanity, Non-Muslims, Obligation, Sirah

### Introduction

Throughout the history, religion has brought out the worst and the best in humanity. As a simple illustration, people's differing views on Christianity drenched Europe in blood with religious wars for over 100 years after the Protestant Reformation. However, it was also a deep belief in Christianity that motivated William Wilberforce to spend his life fighting the slave trade, and which inspired the great Victorian social reformers in Britain.

Today religions are badly misunderstood, with religious belief at times being regarded as almost a mental aberration. Of all the religions, the most misunderstood today is Islam. Many people look at newspapers and television and conclude that Islam is inseparably associated with terrorism and mass murder and consider others only subjects under Muslims. Besides many Muslim countries, people living in different western countries, which do not have a conceptual clarity regarding Islam, are wrongly relating it with Islam. But the most disturbing issue within community is that the terrorists declare their evil goals to be part and parcel of the Islamic concept of *Jihad*. Furthermore they speak of enforcing the Islamic *shariah* according to their extremist and terrorist ideology.

The present study is meant to exhibit an idea regarding the status of non-Muslims living in Muslim countries. It will demonstrate Islamic approach to non-Muslims by examining the *sirah* of Prophet Muhammad. It will help us to understand Prophetic treatment with non-Muslims that will lead us to create conducive atmosphere where Muslims and non-Muslims can live together peacefully.

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## Islam and Non-Muslims

At the very outset, it is to be understood clearly that the basic concept of Islam in regard to the human rights is based upon the dignity and respect for humankind and the equality of humanity. Both are described in detail in Quran and Hadith. Here is the brief description of both of them in light of Quran

### Unity of Mankind

Islam came to demolish the very edifice of discrimination based on ethno-linguistic, geographical and socio-religious basis. Allah has bestowed the highest honour to humankind among his creation without any discrimination. Quranic description of humanity emanates from the single entity, i-e all are the children of Adam and Eve. The Islamic notion about the creation of humanity is *Banu Adam* that consist all humans, irrespective of their ethno-linguistic and socio-religious affiliation. Besides this, the words like “*Insaan*” and “*Naas*” are significantly used in Islamic Scriptures to denote humanity.

The word “*Banu Adam*” (Children of Adam) is mentioned in the Quran seven times: *Insaan* (Human being) in the singular form 65 times: “*Ins*”, “*Bashr*” (Humankind) in 54 times, and “*Nass*” (human beings) in the plural form 239 times and directly addressed 19 times. It is obvious, then, that the Quran is concerned with humankind in its totality. Following are some verses of Quran that depicts the words like *Banu Adam* and *Naas*.

*O Children of Adam! We have brought down to you clothing so as to cover what may not be nice to be exposed of your bodies, and to be an adornment for you as well; but the raiment of God-consciousness and righteousness is the best.*<sup>1</sup>

O Children of Adam! Care about your good looking at every place of worship; and eat and drink [freely] but do not waste. Say: who is these to forbid the beauty which God has brought forth for His creatures and the good things from among the means of sustenance [that He has provided for them]. Say: My Lord has forbidden only shameful deeds whether committed openly or secretly, and evil-doing, and illegitimate violation of others’ rights, and associating with God others with no authority given to them by God, and saying about God what you not know. For every people a term has been set [in this world life], and [the end of] their term approaches, they can either delay it by a single moment, no can they hasten it. O Children of Adam! Whenever there come to you conveyors of My messages from amongst you who present my messages to you, those who are conscious of Me and live righteously no fear shall be on them, nor shall they grieve.<sup>2</sup>

And [be aware] when you Lord has brought forth from the children of Adam - from their loins - their offspring, and made them witnesses of their ownelves [asking them]: ‘Am I not you Lord [who has created you and sustained you and is wholly

caring about you]? They say, ‘Yea; verily, we do bear witness’. [This has been done] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: ‘Of this we were unaware’<sup>3</sup>

O mankind, what has deceived you concerning your lord, the Generous, who created you, proportioned you, and balanced you? In whatever form He willed has He assembled you.<sup>4</sup>

“Say, “I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, The sovereign of mankind. The God of mankind”<sup>5</sup>

Besides these, there are other verses that depict the very concept of equality of humankind purely on humanitarian grounds. Following are some of them;

O people! Fear your lord who created you from a single soul and made it mate from within it, and from that pair spread many men and women and fear Allah in whose name you ask for (your rights) and pay attention to the ties of relationship. Undoubtedly Allah is watching you all time.<sup>6</sup>

O people! We created you from one man and one woman and made you branches and tribes that you may recognise one another. Undoubtedly, the most respected among you in the sight of Allah is he who is more pious; verily, Allah is knowing, Aware.<sup>7</sup>

### **Dignity of Mankind**

Islam is the faith that upholds the honour of mankind. The *Din* (Islam) which gives the teachings of treating everyone with respect has no such principle that is contrary to the honour of mankind. Al-Quran describes the dignity and respect for humankind in the below mentioned verses;

And no doubt, We honoured the children of Adam and got them ride in the land and sea and provide them with clean things and preferred them over many of Our creations.<sup>8</sup>

“Undoubtedly, We have made man in the fairest stature”.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear from the above mentioned verses of Quran that Allah has endowed on human beings the status of being superior to many of His creations. Quran has described the position enjoyed by the human beings in a great detail that at the time of creation of Adam, Allah enjoined upon the angels to bow before Adam. The Quran portrays the image of angel’s prostration to Adam in the following manner;

And recall, when We ordered the angels to prostrate before Adam, then all prostrated save Iblees. He refused and boasted and became disbeliever.<sup>10</sup>

Like all the segments of society, in a Muslim state, non-Muslim citizens have been declared to be deserving of all those rights that can be imagined in an ideal society. In *Bada‘al-Sana’i*, Al-Kasani regarded the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims as equal: “Non-Muslim

citizens enjoy the same rights that are enjoyed by us (Muslims), and they have the same responsibilities as we do.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Prophet Muhammad and His treatment with Non-Muslims**

Prophet Muhammad maintained human dignity and raised his status, as human beings, whether Muslims or not, are the offspring of Adam. Prophet Muhammad said in the farewell Pilgrimage as;

O people! Undoubtedly your lord is one—the Absolute and undoubtedly your ancestors are same, neither is Arabian superior to non-Arabian and non-Arabian superior to Arabian, nor is red superior to black and black superior to red but by virtuous deeds.<sup>12</sup>

Muhammad was consistent in showing this clearly in his behaviour and dealing with non-Muslims. Prophet used to visit non-Muslims who were sick. Hence visited Abu Talib in his sickness, he also visited a sick Jewish boy.<sup>13</sup> He used to accept the gifts and invitations of non-Muslims. Besides, He also used to prompt their companions about the non-Muslims relatives and neighbours as;

Asma’, the Daughter of Abu Bakr narrated: “my mother came to me during the period of Allah’s messenger: ‘she desires (a gift from me); shall I kinship with her?’ He said: ‘Yes, keep good relations with your (polytheist) mother’.”<sup>14</sup>

He observed people’s rights in terms of good neighbourliness, as he said: “The best of the companions with Allah is the one who is the best to his companion, and the best of neighbours with him is the one who is best to his neighbour.”<sup>15</sup> The tradition included every neighbour even if he was a non-Muslim. Jabir Bin Abdullah related:

“A funeral procession passed in front of us and the Prophet stood up and we too stood up”. We said, “O Messenger of Allah, this is the funeral procession of a Jew!” He said, ‘if you catch sight of the bier (The funeral procession), you must stand up.’”<sup>16</sup>

For the welfare of the people, irrespective of their ethno-linguistic, geo-political and socio-religious discriminations, Prophet Muhammad during his younger days, at the age of fifteen, indulged himself in different programmes that were meant for human well-being. For example, in month of *DhulQa’idah*, when a need was felt regarding the framing of a confederacy at Makkah for suppressing violence and injustice, and protecting the rights of weak and poor, Prophet along with the representatives of different tribes, participated in it very ardently. He, after his proclamation of prophethood used to comment on it with very positive words: “I witness a confederacy in the house of ‘Abdullah bin Jud’an. It was more appealing to me than herds of cattle. Even now in the period of Islam, I would respond positively to attending such a meeting if I were invited”.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the kindness of Prophet towards non-Muslims and the enemies as well, the *Sirah* of Prophet demonstrates enormous examples that demonstrates the fact. He, in the whole of his life, wished good for the humanity. As per the tradition, narrated by Abu Hurayrah: “it

was submitted to the messenger of Allah: “invoke a curse upon the polytheist!” He said, ‘I was not sent as a curser; I have been sent only as mercy’.<sup>18</sup> His mercy encompassed in it the whole ummah irrespective of their ethno-linguistic and socio-religious affiliations but also the whole universe as well. The fact is evident from the below mentioned event of his life during Makkah period.

In the earlier period of his mission, the Prophet travelled to the city of Taif, a city located in the mountains nearby Makkah, in order to invite them to accept Islam. The leaders of Taif, however, were rude and discourteous in their treatment of the Prophet. Not being content with their insolent attitude towards him the riff-raff followed the Prophet shouting at and abusing him, and throwing stones at him until he was compelled to take refuge in an orchard. Thus the Prophet had to endure even obstacles in Taif, than he had had to face in Makkah. These ruffian, stationed either side of the path, threw stones at him until his feet were injured and smeared with blood. These oppressions grievously dejected the Prophet and plunged him into a state of depression. Then the lord sent an angel of mountains, seeking the permission of the Prophet to join together the two hills and crush the city of Taif, between which it was located. Out of his great tolerance and mercy, the messenger of God replied, “No! For, I hope that God willbring forth from their loins people who will worship God alone, associating nothing with Him”.<sup>19</sup>

Further, the Prophet encouraged the Muslims to be kind and gentle in all matters. Kindness is one of the best ways to be a good example of a devout Muslim and to open people’s hearts towards Islam. In contrast, unwarranted harshness makes matters ugly and pushes people away from Islam ,Aisha reported: the messenger of Allah said: “verily, kindness is not found in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disgraces it”.<sup>20</sup>

Based upon all this, modern scholars encourage Muslims to be kind to non-Muslims during their festivals and to express good wishes for them on the condition that we do not support any specific religious ritual or doctrine that is idolatrous.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, we can rightly say that Islam came to abolish all types of discrimination and to develop humankind with dignity and honour irrespective of their differences. Prophet of Islam demonstrated this in every moment of his life. He used to warn his companions about the treatment of their fellow beings even if they were not Muslims. It will not be an exaggeration to call Muhammad—the champion of humanity on the earth.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Quran, 7: 27

<sup>2</sup> Al-Quran, 7: 31-35

<sup>3</sup> Al-Quran, 7: 172

<sup>4</sup> Al-Quran, 82: 6-8

<sup>5</sup> Al- Quran, 114: 1-3

<sup>6</sup> Al-Quran, 4: 1

<sup>7</sup> Al-Quran, 49: 13

<sup>8</sup> Al-Quran, 17: 70

<sup>9</sup> Al-Quran, 95: 4

<sup>10</sup> Al-Quran, 2: 34

<sup>11</sup> Al-Kasani, 'Ala' al-Din, *Bada' al-Sana'i fi- 'Ilm al-Tafsir*, Beirut, Lebanon: *Dar al-Kutub al- 'Arabi*, 1982, 7:111.

<sup>12</sup> Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal, H.No. 23536

<sup>13</sup> See Bukhari, H.No. 1356

<sup>14</sup> Bukhari, *the book of gifts and their Excellence*, Chapter: "Gifts to Idolaters", 2477 and in *the book of Annual Security Tax for Non-Muslims*, Chapter: "the sin committed by someone who promises and then betrays", 3012; Muslim, *the book of the Alms-due*, Chapter: "the excellence of spending on and giving Alms to relatives, to spouse, to children and parents even if they are polytheists", 1003.

<sup>15</sup> See *Tirmidhi*, H. No. 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Bukhari, *the book of the funeral ceremonies*, Chapter: "someone standing up for a Jew funeral procession" 1249; Muslim, *the book of funeral ceremonies*, Chapter: "someone standing up for a funeral procession", 960; Al-Nasai'I, *the book of funeral ceremonies*, Chapter: "someone standing up for the funeral procession of the people who associated partners with Allah", 19912.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Hisham, Abu Muhammad Abdul Malik, *As-Seerah An-Nabawiyah*, Mustafa Al-Babi, Al-Halabi and Sons Press and Bookshop, Egypt, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1995, 1/113. See Also, Mubarkpori, Safiur-Rahman, *The Sealed Nector*, Darussalam, 2001, pp. 124-5.

<sup>18</sup> Muslim, *the Book of Piety, Filial Duty and Good Manners*, Chapter: "the prohibition of invoking curses on creatures and other things", 2599.

<sup>19</sup> The event exists almost all the works written on Sirah off Prophet Muhammad □ both by Muslims and Non-Muslims. Further, it is also recorded by a number of Traditionalists in their respective works like Imam Muslim in his *Sahih*.

<sup>20</sup> *Muslim Sharrif*, H. No. 2594.