



Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Minorities of Pakistan: An Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of this study is to discuss the significance of the interfaith dialogue among the religious minorities of the Pakistan. This study also finds out the need and struggle to promote the interfaith dialogue between the minorities of Pakistan. Pakistan is a Muslim majority state and home to the followers of different religious beliefs, where religious beliefs considered as integral part of the personality. Interfaith dialogue between different religious minorities of Pakistan is extremely important because there will be no peace in the society without dialogue in different religions, Pakistan faces various challenges while promoting interreligious dialogue to advance peace, tolerance and non-violence among the different religious groups. Interfaith dialogue is important to avoid religious communalism and religious extremism. The motivation behind interfaith exchange is to develop tolerance, acceptance and respect in regard of different religious frameworks and foundations. Interfaith dialogue allows people of different religions to interact and discuss about their religions, advance interreligious understanding and makes interreligious relations, clarify the questions that avoid frictions among religious communities. Interfaith dialogue improves our affectability to the sentiments of all declaring religious individuals in their association with God. This research paper discusses important issues regarding inter religious dialogues and improve the understanding between the minorities and the various religious groups of Pakistan. This paper also finds the importance and contribution of interfaith dialogue towards the communal harmony and the welfare of the

humanity.

Introduction

Freedom about religion is a basic and fundamental human right. Beliefs of everyone are sacred. Anyhow, we will not compel anyone to accept Islam. It is the fundamental right of individual that his/her faith, culture, and religious beliefs should be held in regarded and respected.¹ However, at the time of religious intolerance and misunderstanding between different religions there is still growing numbers of individuals who believe that interfaith dialogues are the best way to establish peace and promote harmony. Interfaith dialogue is the way to introduce religious and intercultural understanding and tolerance. In view of that, religious leader from various beliefs have met up to promote their thoughts of harmony and peace to guarantee that future generations get the faith within humanity.²

Islam recognizes other religions and demand followers of Islam to respect other religions.³ The key role of interfaith dialogue is to get rid of misconceptions and accept dissimilarities. The goal is to create an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence and harmonious relations between them. Interfaith dialogue is about creating prospects to bring people together; people with different religions, cultures, ideas and beliefs at one place or at same track. The objective of interfaith dialogue is to fight against harmful conditioning and fanaticism and to pave a way for communication, hearing and respecting. Interfaith dialogue signifies to hold on to one's religion and at the same time recognize another person's religion. It requires integrity and regard from its participants so that every participant may present their religion truthfully.⁴

Concept of Interfaith Dialogue

The term interfaith dialogue or interreligious dialogue states constructive relation among individuals of different beliefs and communities. The World's Parliament of Religions 1893 draws its main concept.⁵ It is very hard to draw out the objective of modern interfaith program, which have numerous dissimilar groups and persons and certain similar targets. Most representatives of different religions and faiths give respect to the other's opinion, moreover to advocate their own. They have the ability to tolerate and defend the rights of others and welcoming the benefits of world other

religions. People elaborate interfaith dialogue are hardly changed their beliefs.⁶

Interfaith dialogue has intermittently executed in multi-religious localities such as India, Pakistan and North American cities; the project on a worldwide level is fresh. Interfaith dialogue has many kinds, but is fundamentally a sensible step to make a bridge of thoughtful, respective, harmonious and friendly relations amongst religious communities.

Religious Tolerance and the Basic Sources of Islam

Among the paramount features of the Human Rights subject is the regard and patience that the public should display towards the faiths and beliefs of other individuals, which involves the subject of liberty of religion. I will briefly elaborate the Islam's view religious tolerance.⁷ Islam, like other religions, believes in prophets and messengers of God. One interesting method of knowing the views of Islam upon the liberty of religion is to look at the actions and sayings of prophets. Did they force people to accept their teachings? Did Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon him) spread the religion by sword? Not at all! The words of the Qur'an are: *"Nothing is on the Messenger but communicating the Message. And Allah knows what you disclose and what you hide."* (5:99)⁸

At one instance, the people came to the Muhammad (pbuh) and said that if God did not want them to worship and follow idols, why the god does not stops them forcefully? The following verse was revealed: *"And the polytheists said, 'had Allah willed, we would not have worshipped anything save Him, neither we nor our fathers' nor we would have forbidden anything apart from Him thus did those before them; then what is on the messengers, but to deliver clearly."* (16:35)⁹

There are two basic sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is order for the followers of the Islam to recourse 1st of all to the Holy Qur'an and if you do not have the answer of your question in Holy Qur'an, then recourse to the Sunnah of Holy Prophet (pbuh). Sunnah is the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an. All the aspects of life have been discussed in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah explains all of these in brief way.

Interfaith Dialogue in Pakistan

Pakistan is an Islamic country that got independence in the name of Islam. There are so many religions and communities in Pakistan. Everyone has the right to follow his religion and beliefs. Islam gives full freedom to followers

of other religions to worship and act according to their religious beliefs. In Pakistan, other religions and communities have religious freedom. The role of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan is to promote more freedom to all religions and make sure that no one should quarrel with each other based on their religious beliefs.¹⁰

Islam promotes peace and tolerance. This is the 21st century and the whole world is going very fast and inventive in information technology and other fields of life but the religious differences are still there. Everyone has believed that his/her religion is true and near to ALLAH and all other religions are fake. Ethics of disagreement should be promoted to tackle this situation.

The main purpose of interfaith dialogue is to provide protection to all religions believers. This is like a conference or meeting of representatives of different religions. It is held to solve problems through table talk. In Pakistan, these interfaith dialogues are held to reduce the problems and war between different religions.

Religious Minorities in Pakistan

Pakistan is a Muslim majority state where other religious minority groups also have equal status as a citizen of Pakistan. “*The Constitution of the Islamic republic of Pakistan 1973*” ensures “*fundamental rights*, equality of status, freedom of expression, economic and political equality, freedom of thought, worship, faith, belief, association, and equality before law and public ethics to its residents.”¹¹

Minorities enjoy equal rights under the Constitution of Pakistan. They have opportunity to worship and pursue their way of life.¹² Minorities are free to execute their religious obligations and they can develop or maintain their institutes.¹³ They have freedom to teach their religion within their religious institutes. The Constitution of Pakistan 1973 protects the basic and essential rights of all citizens of Pakistan and there is no discrimination on the ground of religion, caste, and creed.¹⁴ The Constitution also guarantees to safeguard the script dialect, language, and cultures of everybody, regardless of their religion and statement of faith. The Constitution and Islam are not hindrances in the social freedom of minorities.

Regarding the matter of minorities, Pakistan is inspected very thoroughly. There were many instances when minorities were targeted, and incidents like this defame the state. Pakistan is tagged as a “suffocated land” for minorities. However, these attacks cannot be termed as discrimination

done by state. The Constitution of Pakistan bestow freedom of religion and rights to minorities. The minorities are free to practice their religion and they can take part in all activities of country. Non-discrimination and the principle of equity are the foundations of the basic human rights. Rights can be defined as “interests who can be protected and recognized by law.”¹⁵

Issues Regarding Interfaith Dialogues in Pakistan

In Pakistan, people of various faiths and political affiliations know that interreligious dialogue, common discourse, good social relations and disposal of partialities can pave way to progress and prosperity in Pakistan. Contrarily, the dismal truth of this issue is that various religious, ethnic and political groups are yet disoriented and do not understand the procedure, essence and goals of the argument. Some extremist organizations lay out false propaganda about minorities that they are in bed with some powers, which can harm our nation's security. These groups are intellectually uneducated and lack understanding. Contrarily, the religious minorities that resides in Pakistan have additionally demonstrated a reckless perspective. They are against the blasphemy laws rather than openly criticizing blasphemy. No religion allows blasphemy. Another dismal reality in this regard is that the individuals who are accused for disrespect flee from the country rather than defending themselves. In recent circumstances, different religious and political groups create misunderstanding between the public, which badly affected the good relations of various people of different religions. It is extremely necessary to promote positive attitude towards the interfaith dialogue for the peace building in this recent religious, political and social prospective of Pakistan. There are some issues regarding interfaith dialogue in Pakistan;

a. Lack of interest

The main challenge is that there is no interest. If the argument is to be succeeded, the members of the argument must be on the same page and are clear about what they want to achieve. This can help a person which topic he wants to talk about. For example, if the topic is philosophical issues, graphologists, historians, linguist and scholars of different fields will be included. Contrarily, if the topic is about values and experiences, atheist and agnostics will be included. Scholastics who need to discuss beliefs would most likely avoid these exchanges. In this way, it is important to hold various kinds of discussions, each equipped to a different audience.

b. Inadequate Understanding of Interfaith Dialogue

Another biggest issue regarding the interfaith tussle in Pakistan is poor acknowledgement of argument between different religions and political instability. Huge numbers of the current interfaith activities in the nation spin around investment of religious leaders, talking about complex philosophical issues which may not generally be reasonable or applicable to by far most of youthful Pakistanis – who make up the greater part of Pakistan's populace. The inclusion of religious leaders in an interfaith course or meeting is significant and leaves a constructive message with the members, yet in the event that the objective is to reinforce the interfaith development in Pakistan and make a genuine impact for various faith communities, the contribution of youngsters in this battle holds a critical position. They should be prepared and trained in interfaith dialogue, and ought to be well furnished with the great ideas to promote interfaith dialogue harmony in Pakistan.

c. Intolerance

The information regarding different faiths of Pakistan based on poor study of religion's literature give rise to uncertainty and hesitancy. The new learner and devotee of any religion start to think that people from other religions are lesser than them. The past of their religious empires and dominancy, corrupt their thinking. These kinds of thoughts give rise to hate between different religions. The solution to this is education programs that will teach tolerance and promote it.

d. Misconceptions

Another issue is individual sense they have to “water down” or bargain their religious personality to fit in dialogue. It happens when members go over an unsolvable disagreement. In a perfect world, interfaith exchange is expected to assist every member in understanding their own religion and find grounds wherein their religion is irreplaceable and distinctive. The followers of different religions should accept the differences and understand the beliefs of other religions while following their own religion. While trying to sign a treaty with infidels, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) experienced somewhat similar situation. The infidels proposed that they will worship his god for one year and then Muhammad has to follow their gods for the next year. The following verse was revealed in Qur'an: *“For you, your religion. And for me my religion.”*¹⁶

e. The Un-Fair Use of Religion

The positive usage of religion shows its real face and worth and the negative usage leads to bad outcomes. The protest against the process of constitution formation is usually from politicians or individuals in Pakistan. The minorities have the right to participate in the national and provincial assemblies. The blasphemy laws are seen to get used by different political and social groups. Islam or Pakistan will not get anything by blaming a non-Muslim of blasphemy. One of the main hurdles in interfaith dialogue is absence of non-Muslims in the constitution making process.

f. Role of Political Parties

The promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contribute to the political and social stability of States in which they live.¹⁷

The triumph of inter-faith dialogue falls directly upon the political layout of a state. World acknowledges that it is as a matter of first importance obligation of the country to defend essential human privileges of the considerable number of fragments of the public. However, regrettably, the country organizations of Pakistan are not practical in this regard. In Pakistan, all of the political parties have human rights clauses in their political agenda. However, they have not done anything practically to support this agenda. The leaders of political parties in Pakistan, without a doubt, can shoulder a department to limit and inspect the inclinations of fanaticism, torment and imbalance in public. They can set up a superior and solid association with the regular narrative of country through their political individuals.

Conclusion

The importance of interfaith dialogue shows the right indicator in order to show, how necessary interfaith dialogue is in all over the world especially among the multicultural society. In this manner, the administration, the organizations, the public and even the individual should think positively with respect to the execution of an interfaith dialogue at their own place towards a peaceful and harmonious society and State.

The only way this dialogue can triumph is that if nation and public have common knowledge. The truth is that people do not know the worth of it and it confuses many. They think it means merging two separate religions

into one. Because of this, they oppose this idea and go against it. These kind of conflicts usually happens in India and Pakistan. It is high time to spread knowledge regarding this matter in public. This dialogue can bring people closer to each other and remove divisions in society. Research shows that showing love and affection to different community and learning about it helps in understanding that group. The same goes for inter-faith dialogue.

Recommendations

Islamic Republic of Pakistan provides all basic rights to minorities. There are so many minorities lived in Pakistan like Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhist, Christians, Parsis and Quadianis. All the minorities have the freedom to perform religious activities according to their religions to advance a culture of harmony and peacefulness dependent on tolerance, education and dialogue. We have to initially persuade ourselves and after that the others. The equality for all citizens of Pakistan, regardless of religion, is their basic right. We have to teach ourselves. We have to coordinate with others, in accepting that we are Pakistanis. These are certain recommendations to promote interfaith dialogue in Pakistan.

- 1) Interfaith dialogue must ensure that all parties have equal rights and equal responsibilities.
- 2) Government should take measures to create awareness and improve collective common sense in the society regarding interfaith dialogue harmony.
- 3) There many laws for the protection of minorities in Pakistan but there is also need for their practical use for safeguarding the rights of minorities.
- 4) Muslim Ulema and political parties should create an environment of tolerance to eliminate of sense of insecurity and injustice among the minorities of Pakistan.
- 5) The government of Pakistan must make sure that they teach religious tolerance in their curriculum.

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Notes and References

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⁹ Surah An-Nahl [16 :35].

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¹¹ “*The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan*,” Preamble.

¹² *The Constitution of Islamic republic of Pakistan*, Article 20 (a).

¹³ Ibid., Article 20 (b).

¹⁴ Ibid., Article 25.

¹⁵ L.B. Curzon, *Jurisprudence*, (London: Cavendish Publishing, 2002) 235.

¹⁶ Surat Al-Kafirun [109:6].

¹⁷ “*Preamble of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*,” 18 December 1992.

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