

## **Religious Diversity in the Context of the Teachings of the Quran**

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### **Abstract**

There are multiple religions extant in the world we live in. Each religion claims to be the way to salvation, and at times, the only way to salvation. On certain occasions such claims assume such rigidity that the religionists adopt fanatic and intolerant attitude, resulting in certain harmful activities towards other religionists. Every known religion offers measures to neutralize the religious differences prevalent among religions. Islam however is seen as the most intolerant and exclusive of all the religions. Certain people of other faiths hold Islam as the stumbling block to religious understanding. It (Islam) is often ignored in dealing with the theme of religious diversity. The present paper is intended to reveal the attitude of Islam towards religious diversity, and what it offers for the settlement of differences among religions. A survey through the Islamic Texts- Quran and Ahadith shall be made to unveil the approach of Islam with respect to religious pluralism. Besides, an attempt will be made to analyse the current way of intolerance sprouting out in the Muslim lands.

**Key-words:** Diversity, Inclusiveness, Exclusiveness, Tolerance, Intolerance.

### **Introduction**

Religion continues to manifest itself in the activities and thoughts of human beings and keeps on engaging the brains of people from a layman to as far as the highest intellectual. In spite of some severe blows from Darwinian Theory of Evolution, Marxian and Freudian Theories, the religious ideas continue to surround the human lives. The modern man amidst the most wonderful discoveries, inventions and technological attainments feels the absence of religion as H.J.Paton in his work "The Modern Predicament" puts it, "Modern man, even with all the comforts and luxuries at his disposal, isn't happy, when he isn't able to experience God. He passionately mourns His absence and in general, is not reconciled to it."<sup>1</sup> Steven Weinberg in his "Dream of a Final Theory" writes, "If the word God is to be of any use, it should be taken an interested God, the creator and a law-giver who has established not only the laws of nature and the universe but also standards of good and evil, some personality that is concerned with our actions, something in short that is appropriate for us to worship. This is the God that has mattered to men and women throughout history."<sup>2</sup> Religion offers meaning to life, orients the

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activities of man towards his individual well-being and for the welfare of his fellow-beings. In general religion strives for universal unity of mankind towards good, righteousness, peace, order and harmony.

In the contemporary era efforts are going on at the local, national and international levels to rediscover the role of religion in ushering an era of peace, cooperation and mutual tolerance despite the venomous remarks on the existence of religion by militant atheists and philosophers. However the views of anti-religious receive reinforcements when religious people clash with one another in order to prove their religion supreme over the other. And among all the religions it is Islam which is perceived as the most intolerant and exclusive in approach. The stupid and barbaric acts of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), BokoHaram and TTP (Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan) are supposed to gush out of the Islamic Texts-Quran and Hadith. Such extremist organisations are projected both in print and electronic media in such a way as if they represent the truth of Islam. This not only maligns the image of Islam but equally sows the seeds of suspicion in the minds of other fellow religionists who see it futile to hold a dialogue with Muslims. In the following pages it would be my endeavour to incorporate the teachings of Islam that advocate for religious understanding, tolerance and freedom of religious choice, and would deal with the issue of religious diversity.

### **Islamic Perspective on Religious Diversity**

Religious pluralism is an evident thing in the world. There is a marked difference in the religious beliefs and practices of people living in different parts of the globe and at times within the same country. There are polytheistic, pantheistic, henotheistic, and Monotheistic religious traditions. The respective members of such religious denominations garner their own ways to connect to the Ultimate Reality. They have their own forms of worship and rituals. All major religions deal one way or the other with the issue of religious diversity and pluralism. Islam is one of such major religion of the world and according to the current statistics, the fastest growing of all ones. It stores much on the theme of religious diversity as Its fundamental book Al- Quran was revealed amidst a multi-religious society on the person of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) of Arabian peninsula.

In chapter 49 verse 13 of the Quran, we come across such words as, “O mankind! We have created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware”. This verse sets the tune for the unity of mankind for their origin is same and their creator is one God. It also marks the end of

discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, status, and race. The more the God conscious, the more the one deserves respect and honour. As a natural corollary the same God may not be expected to make any discrimination on the basis of religion, giving inferior religious forms to one community and superior to other. However there may be differences in the observance of rituals, commands and prohibitions that come up with religion. The Quran expresses it as... “For each of you We have appointed a Law and a way of life. And had Allah so willed, He would surely have made you one single community; instead, (He gave each of you a Law and a way of life) in order to test you by what He gave you. Vie, then, one with another in good works. Unto Allah is the return of all of you; and He will then make you understand the truth concerning the matters on which you disagreed.”<sup>3</sup> The phrase *one single community* in the preceding verse talks about uniform religious identity. In origin and its final return, the humanity is one and the same; however the ways of obeying the commandments of God may vary from time to time, from one community to other. The prophets who rose in different climes and at different times to deliver the message of divine unity had necessarily to take note of the condition of the mind which had to respond to their message. In presenting or explaining the attributes to the people of their times, the prophets adopted a method suited to their intellectual standard. In this respect the Quran expounds as “ And We didn’t send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them...”<sup>4</sup>At another place Quran affirms, “And for every nation is a messenger. So when their messenger comes, it will be judged between them in justice, and they will not be wronged.”<sup>5</sup>

The above verses we must agree point towards religious pluralism. However when one comes across such Quranic verses like, “We did not send any messenger before you except with the inspiration: “There is no god except Me; you shall worship Me alone”.<sup>6</sup> One finds that the fundamental message of all the Prophets (Peace be upon them all), whom the final Prophet (Peace be upon him) and the Qur’an calls as *forming one family* is same. The Quran further supplements this: “ The Messenger( Muhammad) believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and so do the believers; they all believe in Allah (God) 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 forgive us. To You we shall return.”<sup>7</sup> If the content of the message conveyed by the messengers is identical where then do the differences arise? The Quran tells us that the variations lie in the *Laws* and *ways* devised within specific circumstances and mental capacities of people to understand the niceties of Divine purpose. Quran calls such laws and ways as “*Shar’ah wa Minhaj*”.<sup>8</sup> We may safely infer from the above discussion that the basic message of a Messenger or Warner (as Qur’an sometimes uses this word for

God's messengers) remains same throughout the human history but the rules and commands regarding service and obedience towards God and relationships towards human beings changed. Carl Ernest says, "Religion can be understood only with respect to context: We have to understand the actors, the tune, the place, and the issues in order to avoid serious mistakes."<sup>9</sup>

When Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) proclaimed his religion as Islam, he never spoke in exclusive terms. He felt proud to be among the descendants of Abraham (Peace be upon him) who stood for the purity of religion. In one of his comprehensive sayings, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said as, "The similitude of mine and that of the Prophets (before me) is that of a person who constructed a building and he built it fine and well and the people went round it saying: Never have we seen a building more imposing than this, but for one brick, and I am that brick (with which you give the finishing touch to the building)."<sup>10</sup> In her famous book, *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong writes, "The Quran is adamantly opposed to the use of force in religious matters, its vision is inclusive, it recognises the validity of all rightly guided religions, and praises all the great prophets of the past. The last time Muhammad preached to the community before his death, he urged Muslims to use their religion to reach out to others in understanding, since all human beings were brothers."<sup>11</sup>

While the Quran and the Sunnah ( the sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad) offer due respect to all prophets, messengers and warners mentioned in the Quran as well as to those who remain unmentioned there; where do Islam parts away from religions who exist besides Islam. The Quran comes forward and says, "Mankind were one community, and Allah sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the scripture) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another. And Allah by his will guide those who believe unto the truth of that concerning which they differed, Allah guides whom He will unto a straight path."<sup>12</sup> At another place Quran affirms, "Verily religion with Allah is Islam. Those who (formerly) received the scripture differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso disbelieves the revelations of Allah (will find that). Verily Allah is swift in reckoning."<sup>13</sup> M.M. Pickthall translates the word Islam as the Surrender (to His (God's) Will and Guidance) while Muhammad Asad translates It as "man's self surrender unto Him" (God). In such verses and there are many like these in the Quran, we witness the mention of the people who violated the basics of the religion i.e. they showed little regard towards the unity of God (Tawhid) and unity of mankind, instead they looked for

discrimination among prophets and boasted about their own race. Instead of endorsing the message of the messengers of God, they sought contradictions among them. As a consequence humanity divided on religious lines. “This *Ummah* of your’s is one *Ummah*, and I am your Lord, so fear me. But they cut off their affair of unity into sects, each faction rejoicing in what it has”, says Quran.<sup>14</sup> Sheikh Salman al-‘Audah commenting on this verse says, “The Arabic word “*Ummah*” as it is used in this verse means: “people united by faith”. This particular meaning for the word *Ummah* is often seen in the Quran.”<sup>15</sup> We may infer thus that religion unites mankind under one unrivalled Supreme God Who is revered and accepted as the creator and law-giver of universe and the human beings dwelling in it. God Almighty chooses religion as the binding force for human beings; it is but mankind that puts unity at stake. People carve out their own version of religion thereby belying the spirit and continuity of Divine Message coming down the ages.

The contemporary version of religious pluralism that we witness is more a deviation than a service to the “Will of God.” Say: O people of the Book! Stress not in your religion other than the truth, and follow not the vain desires of folk who erred of old and led many astray, and erred from a plain road.<sup>16</sup> “Say (O Muhammad): O mankind! If you are in doubt of my religion then (know that) I worship not those whom you worship instead of Allah, but I worship Allah Who causes you to die, and I have been commanded to be of the believers”<sup>17</sup>. The logical deduction out of such verses comes that it is the Oneness of God that is first compromised followed by the denial of the teachings of the prophet who confirms the earlier revelations and claims himself as the ‘servant’ of the True Lord. The recognition of one supreme God and His obedience remains the watch-word of every major religion of the world and so the fundamental duty of every Divine Messenger. When humans turn forgetful of the consciousness of one eternal and immortal God, they construct such religions that push the God to periphery. It not only marks the disobedience of God but also signals the opposition to the general memorandum of the prophets cum messengers—“We didn’t send any messenger before you, O Muhammad except that We revealed to him that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah, so make all your worship purely for Him.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Tolerance and Freedom of Religion in Islam: Some Excerpts from Islamic History**

In the preceding pages we tried to explore the facets of Quran and Sunnah on the theme of religious diversity. In the succeeding pages we shall explore the Quranic and Prophetic treatment towards religions other than Islam. In the first instance, let us be reminded that Islam doesn’t begin with the Prophethood of

Muhammad (Peace be upon him). It only acquires completion with him. The Quran addresses the entire human existence while Muhammad (Peace be upon him) seeks for the salvation of all. Now the characteristic that sets Islam distinct from rest of the religions is the insistence it lays upon the permanence of Oneness of Allah and carriers (Messengers) of such a concept in every period of human history. It no way seems to compromise on the lofty monotheistic ideals, it sets out before the people. However it also secures the freedom of choice of religion. To paraphrase the words of Prof. Hashim Kamili, Islamic religious pluralism does not simply aim at tolerance of the other but entails an active effort to gain an understanding of the other. One can tolerate a neighbour about whom one remains thoroughly ignorant. That may well be preferable to conflict, yet it still falls short of active pluralism— which means acknowledging and engaging differences without any attempt to impose hegemony. After presenting the testimonials, arguments and rationale for Its truth and universality, It leaves the choice up to the people who may espouse or shun it. Besides, Allah exhorts Muslims (those who subscribe to the message of Islam) to display tolerance and understanding towards other faiths and their followers. No religious coercion or imposition is allowed either by Quran or the Sunnah of the Prophet.

The first important verse of the Quran that immediately catches our attention reads as, “Do not revile those whom they invoke other than Allah, lest they should revile Allah in transgression without having knowledge. This is how We made the deeds of every community attractive in their sight. Then, to their Lord is their return, after which He shall tell them what they have been doing”<sup>19</sup>. The believers are told not to abuse the gods who are worshipped in place of One True Lord for their followers may in retaliation speak ill of their [Muslims’] God. The consequence will be the religious violence that Islam rejects out-rightly. The spirit of the aforementioned verse is also reflected in the following words of the Quran as well, “There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing”<sup>20</sup> The noted Islamic Scholar often counted as the extremist voices of the Muslim world comments on such verse as, “Islam looks at religious faith as a matter of conviction, once the basic facts are provided and explained. Faith is never a matter of coercion or compulsion. To achieve this conviction, Islam addresses the human being in totality. It addresses the human mind and intellect, human common sense, emotions and feelings, the innermost human nature, and the whole human conscious being. It resorts to no coercive means or physical miracles that confound the mind or that are beyond human ability to rationalise and comprehend. By the same token, Islam never seeks converts through compulsion or threats or pressure of any

kind. It deploys facts, reasoning, explanation and persuasion...This reflects the honour God has reserved for man and the high regard in which man's will, thought and emotions are held, and the freedom he is granted to choose his beliefs, and the responsible position he is afforded to be judge of his own actions."<sup>21</sup>

The above stated verse was revealed and put to practice in the period when the Prophet and his companions enjoyed authority after long and dreadful atrocities inflicted on them by the Makkan chieftains. To quote Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, a famous British orientalist," the verse [2:256] is a Medinan verse, when Muslims lived in their period of political ascendance."<sup>22</sup> We see the Prophet conveying the message of the Quran in the most judicious manner. He would often grieve, detrimental to his health when people turned away from his teachings. Many a times Allah would console him through Quran as not to worry at the cost of his health for the guidance lies in His hands and that the Prophet is supposed to convey only what He commands him to pass on. The Quran reveals the restlessness of Prophet as, "Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers"<sup>23</sup>. At another place Quran expresses the concern of the Prophet for his people in the following words: "Surely a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is that you should fall into trouble; he is ardently desirous of your welfare, and to the believers he is compassionate and merciful"<sup>24</sup>. To minimise the anxiety of the Prophet, Allah sends forth the words, "Therefore do remind, for you are only a reminder. You are not a watcher over them"<sup>25</sup> "And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them; will you compel men to become believers? No soul can believe but by the permission of God."<sup>26</sup> He said: "O my people! See you if (it be that) I have a clear sign from my Lord, and that He has sent Mercy unto me from his own presence, but that the Mercy has been obscured from your sight? Shall we compel you to accept it when you are averse to it? <sup>27</sup> Say, "The truth is from your Lord: Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it)..."<sup>28</sup>

In all such verses of the Quran the Prophet and the community of believers are instructed not to compel others as the guidance and righteousness must be grasped through conviction not compulsion. All they are supposed to do is to present the truth from their Lord in the most unambiguous terms through gentle preaching: "Invite to the way of your lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided"<sup>29</sup> In the annals of Islamic history we have ample evidences that authenticate the fact that the Prophet and his companions lived up to the spirit of Allah's commands in the Quran.

It may not be possible to incorporate all the examples laid down by the Prophet and his companions speaking of tolerance in religious matters, however we may refer to some of the episodes that may enough serve our purpose. The first important instance of religious tolerance that should strike one's mind is what the Prophet politely declared to the stubborn Quraysh of the Makkah: "To you your religion and to me mine"<sup>30</sup> It was Allah saying, "And if they reject you, then say: "To me my deeds and to you your deeds and you are innocent of my accounts and I am innocent of yours"<sup>31</sup>. At Madinah, the Prophet inaugurated the historical *Meethaq-e- Madinah* (The Charter of Madinah) wherein religious freedom to all communities was granted with no rancour in the heart of the Prophet or his followers. Likewise the "Charter of Privileges"(628 C.E.) was granted to the monks of Saint Catherine Monastery in Mount Sinai guaranteeing freedom of worship and freedom to appoint their own judges etc to solve their own religious matters. The Treaty of Hudaibiah (628) may be cited as one more landmark in the display of tolerance where the Prophet and his followers held restrain and complied with the humiliating terms of the treaty. The Conquest of Makkah (630) makes an excellent example of religious tolerance and freedom. No forceful conversion is recorded by historians though the Prophet and his loyal; though they had authority and the pretext to commit violence. And before departing for the heavenly abode, the Prophet left through his conduct and utterances a great legacy of religious tolerance. One of his important quotes is: "Whoever kills a person having treaty with the Muslims, shall not smell the fragrance of paradise though its aroma is perceived from a distance of forty years."<sup>32</sup>

The policy of toleration left by the Prophet was carried with the same fervour by his companions. The historical treaty (637) signed by Umar (ra), the second Caliph of Islam (634-644) with the patriarch Sophronius in Jerusalem after it came under Umar's domain presents a glaring example of tolerance and outlook on the part of Muslims. The Caliph gave the inhabitants of the land an assurance of safety for their property, their churches, their crosses, rituals that belonged to their religion, etc. "It has been recorded in the annals of Muslim chronicles, that at the time of Zuhr [afternoon prayer] prayers, Sophronius invited Umar to pray in the rebuilt Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Umar declined, fearing that accepting the invitation might endanger the Church's status as a Christian temple, and that Muslims might break the treaty and turn the temple into a mosque"<sup>33</sup> We find another example of Umar during his Caliphate wherein he extended the approach towards *Ahl-e-Kitab* (People of the Book- Jews and Christians) to other religious communities. It is related that some Muslims told Umar Ibn Khattab about some people who worshipped fire and they were neither Jews, nor Christians nor people of the Holy Books. This caused a problem for Umar. Then Abdur Rahman Ibn Auf said: "I was witness to the Messenger of God when he said, "Deal with them as you deal



with the People of the Holy Books.”<sup>34</sup> The same policy was adopted by Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam (656-661) during his Caliphate. The people other than the *Ahl-i-Kitab* are termed as *Shibhe Ahl-i-Kitab* (those who do not have any of the scriptures mentioned in the Quran, but they are understood to have been the recipients of some scripture at some point of time. Iranian Parsis are taken as such. According to many Ulama, Hindus, etc. are also in the same category.

Moving forward we see the age of Abbasid Caliphate employing people of all faiths at *Dar-ul-Hikmah* for the dissemination of beneficial knowledge for the general good of the mankind. The restraint displayed by Salah-ud-Din Ayyubi while encountering notorious Crusades of the Christendom sets another example of religious tolerance. The Umayyad Caliphate of Spain presents one more picture of religious tolerance on the part of Muslims. Making a further voyage we witness the Ottoman Caliphate displaying the acts of tolerance at a time when their existence was threatened from multiple sides. In the same line comes the Mughal rule in India where exemplary acts of religious tolerance and harmony was displayed by the kings and their ministers. Sir Wesley Haig writes, the eloquence of the early Muslim Historians lavished with regard to such matter as crushing rebellions, arson of forts, cities and villages and laying waste the entire regions, would have gone to support the view that most of the early Muslim invasions of India were aimed at the propagation of Islam and elimination of idol worship. But the facts totally belie this view. From Mahmud to the latter day Muslim invaders, always accepted the subservience of the Hindu rajahs and landlords whose hereditary estates were left in their possession...Moreover the Muslim rulers won over the Hindu masses and gained their confidence and support and the administrative machinery at the lower level was entrusted to their care. The land revenue and the financial system remained practically in the hands of the Hindus. Undoubtedly rebellion was crushed mercilessly and at least there were excesses also in the corrective measures, but religion was not the factor responsible for them. There is no reason to believe that a Hindu cultivator under a Muslim landlord was any the worse than his Hindu counterpart under a Hindu zamindar.<sup>35</sup>

### **The contemporary scenario of Muslim Religious In-tolerance**

In the preceding pages we viewed the content of Islamic Texts in connection with the religious pluralism and the approach of Islam with respect to religious diversity. We also traversed through the pages of Islamic history to witness the pragmatic acts of tolerance displayed by the followers of Islam. In the succeeding pages we would be dealing with the current state of tolerance existing in the Muslim world. The Muslim population of the globe had been under scathing criticism since orientalist took to the study of Islam, especially

from the civilizational point of view. Some prominent ones like Watt, Goldzehr, etc through their writings mobilised the public opinion against Islam and the Muslims. The Islamic History was presented in a very poor light.

Our times see the fierce criticism on Islam and Muslims. The acts of terror unleashed by some radical organisations such as ISIS, BokoHaram, TTP, and Al-Qaida in the name of Islam opened the doors of unrestrained condemnation of Muslims and the hatred towards Islam. The recent brutal attack at Paris carried out by ISIS, the soul-harrowing assault on school children and the more recent horrible attack on university students in Pakistan serves as a handy tool for the Islamophobes to reproach the Islam and its teachings. The heinous acts of such notorious organisations are linked directly to Islam by a good proportion of the world community if not by all.

In the foregoing pages we see the principles laid down by Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet together with the precepts of his companions making religious matters clear and easy for the people. The great legacy of toleration and moderation continued up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Ottoman Empire in the heart of the Europe and the Mughal Empire in the heart of the Indian sub-continent offering glaring examples. It was after the intrusion of colonial powers that extremism began to develop as a result of forced secularisation of the religiously dominated countries, be they Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu ones. The cultural aggression coupled with intense modernisation posed a potent threat to the religious beliefs and values of the religionists and they opposed the secular forces tooth and nail. In the words of Karen Armstrong: “The defensive piety popularly known as fundamentalism erupted in almost every major faith during the twentieth century”<sup>36</sup>

But all blame can't rest with the colonial or imperialist powers. The religious people and especially Muslims here deserve a fair amount of criticism. They bypass the methodology of Quran and Sunnah while interpreting and implementing Islam. The likes of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and TTP (Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan) misinterpret the principles of Tafseer, Fiqh etc. laid down by the learned scholars of Islam. They interpret Islamic Texts in a way that suits their interests. They use indiscriminate force to impose their version of Islam on the rest of people with no justification in Islam. “In pluralistic modern societies, to assert the authority of a particular holy book, according to a particular “literal” interpretation, amounts to a tyrannical assertion of power. Although this is precisely what religious fundamentalists do, in practice they can only attain this authority by suppressing or eliminating everyone who holds a different point of view” , says Carl Ernest<sup>37</sup>. In a very recent book “ Islam and the Future of Tolerance” by Maajid Nawaz and Sam Harris, Maajid Nawaz rightly says that in order to defeat the scourge of ISIS, etc. we need to expose their ideology i.e. their version of Islam. Until and

unless they are not defeated intellectually youth may continue to join their ranks.<sup>38</sup> In order to save Islam playing in the hands of the dominant violent minority, the silent sober majority of Muslims have to come forward all in one voice to revive the true nature of Islam. The men of great religious understanding have to shoulder the greater part of the responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

“Man is amidst spiritual bankruptcy and constant threat of nuclear wars. In such circumstances religion has to make a fresh start”, says Karen Armstrong<sup>39</sup>. Religion has an immense role in defusing tensions arising out of clash of interests— political, social and economic among the nations, because religion offers the ultimate meaning to life. It narrows down the parochial feelings of pride, ego, status, power and prestige. Instead it cultivates the highest virtues of love, justice, equality and brotherhood. In order to pave the way for the fulfilment of such religious ideals, the religious communities of the world have to develop a deeper religious understanding towards one another’s religion. Islam that commands more than a billion followers in the world deserves to be understood without any prejudice and pre-occupied notions in mind. The straight-forward study of the Islamic History in the light of Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) would reveal the actual nature of Islam, unfold its inclusive character, and leave little scope for religious feuds. The West has to usher a new policy towards Islam and Muslims for it shares many things with Islam through Christianity and Judaism. To quote Houston Smith, “ Of all the non-Western religions, Islam stands closet to the West— closet geographically, and also closet ideologically; for religiously it stands in the Abrahamic family of religions, while philosophically it builds on the Greeks. Yet despite this mental and spatial proximity, Islam is the most difficult religion for the West to understand...Until recently it was called Muhammadanism by the West, which is not only inaccurate but offensive. It is inaccurate, Muslims say, because Muhammad did not create this religion, God did— Muhammad was merely God’s mouth-piece.”<sup>40</sup>

Summing up our description and discussion, we may arrive at the conclusion that Islam still awaits a deserving treatment by all the living religious communities of the world. A lot more needs to find out about the contribution of Islam towards encouraging and promoting religious tolerance. It is the need of the hour to avail the teachings of Islam for restraining the growing wave of persecution in the name of religion be it in Europe, America, Middle-East, or India.

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<sup>38</sup>Nawaz, Maajid and Harris, Sam (2015), *Islam and the Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue*, Harvard University Press Cambridge, London, p.118

<sup>39</sup> Armstrong, Karen (1993), *A History of God*, Ballantine Books, New York

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