

Muslims' Perspective: Unity in Diversity of Faiths (Essential Ingredient in Developing of Nations)

Introduction

- 1) An important aspect of this topic under discussion, is taking cognizance of the existence of diversity, globally spread out in all communities. Recognition of the existence of ethnic divides, whether by race or by religion, is frequently the cause of societal frictions in most countries. In many cases, the societal frictions developed into civil wars. This is generally common knowledge amongst all societies, throughout the wide world. There is dire need for bridging over ethnic divides. Some countries have taken sensible protective measures to freedom of religion, conscience and belief. A globally exemplary model is in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.¹ However for Muslims at global level, what matters most are not the steep diversities, but what provisions also exist in their Holy Qur'an, which (a) give liberal opportunities to recognise the valid existence of other Faiths; and (b) how to live and practice the magnificence of Islam alongside all other Faiths.

Scope

- 2) Every Faith needs the space to exist and carry out its mission objectives, without fear of other religious groups showing hatred, or planning working schemes against it. Some countries are biasedly slanted with one Faith as absolutely in majority. For example, Fiji is one of the very few countries amongst the 23 countries of the Pacific islands, which has such a rich diversity of ethnicities in terms of races, religions, languages, cultures and social infrastructures provided by religious groups. Hence, the diversity of Faiths in the country is not something to stress upon, as that is already known to most peoples, but the stress is required to find how others' scriptures compel their followership, to respect and allow freedom of religious practices by all other religious and racial ethnicities. This composite model in Fiji, can easily become exemplary to the rest of the world.

¹ Chapter 2 of 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji deliberates on Bill of Rights. Section 22 aptly and saliently scopes unity in diversity. Every person has right to freedom of religion, conscience and belief. Every person is protected with rights not to be compelled to indulge into activity, including taking oaths contrary to that person's religion or belief. This applies to both individual and communities. No person is to be compelled to express beliefs contrary to that person's religion. Whilst religious communities may provide educational institutions, they must not compel students to receive religious instructions other than the student's belief, unless consented to by the student's parents or guardians.

3) Muslims recognise the origins of mankind, from the original pair of Adam and Eve and out of these two, have spread many communities throughout the world. It is religiously lawful for Muslims to partake of food prepared by those communities and to take in marriages, communities which have evolved from revealed religions. Muslims are forever reminded that Almighty God is always watching over them in all their actions. Past prophets, both as pre-Israelite prophets and Israelite prophets, who existed before Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*), and who have been mentioned by name in the Torah and the Bible, have also been mentioned by name in the Holy Qur'an. Accordingly, Muslims are compelled to honour them all as prophets. The Holy Qur'an requires Muslims to understand and accept that mankind is a single nation and Almighty God had sent His messengers amongst all communities since Creation, with His messages, and which were expressed in different progressive ways, through numerous generations and over different civilizations. Almighty God reminds Muslims that all His messengers came with His messages according to their communities' needs. The Holy Qur'an compels Muslims to respect and accept all other communities and different religions; and Almighty God prohibits Muslims from abusing or offending them. Muslims are **prescriptively** warned that there is no compulsion in religion and Almighty God will hold accountable, all those who disbelieved in Almighty God and listened to the accursed devil. That is unity in diversity of Faiths as stated in the Holy Qur'an.

Interrogating the Holy Qur'an

- 4) Therefore, it becomes imperative for all Muslims, to interrogate the Holy Qur'an and identify just a few of those distinct verses, which lend support to compact of Muslims, in recognising unity in diversity of all Faiths, regardless of their country of habitat.
- 5) All Muslims, regardless of their sects'² alignments, must recognise the origins of mankind from the original pair of Adam and Eve and out of these two, have spread many communities throughout the world.
- 6) The obvious question which crosses most peoples' minds is: Do Muslims recognize origins of mankind from a single pair of human beings as the base for all Unity? The Holy Qur'an, as the absolute principal scriptural law in all affairs of Muslims, makes the following Ordinances: **HQ49:13** *"O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware."* **HQ4:1** *"O people,*

² There are two mainstream Muslim sects. First is Sunni with 60 Divisions. The other is Shia with 12 Divisions.

keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind), and spread from these two many men and women. And keep your duty to Allah, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship. Surely Allah is ever a Watcher over you.”

7) The original Christians³ as direct followers of Prophet Jesus Christ (final of descents of Israelite prophets), and the original Jews⁴ as direct followers of Prophet Moses⁵ (most prominent of the Israelite prophets), were all strict followers and believers in the existence of only One God. In their own original roles as servants of Almighty God, these prophets did not participate in any act of paganism or polytheism. They did not have idols and they did not make food offerings to idols. In Islam, it is religiously lawful for Muslims to partake of food prepared by those communities and to take in marriages, which have evolved from revealed religions. For example, Muslims are permitted to eat Kosher⁶ food prepared by Jews. The next obvious question which arises is: Are there restrictions for Muslims in taking part of food, etc. of previous revealed religions? **HQ5:5** *“This day (all) good things are made lawful for you. And the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And so are the chaste from among the believing women and the chaste from among those who have been given the Book before you, when you give them their dowries, taking (them) in marriage, not fornicating nor taking them for lovers in secret. And whoever denies faith, his work indeed is fruitless; and in the Hereafter he is among the losers.”*

8) Muslims are forever reminded that Almighty God is always watching over them in all their actions. Past prophets, from pre-Israelite era, during the Israelite era and other mentions in their holy scriptures, which existed before Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) and have been mentioned by name in the Torah and the Bible. The same prophets have also been mentioned by name in the Holy Qur’an and Muslims are compelled to honour them all. According to the Hadith in Islam (*Musnad Ahmed* Hadith No 21257), Almighty God had sent over 124,000 persons delegated as His prophets and messengers. They were all as

³ After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, his close followers as original Christians fled and dwelled in caves for 309 years (Holy Qur’an 18:25) and later built monasteries in remote hilltops. Trinity was promulgated in 325AD, which followed the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine (306-337AD) from Roman State religion of Mithraism to Christianity (with Trinity). In 325AD Constantine had convened the Council of Nicaea, the first Roman Empire-wide meeting of all church leaders to discuss various doctrinal controversies. This led to the structuring of the new Bible format. The first complete English translation of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew texts was in 1526 (William Tyndale version).

⁴ Original Jews were direct descendants of the 12 Tribes of Israel who lived in Egypt for decades and whom Prophet Moses led out of Egypt as the great Exodus, in search of the Promised Land.

⁵ Prophet Moses had descended from the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

⁶ Kosher foods are those that conform to the Jewish dietary laws called Kashrut, equivalent to Muslims’ Halal.

His spiritually contracted servants.⁷ The Holy Qur'an clarifies that there is not a nation, which was not graced with a prophet or messenger from Almighty God. Yet another question may be asked, regarding the same prophets: Since some of the past prophets are mentioned by name in the Torah, the Bible and the Holy Qur'an (as lessons), so does that reflect as Unity in Diversity? **HQ2:136** *"Say: We believe in Allah and (in) what has been revealed to us, and (in) what was revealed to Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) what was given to Moses and Jesus, and (in) what was given to the prophets from their Lord, we make no distinction between any of them and to Him we submit."*

- 9) The Holy Qur'an requires Muslims to understand and accept that mankind is a single nation and Almighty God sent His messengers amongst all communities since Creation, with His messages, which were expressed in different progressive ways to generations over different civilizations. The differences in communities are superficial only and evolved through extended geographical locations. Almighty God reminds Muslims that all His messengers came with His messages according to communities' needs. Another question which may cross peoples' minds is: Does the Holy Qur'an recognize respecting all other Faiths as a single nation? These have been materially evidenced in the following roll out of verses: **HQ2:112** *"No, whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others), he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve."* **HQ2:213** *"Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people in that in which they differed. And none but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, envying one another. So Allah has guided by His will those who believe to the truth about which they differed. And Allah guides whom He pleases to the right path."* **HQ2:285** *"The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His messengers. We make no distinction between any of His messengers. And they say: We hear and obey; our Lord, Your forgiveness (do we crave), and to You is the eventual course."* **HQ10:19** *"And (all) people are but a single nation, then they disagree. And if a word had not already gone forth from your Lord, the matter would have certainly been decided between them regarding that in which they disagree."*

⁷ The Holy Qur'an is not a register of prophets but only 25 prophets have been named as exemplary; and these 25 names have been repeated several times in different Chapters, according to different circumstances, as lessons for mankind.

- 10) The Holy Qur'an compels Muslims to respect and accept all other communities and different religions as alongside to Islam; and Almighty God prohibits Muslims from abusing or offending them. For example, Prophet Abraham was neither a Jew⁸ nor a Christian⁹ but inclined to Almighty God and he was obedient to Almighty God and he did not associate with other gods and Almighty God made Prophet Abraham the Father of Humanity. Muslims are warned there is no compulsion in religion and Almighty God will hold accountable those who disbelieved in Almighty God and listened to the accursed devil. The final question which may be asked is: Does the Holy Qur'an consent to the freedom of religious practices by those who are not Muslims? **HQ6:108** *"And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, in case, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance. Thus to every people have We made their deeds seem good; then to their Lord is their return so He will inform them of what they did."* **HQ2:256-257** *"There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing. Allah is the Friend of those who believe — He brings them out of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their friends are the devils who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; in it they abide."*
- 11) An important aspect of this topic is taking cognizance of the existence of diversity widely spread out, globally in all Faiths and generally common knowledge amongst all societies. However, what matters most are notwithstanding the steep diversity, what provisions existed in different scriptures, which gave liberal opportunities to recognise the existence of other Faiths; and how to live and practice own religion alongside all other Faiths?
- 12) The Holy Qur'an makes several Ordinances for Muslims to respect and let other Faiths continue their worshipping of Almighty God. Their language or method of worship may be different, but they are worshipping same one Almighty God. Only a few have been quoted here for sake of brevity: **HQ22:40** *"Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, surely cloisters and churches and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allah will help him who helps Him. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty."* Other Faiths are not

⁸ Judaism descended from the twelve sons of Jacob (son of Isaac and as grandson of Abraham) who later became known as Israel and his twelve sons became the twelve Tribes of Israel.

⁹ Christianity commenced after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, who was a Jew and his parents (Mary and Joseph) descended from the tribe of Judah.

necessarily rebellious and if they wish to live in peace with Muslims, then they should be allowed to continue: **HQ8:61** *“And if they incline to peace, you (must) incline to it also, and trust in Allah. Surely He is the Hearer, the Knower.”*

- 13) Some critics of Islam often label Muslims as fighting other Faiths in propagation of Islam. This is far from truth and the Ordinance in the Holy Qur’an prescriptively imposes upon Muslims not to fight the other Faiths but respond only in self-defence; however, when the aggressor stops, then Muslims must also stop fighting back: **HQ60:8** *“Allah does not forbid you, with regard to those who do not fight you for religion, nor drive you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly. Surely Allah loves the doers of justice.”*
- 14) That is unity in diversity of Faiths as stated in the Holy Qur’an. Islam is the religion of humanity and this has been certified by Almighty God at **HQ5:3**, as *“This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.”*
- 15) It is for all correct thinking Muslims to guide and assist other Muslims; the Holy Qur’an has sanctioned that correct advice shall be given to those who need to be guided. This is given in the Holy Qur’an at **HQ3:104**, as *“And from among you there should be a community who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.”*

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