

Protection and Respect for the Places of Worship in Islam

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ABSTRACT

In the present civilized and advanced world, religion is taken as the torch-bearer of peace, security and love. That is why society highly respects religion and also allows freedom of constructing places of worship and the practice of religion. During a visit to countries where religion is respected, tourists' are not only drawn to places of entertainment, but also to the churches, mosques, and minarets. Their architecture, structure and decoration are an example of human art and skill. This article hypothesizes that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and enjoins upon its followers to maintain cordial ties with the believers of other religions. Islam doesn't only respect the places of worship of other religions, but allows their construction and expansion. The above hypothesis will be proved from the verses of the Holy Quran, the sayings of the Holy Prophet and instances from the lives of the Companions of the Holy Prophet. The opinions of all the Muslim Schools of Thought will also be discussed. The respect for the places of worship of other religions will be illustrated from the history of the Muslims. Findings and recommendations will be discussed.

Keywords: Religious Fraternity, Tolerance, Harmony, Protection, Respect, Worship.

Introduction

Islam does not believe only in the wisdom and intellect of human beings but it also regards man as the most respectable creature on earth. Humans possessing understanding and logic are highly honored in Islam. As far as basic human rights are concerned, there is no difference between the Muslims and non-Muslims, the prophet of Islam made it an exemplary obsession for all times to come by simply practicing it in letter and spirit. Living respectfully and creating an overall atmosphere of respect is one of the fundamentals of Islam. Hence in every age, it can be seen in the Muslim cultures that the standards of mutual respect were upheld; the charter of Medina, the caliphate (Khilafate Rashdah) age, and post caliphate age, Syria, Baghdad, Egypt, Spain,

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Turkey and India are a strong example of such practice. In fact, the non-Muslims in the Muslim societies enjoyed the same rights as those of the Muslims. The life, property and honor of the non-Muslims were not only safe but they had the legal right to protect their assets. Non-Muslims were not forced to accept Islam, rather they enjoyed rights to worship the way they like and to build and establish their places of worship. They practically had all the same advantages as those of the Muslims.

The right of belief and worship were the top most rights among all others that Islam has given to non-Muslims. All people are free to follow their specific beliefs and religions; nobody is forced to adopt any other religion neither can one be forced to embrace Islam. The Quran clearly mentions that for the Muslims is their religion and for the Non-Muslims is their religion. No coercion is to be applied on any individual to believe in what he does not. Allah says in the Quran: *“Let there be no compulsion in religion, truth stands out clear from error.”* (Al Quran 2/256)

Another verse of the Quran says: And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers? (Al Quran 10/99)

In order to create a real and long lasting harmony among the peoples of the world belonging to different religions it is a must to truly respect and care for all the religious symbols of different sects and religions. Whenever people lack this dogma of mutual respect, peace and social serenity are put at stake. During the pre-Islamic period, people belonging to different religions were marked with prejudice and sectarianism. Religious opposition was at its peak; all other religions were totally considered incorrect and erroneous. The places of worship belonging to other religions were not respected; rather there are obvious instances of the demolition of such places. Even in recent times, it has been found that the victorious nations converted such holy places into stables. In contrast, Islam never allows such desecration of the holy places regardless of the religion the place of worship is associated with. Allah says: *“To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; and verily, God is powerful for their aid. (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right (For no cause) except that they say. “Our Lord Is God” Did not God check one set of people by means of another, There would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, Synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in*

abundant measure. God will certainly aid those who Aid His (cause); for verily God is full of strength. Exalted in might, (Able to enforce his will)". (Al Quran 22/39-40)

The way the Quran has advised the Muslims for religious fraternity, it is clear that not only the places of the non-Muslims are supposed to be safe but it has even been advised not to verbally abuse any gods of the non-Muslims.

Allah says: *"Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides God, lest they out of spite revile God in their ignorance. Thus have we made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord, and we shall then tell them the truth of all that they did."* (Al Quran 6/108)

The famous interpreter Imam Muhammad bin Ahmed Alqurtubi explains this verse as:

Translation: "When the non-believers get power and you get apprehensive that they will abuse or disrespect Allah or His Prophet, even in that situation it is not fair for the Muslims to use swear words for the religion, gods or other religious symbols of the non-believers; or any such act that causes disrespect to their religions. Because such an act will instigate them to commit sins. The commandment of this verse will ever be valid for the Muslims." (Qurtubi: 1967 ۶- 7/61)

- **The Attitude of the Prophet:**

These Quranic principles are part of Islamic law and the prophet implemented them. Hence, when the prophet entered Medina, he established a civil government and explained all the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims categorically. The non-Muslims were not only allowed religious freedom but they were also allowed to keep their places of worship intact.

- i) **A Few Instances:**

Before the establishment of the Islamic state at Medina, there was a BaitulMadaris of Jews (a combined place of worship and schooling) which was kept safe and intact by the prophet and the Jews had complete freedom in this BaitulMadaris (Hameedullah 2010 ۶- Dr:240).

The Charter of Medina, which being an exemplary manifestation of the vision and ideal thoughtfulness of the prophet, is an excellent illustration of the essential elements of fraternity, peace and security and justice. This is a historical treaty through which the prophet was able to establish a code of

conduct in which every group/participant had full freedom of religion and beliefs and they also had equal rights to get justice for themselves. (Ibn-i-Hisham: 1995 ھ- 2/501-504)

The religious fraternity of the prophet can also be seen from an incident when a Christian delegate from Najran came to Medina. The prophet not only welcomed and accommodated them into the mosque but also served them food and also allowed them to worship according to their own religion in Masjid Nabvi (Ibid: 1995 ھ- 2/574 Al-Jozia: 1982 ھ- 3/637). A treaty was made with the Najran delegate, which is a model of the religious alliance; it reads:

“Najran and life of the people in its surroundings, their religion, their lands, their property, their caravans, their messengers are under the safety/guarantee of the prophet of Allah. No change will be caused to their present condition neither their rights will be restrained, no Rabi will be removed from his position, everything in their possession will remain with them, justice will be made in their demand for rights. Neither they will be asked for military service nor they will be allowed to act as cruel neither they will be made to undergo any injustice or cruelty.” (Ibn-i-Hisham: 1995 ھ- 2/574 Ibn-i-Kaseer: 1984 ھ- 1/368)

ii) *The Conduct of Khulfa-e-Rashdeen (The Caliphs):*

Following the commandments of the holy prophet, the caliphs of the prophet also provided all religious and other facilities to all the non-Muslims in the Islamic state and honored all their agreements. In the caliphate of Abu Bakar Siddique, after the conquest of Heerah, Khalid bin Waleed wrote in the agreement:

Translation: *“Their churches and seminaries will not be demolished neither they will be stopped from their individual rituals like blowing the horns etc.”* (Bilazuri: 1983 ھ- 244)

Khalid bin Waleed guaranteed the priests of Syria the following:

Their churches and seminaries will, they can blow their horns, except during the time of Muslim prayer, and on Eid days they can bring out their cross. (Yousuf Abu: 1332 ھ-86)

Khalid bin Waleed also guaranteed the protection of the places of worship in the agreement with the people of Damascus.

Translation: *“This is a message from Khalid to the people of Damascus that when he enters their city as a conqueror, he guarantees them the*

safety of their honor, life and property. Their worship places and the walls of their city will not be destroyed, nor their houses will be occupied. If they pay tax (Jizya), they will enjoy goodness from Allah, the prophet and his caliphs.” (Bilazuri: 1983 ھ- 128)

During the caliphate of Hazrat Umar, the conqueror of Syria Abu Ubaida guaranteed the protection of places of worship.

Translation: “*Abu Ubaida assures them that when he enters Syria as a conqueror, their churches and seminaries will be safe.*” (Yousuf: 1332 ھ - 80)

In the treaty with the people of Jerusalem, their religious freedom, places of worship and synagogues are guaranteed by Hazrat Umar: “*In the name of Allah, this is the surety for the people of Jerusalem rendered by AmeerulMomneen Umar. It ensures the safety of their life, honor, cross, synagogues and property, all their population whether they are ill or healthy will be included in this surety. Their synagogues will not be made residential places neither they will be destroyed. All these places will be protected as their property. In the matters pertaining to religion, they will not be pressurized, neither they will be tortured.*” (Tabari: 1987 ھ-2/449)

In the caliphate of Hazrat Umar, a few Muslims usurped a piece of land belonging to a Jew and built a mosque on that piece of land. When Hazrat Umar came to know this, he ordered the mosque structure to be torn down and returned the land to its Jewish owner. (HameedullahDr: 2010 ھ-241).

iii) The Attitude of Later Muslim Rulers About Agreements/Treaties:

The rulers after Khulfa-e-Rashdeen have also shown positive attitude about the treaties with the people of other religions. A famous event of history relates that Waleed bin Abdul Malik Umvi forcibly converted a church ‘Yohna’ into a mosque. When Umar bin Abdul Aziz became the caliph, the Christians complained to him about this dispute, the caliph passed orders to the administrator of the area to find out as to how much part of the mosque was built on the reported church and ordered to return it to the Christians (Bilazuri: 1983 ھ - 131-132).

When examining the historical facts, we come to know that since the very beginning, Islam has duly permitted all the non-Muslims to build, maintain and protect their places of worship. In the first century Hijra, many churches were

built in Egypt, as evident by the Marmerqasi church of Iskandria was built in 39 to 56 year of Hijra. (Al Kharbooti: 1969 ھ- 139) Likewise the first church of Rome was built in Fastaat in the reign of Musillima bin Manjlad during 47 to 68 Hijra. Similarly when Abdul Aziz bin Marwan established the city of Halwan, he allowed the Christians to build churches and also allowed some Rabi to build their seminaries (Al Kharbooti: 1969 ھ- 139). Later on in the reigns of BanuUmmaya and Banu Abbas, especially in the caliphate of Abdul Malik, there are examples of the building of churches at many places which have also been reported by Christian historians (685-705 A.D). (Al Kharbooti: 1969 ھ- 139)

In the city of Alruha (Udesia) a well off Christian named Atanasios got a very delicate and fascinating church building called after Mary. In many other cities of Egypt, a number of churches and synagogues were built. In 711 H, a church belonging to the Yaqoobi sect was built on the orders of caliph Waleed. In the time of Yazeed II (720 AD), Antakia's Yaqoobi Asqaf- Mar Ilyas, along with many Rabi, entered the city with great pomp and show and inaugurated a newly built church there. The following year he inaugurated another church in Sarmadah which was opposed by a rival of their own Christian sect belonging to the beliefs of Chalcedon. (Arnold T.W: 2004 ھ- 88)

In the reigns of different succeeding caliphs, many such churches were built. During the time of Khalid Alqasri, the Governor of Iraq (724 to 738 AD), a church was built. (İbn-i-Khalikkan: 1995 ھ- 2/160)

In 759 AD a church was built at Naseebain with an amount of 56000 Dinar spent by a Nastoori Bishop Kipryan. In the same century, the church of Abu Sarja was built inside the old Roman fort (Arnold T.W: 2004 ھ- 89).

During the reign of Caliph Mehdi Abbasi (775-785 AD), a church was built for the Christian prisoners who had been captured in the Roman wars (Hanavi: 1399 ھ- 2/662). In the reign of Caliph Haroon Rasheed (786-809), two churches were constructed in Baghdad. (Hanavi: 1399 ھ- 2/670) In the same period, churches were built in Basra and Babel in which the coffins of the prophets Danial and Hazqeel were kept (Arnold: 2004 ھ-89). Caliph Mamoon in Egypt ordered to build a church on the mountain of Moazam near Cairo. Under the permission of Mamoon, a very well off Christian named Bakam had many splendid churches built at Bora (Arnold: 2004 ھ- 89).

Thus, wherever the Muslims went as conquerors, they gave full religious freedom to the believers of all different religions and looked after their places of worship with the state expenses. The jurists of Islam made legislation regarding the treaties with the non-Muslims, the main clauses of which are reproduced here briefly:

In the Islamic state where the Muslims are in majority, no reservations will be there to make pacts with the non-Muslims. If their places of worship are damaged, they will be repaired but they will not have the right to construct new such places on their own. (Kasani: 1982 ۶- 7/114) The areas where the Muslims are not in majority or where they do not observe Juma, Eid or AqamateHudood, the non-Muslims there will have the right to construct their new places of worship (Kasani: 1882 ۶- 7/114). Imam Abu Yousuf has narrated Abdullah bin Abbas's opinion in these words:

The minorities will not have rights in the towns established by the Muslims to construct their churches or synagogues or to blow their horns or sell alcohol and pork publicly. However in the towns already established by the non-Muslims but conquered by the Muslims, and where the non-Muslims accept the rule of the Muslims, they will have the rights as written in the agreements and thereby the Muslims will also be bound to observe and follow them (Yousuf: 1332 ۵- 208-209).

These are a few of the rules made by the Muslim jurists since the very early times.

- **Conclusion and Findings**

The freedom of the right of beliefs and worship tops the list among all the rights granted to the non-Muslims by the Muslims. Every individual is allowed to follow their own beliefs and to worship according to that specific belief and faith. Islam has always protected the places of worship of other religions and has respected all the symbols of other religions.

In spite of the strong examples of justice and fraternity with the non-Muslims, some people dare to distort the historical facts and blame Islam for injustice and disparity with the non-Muslims. But the pages and numerous events of history testify the fact that no religion other Islam cultivated the tradition of looking after, safeguarding, and respecting the holy places belonging to other religions. Appreciating the fraternity of the Muslim rulers, as Treton writes: the overall

attitude of the Muslim rulers regarding dealing with the non-Muslims was much better than the rules they were supposed to follow in this regard. The construction of new churches and synagogues is an obvious example of their attitude. The state departments never interfered with the affairs of the Jews and the Christians, rather sometimes these people were seen working on key posts in the Muslim states and they were able to earn decently because of their positions. The Muslims had also started participating in the Christian rituals (Treton: 1970- 158).

• **Recommendations:**

Peace and security can be maintained in the world only when unprejudiced attitude is shown in the matters of religion.

All the countries of the world must collectively think of establishing an international organization that must implement a system based on religious harmony, tolerance, unity, brotherhood and justice and must work for the wellbeing of all of humanity beyond any religious or social discrimination.

The system that the prophet introduced to deal with the people of other religions stands valid for all times; it guaranties peace and security even now.

We must, with our behavior and attitude, try to eradicate the negative impression of Islam created purposefully by international anti-Islam forces. We must try to spread the message of peace and security and religious fraternity of Islam throughout the world.

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