

A Study of Two Distinct Opinions Concerning the Quranic View on Peaceful Co-existence and Violence in a Pluralistic Society

Maria Zehra

Department of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

*Corresponding Authors
zehra.maria.amu@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

We commonly encounter two opposing arguments: one that the peace verses of the Quran have been repealed by the war verses of the Quran, and the other that the peace verses have not been repealed and that the interpretation of Quranic verses of war should be made in light of the context and historical importance of the verses in question. To address the conflicting interpretations of Quranic passages on peace and war, an exhaustive comparative literature study of the two arguments was conducted in order to comprehend the rationale and context for each. A contextual and comparative study of Quranic verses reveals that the Muslim society was more akin to a simple and inclusive civilisation than an intolerant one. When taken in its totality, with the verses' revelation and historical context in mind, it promotes peaceful co-existence among diverse communities. The key conclusions of this study suggest that, while the Quran concedes different faiths, it maintains and upholds its monotheistic system of belief. The Quranic notion of peaceful co-existence does not connect with the conventional concept of secularism, where all faiths are perceived as true. However, it has been contended that the Quranic concept of peaceful co-existence accepts the diversity and existence of various communities



with different faiths living in harmony. From the Quranic standpoint, it is conceivable to build a society in which individuals of different religions may coexist peacefully while retaining their unique religious identities.

Keywords: *Islam, Islamophobia, Peaceful Coexistence, Quran, Religious Violence*

INTRODUCTION

“O mankind, indeed, we have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”

Surah al-Hujurat, 49:13

The Quran discusses peaceful coexistence, embraces Christian and Jewish scriptures, and encourages the concept of diversity via collaboration, respect, and understanding amongst various communities. Through the centuries, however, it has been subjected to anti-pluralist interpretations to advance hegemonic goals (Asani, 2002). Extremists in the past and present have attempted to provide a contrary interpretation by claiming that the verses of peace were abrogated by the verses discussing the war in sura The Repentance (Abd-al Salam Faraj, 1995). While certain Quranic texts appear to be encouraging intolerance, others appear to be encouraging peaceful coexistence.

A thorough examination of the context of these verses and other pertinent Quranic passages reveals that it has always chosen peace over violence (e.g., Quran 8:61-62). The combat verses of the Quran should be interpreted in their contextual setting. Quranic epistemology of mankind indicates that peace is an eternal phenomenon and that the Quran’s peace verses have not been abrogated. These are two distinct interpretations of the Quran verses concerning war and peace. However, are these rationales sufficient to comprehend the Quranic notion of heterogeneity and peaceful co-existence in its entirety? This study aims to conduct comprehensive research in order to critically assess both viewpoints and arrive at some intricacies about the Quranic vision of peaceful co-existence and diversity.

This study is critical in today's society when we are witnessing an upsurge in violence towards the Muslim population worldwide and their stereotyping as terrorists. Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon, but it is becoming more prevalent now than ever. Certain Muslim organisations bear an equal share of the blame for how Islam has been portrayed to the rest of the world. In order to comprehend the notion of peaceful co-existence and violence in the Quran, we must first discover other findings that are relevant to the discussion.

This study conducts a comparative examination of two distinct sorts of scholarly opinions. It examines Quranic passages that seem to promote conflict and exclusion using the historical context of its revelation. It also explores the counter-arguments presented by contemporary Muslim scholars based on evidence from the Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which are in favour of peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, it presents a critical study of the verses of the Quran encouraging diversity culminating with a discussion on the study and its relevance for further research.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a conceptual qualitative study. The data was collected from library resources, which included primary and secondary material. The primary resources, such as Tafseer books, fiqh books, and fatwa literature. The secondary resources included research and review papers. A thorough content analysis was performed to reach a certain, accurate, conclusive opinion concerning the Quranic view on peaceful co-existence and violence in a pluralistic society. The existent opinions of classical and contemporary Muslim authorities have been critically analysed. Through the lenses of the contextual and historical study of Quranic verses, this study has reached a precise and accurate conclusion concerning the status of peaceful co-existence and violence in a pluralistic society.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EXTREMISTS' ARGUMENTS AND COUNTER-ARGUMENTS PRESENTED BY THE CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARS

While extremists have exploited verse 9:29-”... slay the idolators wherever you find them...” to justify violence, this verse was revealed during the seventh-century war between a marginal Muslim community and powerful pagan Arabs, Christians, and Jews adversaries. When confronted, Muslims are permitted to protect themselves and their property, but they are not instructed to fight non-believers for no justification. Verse 5:51 espousing believers against making friends with Jews and Christians was revealed in a similar context when specific Jewish and Christian groups betrayed the cause of Muslims by joining in military assaults against the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) alongside pagan Arabs. On the contrary, the Quran instructs believers in verse 29:46 to avoid arguing with the people of the scriptures (Jews and Christians) unless it is ethical, and later in this verse to affirm that “we believe in what has been revealed to us and to you,” confirming peaceful co-existence with the Jewish and Christian scriptures. How is it possible for scripture that advocates for peaceful dialogue with other communities to also advocate for violence in direct contradiction to its verses? This paradox arose as a result of conflicting interpretations of the Quranic texts. The Quran declares diversity as an inherent feature of humanity as a whole, stating, “If the Lord had willed, he would have made mankind in the single nation but they will not cease to diverse” (El Fadl, 2002). Quran unequivocally expresses opposition to coercion about religion: “there is no coercion in religion” (Quran 2:256). Additionally, verses 17:107 and 18:29 grant individuals the liberty to follow their own theistic beliefs. The Quran goes one step further in verse 8:61, urging Muslims to unite and tend towards peace, an idea that has been realised not only in theory but also in practice.

Extremists argue that the verses cited above, as well as others alluding to religious freedom, tolerance, and peace, were rendered null and void by the combative passages (e.g., Quran 9:5, 29) of the sura “The Repentance” (Abd-al Salam Faraj, 1995, p. 16-17). Gasser Auda (2004, p.196) comments that jurists utilised abrogation extensively, which resulted in several contentious rulings. The view that a single sword passage may nullify over a hundred verses of peace is untenable and dilutes the Quran’s universal

messages of tolerance, freedom of religion, and speech. From the standpoint of contemporary authorities on the Quran, such as Joel Hayward, the lessons of the Quran concentrating on peace, tolerance, reconciliation, and inclusivity were not abrogated by the combat verses of the Quran. Hayward stated that certainly most Islamic authorities on the Quran and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) today, as opposed to scholars from, say, the war-filled medieval period, are firm in their judgment that the most warlike verses in the Quran, even those revealed very late in Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) mission, do not cancel out the overwhelming number of verses that extol tolerance, reconciliation, inclusiveness, and peace (Hayward, 2012). That is because if only Quranic verses advocating violence are allowed to define Islam, Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) twenty-three years of preaching Islam will be fruitless (Sulaymān, 1993).

Thus, the idea that the combat passage invalidates the majority of verses supporting tolerance is rebutted by several contemporary authorities. Abdulaziz Sachedina convincingly argued in his book *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (2001) that the primary means by which exclusivists promoted their view was by claiming that the numerous verses commanding Muslims to build bridges of understanding with non-muslims had been supplanted by verses commanding Muslims to fight the infidels. He asserted that it is only through decontextualising the exegesis of such verses, ignoring their original historical context of revelation and employing them to engage in ubiquitous abrogation of contradictory verses, that exclusivist Muslim exegetes have been able to counteract the pluralist ethos that so pervades the Quran (Sulayman, 1993).

PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN THE QURAN

Islam is a religion of moderation, straddling the two extremes. Regarding the Muslim community, verse 2:143 characterises it as rational and well-balanced, a description that applies to both the spiritual (faith) and physical (action) aspects of Islam. The Quran advocates moderation in all aspects of life and should serve as the cornerstone upon which varied cultures can dwell peacefully while retaining their characteristics. Since the inception of Islam as a unified and coherent identity 1430 years ago, Muslim dynasties have shown exceptional tolerance for others (Gülen, 2004). A community

of people from all cultures and races is accepted and encouraged in verse 30:22. This act of God has been interpreted as a sign, validating the idea of peaceful coexistence. Verse 49:13 of the Quran reveals that mankind is the result of a single male and female; tribes exist to identify one another rather than dishonour one another. God never intended diversity to be a source of contention, division, or polarisation in society (Asani, 2003).

The Quran does not negate the messages of the preceding scriptures; rather, in verse 10:94, it instructs the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to consult the people of the scriptures (when in doubt), fostering a peaceful discourse. Concerning repudiation of a reminder proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Quran tells Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that he is merely a warner (one who reminds) and that he is not a dictator over them (Quran 88:21–26). These verses elucidate a contentious debate that continues to rage today, in which extremist groups encourage violence in the event of non-acceptance of their message. At the same time, the Quran, on the other hand, argues that it is God’s responsibility, not that of human beings, including the Prophet, to hold individuals accountable. This divine command is reiterated multiple times in the verses of the Quran. For instance, verses 88:68 and 88:69 instruct the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Muslims that in the event of argument, they should say, “Allah knows best of what you do” and that Allah has the authority to judge. One of the Quranic guidelines for civil discourse is stated in verse 16:125, which commands Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to argue with people in a way that is wiser and to invite them to God’s way with wisdom and fair preaching. This verse rebuts the arguments advanced by extremists who advocate violence.

The extremist depicts the Quran as exclusive and anti-pluralist, which contradicts the concept of guidance in the Quran (Quran 2:185, 3:4). It is especially evident from Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) life, who is the best example of a Quranic follower, that the Qu’ran prefers peace and has an inclusive approach, as evidenced by the Quran’s emphasis on inclusion. Albert Hourani’s (d. 1993) book *The History of the Arab People* (1991) illustrates that during much of Arab-Muslim history, there hardly existed any systematic persecution of people of different religions living under Muslim rule. He also referenced Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his arrangement with both Jews and Christians in Madinah, where each party was permitted to maintain its laws and customs.

Moreover, the entire community across the entire area was to be one of harmony (Ibrahim, 1998). The Madinah charter is another example of pluralism, as it brought together Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Pagans under a single contract that safeguarded all people's fundamental human rights, including religious liberty (Guillaume, 1978). This shows that not less, but rather a greater understanding and adherence to the entirety of the Islamic message will lead to individual and societal stability. The contrary will lead to the opposite (Chak, 2009). Respect for all communities' spiritual beliefs and places of worship is crucial for peaceful co-existence and pluralism. It is documented in Muhammad ibn Sa'd's (d. 845) *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) entered into a covenant with the Christians of Najran (Ibn Sa'd, 1990).

In this covenant, he promised the Christians of Najran complete freedom to pray in their way, as well as the safety of their homes, worship places, and the freedom to stay Christian (Guillaume, 1978). According to al-Wahidi's *Asbab al-Nuzul*, verse 6:108, "And insult not those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge" is connected with the occasion when idolators complained to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), saying, "O Muhammad, either stop reviling our idols or we shall revile your God." (Guezzou, 2008, p.78) As a result, Allah revealed this verse, warning them not to despise their respective gods. According to Qatadah's account, Muslims were the ones who reviled their deities (Guezzou, 2008). Thus, it is plausible to infer that this was not Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) practice but rather that of some other Muslims. While Islamic scripture (the Quran) recognises the diversity of opinion and interpretation, it specifically preserves the liberty of individuals to hold divergent viewpoints by asserting that believing is a matter of choice (Asani, 2003).

DISCUSSION

According to scholars' analytical, historical, and contextual analysis and interpretation, war verses have not superseded peace verses in their essence. These verses are context-specific and were revealed in a specific scenario. Extremists' stance on the sword verses, while ignoring their practical juridical ramifications, is deleterious to the Muslim community's interests

(Auda, 2004). Contemporary authorities presented an excellent counter-argument to extremists by demonstrating that passages directing Muslims to be placid, tolerant, and non-aggressive are perennial verses with a clear meaning and that historical situational realities cannot nullify the established ideal of tolerance.

The examination of this study revealed that the study of the Quran suggests that it is possible to create a society in which people of all religious backgrounds may live peacefully beside one another while yet maintaining their own religious identities. While doing so, it sustains and maintains its monotheistic theological framework. The study of this paper does not want to imply that the Quran endorses secularism unconditionally when using its verses in support of arguments concerning peaceful co-existence and diversity. The endorsement of secularism and respect for diversity are two distinct things. Verse number 19 of the sura The Family of Imran in the Quran demonstrates that the Quran does not regard all religions as equal. Although the Quran endorses and considers monotheism the right path, it does not compel anybody to adhere to a specific faith. Every person has the right to follow a religion of their choice. On the other hand, the Quran accepts the diversity and peaceful co-existence of people of different faiths and allows them to practise their faith and worship at their places of worship. In this sense, this study argues for a more sensible footing to come and congregate for both Muslims and people of other faiths.

According to history, the Quran, and the sunna, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not initiate conflicts against polytheists, Jews, or Christians in the first place but only fought in defence and to defend the area of Madinah. Therefore, many verses of the Quran, which encourage believers to fight against polytheists, must be understood in the light of their historical context. For instance, Quran states that one who is wronged is allowed to fight back to safeguard oneself (Quran 22:39). While it is true that Muslims are not permitted to fight non-Muslims for no justification, the author contends that they are permitted to defend themselves whenever they find themselves in a war zone and confront enemies who are causing injury and violence to their property and lives, in addition to waging war against Muslims, it is strongly suggested that Muslims defend their own lives and property.

Even when it is advocated to defend and fight back in exceptional circumstances, analysis of this research shows that the phenomenon of the piece continues in perpetuity in Islam and that the concept of war is circumstantial and cannot be generalised. In Islam, peace will always be preferred over violence. Even during the war, Muslims are instructed to deal with their adversaries according to the standards and procedures established by the Quran and the sunna. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) outlawed any violence against women or children. He advocated for the humane treatment of prisoners of war and ransomed captives in exchange for teaching ten Muslim boys how to read and write in exchange for their freedom (Mubarakpuri, 2002). According to the Islamic rules of battle, Muslims are advised to feed prisoners for the countenance of Allah. This is evidenced in verses 76:8-9 of the Quran, stating, “They give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive, saying: We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We do not desire from you reward or gratitude”. According to the numerous verses of the Quran discussed above, peace is addressed throughout the Quran and is considered a crucial part of Islam, whereas conflict is unique and contextual. As a result, the Quranic concept of peaceful co-existence emphasises plurality above hostility and violence.

CONCLUSION

The summary of this paper demonstrates that the fight verses should be interpreted in their contextual setting. The Quran instructs mankind, specifically Muslims, to coexist peacefully with members of other faiths while maintaining their monotheistic views. The Quran promotes monotheism as the true path, yet it does not compel anybody to follow it. Muslims are allowed to defend themselves and their properties when they are approached and battled. In contrast to extremists’ argument, they are not allowed to fight people of other faiths without a compelling reason. The teachings of Islam strongly encourage the concepts of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, as evidenced by a contextual and historical examination of the fight and peace verses of the Quran. It not only permits non-muslims to practice their religion in their sacred places but also guarantees that their lives, property, and dignity are completely protected. The study of the Quran’s verses should be exhaustive, and the Quran itself should be studied

in its entirety. That is, contextual and perceptive study, in addition to a devotion to the entirety of the Quranic discourse, would result in harmonious societal coexistence. This study will contribute to future research towards building a Quranic worldview of peace, pluralism, and peaceful co-existence that will aid in combating islamophobia and bringing a holistic study of the Quran into focus.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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