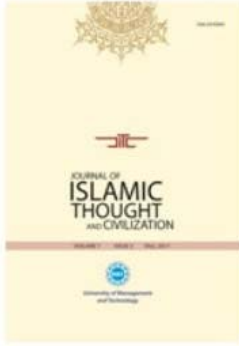


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Understanding Peace and Nonviolence in Islam with Maulānā Wahīduddīn Khān

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Abstract

Islam is the religion of peace; rather it is the very embodiment of it. The very name 'Islam' is derived from the Arabic triliteral root *s.l.m*, which primarily denotes peace. The related term 'Imān' signifies 'giving peace to others.' One of the beautiful names of Allah is *Al-Salām* which means 'The Absolute Peace.' The Islamic greetings '*Assalāmu Alikum*' is also but the 'prayer of peace' for the fellow human beings. There is a great emphasis in Islam for establishing, maintaining and promoting peace. Likewise, violence is all the more condemned in Islam and nonviolence is hailed by equal measure. One of the reports in Bukhari reports from Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (SAW), "A Muslim is he whose neighbors are safe from the evils of his hands and tongue." Likewise, the Qur'ān discourages violence in *sura Baqara*'s verse (205), *waAllahu lā yuhibbu-al-fasād* (And Allah does not love mischief). Moreover, the Qur'ān asks its adherents to repel evil with goodness to turn an enemy into a bosom friend. Maulana Wahiddudin Khan of India, an influential Muslim personality in the modern period, is a staunch advocate of peace from an Islamic perspective. His ideas on peace and non-violence in Islam can be gleaned from his works like *Aman-i-Aalam* (Global Peace), *Islam and Peace*, *The Age of Peace*, *The Prophet of Peace (SAW)*, different issues of the monthly magazine *al-Risālah*, etc. which are reflective of his strong emphasis on peace and non-violence in the contemporary world. The present paper attempts to undertake a study of his views on peace and non-violence in Islam which has become the pressing need of present times owing to the escalation of extremism and terrorism in the world and unfortunately its attribution to Islam.

Keywords: Islam, peace, nonviolence, tolerance, patience, terrorism, *Jihad*

Introduction

In the modern period, human beings have been united by the advanced means of communication and technology; they are facing the challenge of violence in its various forms to such a degree as never witnessed in the whole history. In the midst of the abundance of material things, what humans are devoid of today is peace—peace of mind, peace in family life, peace in society, and above all peace across the globe. The violent forces all over the world have exploited the phenomenon of globalization to globalize the violence. The increasing selfishness, excessive individualism and materialism coupled with the weakening of the religious and ethical attitudes have worsened the situation even more by making human beings



intolerant towards one another. All this makes evident the significance of peace and non-violence for the modern humans. The catastrophe brought about by the two world wars has made it clear beyond the slightest doubt that the continuity of human race on the planet is contingent upon unconditional realization of peace at all levels of the life.

2. Understanding the Meaning of Peace

Peace is generally considered as equivalent to the “absence of manifest violence.” It is regarded as synonymous to “respite from war,” “quiet from suits and disorders,” “rest from any commotion,” “freedom from terror,” “silence,” etc. Jüergen Dedring has defined peace as the absence of war.¹ Peace has remained a persistent theme in the religious and secular traditions throughout history. In Eastern Religions one finds a strong emphasis on links between a spiritual life and action for social justice. The cherished values of these religions include justice, equity, non-violence, concern for the well-being of others and compassion among living beings. It is believed that tranquility in the inner state of mind and harmonious interpersonal relationships contribute to universal peace. Native American and African tribal cultures exhibit peace in the practice of non-exploitation of nature. The Old Testament and Bible maintain that swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Greek philosophers conceptualized a peaceful world in terms of a lack of civil disturbances. During Roman and Medieval Periods, peace implied stable relationship among units of society that lead to the control of organized violence. Enlightenment thinkers John Locke (17th century) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (18th century) viewed war as unnecessary and believed that social contracts could prevent violence. Pacifist anarchists like Leo Tolstoy considered peace as a cherished human value and held the state apparatus responsible for organizing both oppression and violence. Socialists Movements claimed that peace could be obtained in a classless society.²

In Political Science and International Relations peace is generally conceptualized in terms of negative peace and positive peace. While negative peace implies the absence of war, positive peace refers to the presence of social and economic justice. In the words of Kenneth Boulding, “On the positive side, peace signifies a condition of good management, orderly resolution of conflict, harmony associated with mature relationships, gentleness, and love. On the negative side, it is

¹Juergen Dedring, *Recent Advances in Peace and Conflict Research: A Critical Survey* (London: Sage Publications, 1976).

²Chandrashekhar Rao (edited) *Peace and Conflict Studies, MPSE-006*, Course Book for PG in Political Science. IGNOU, (New Delhi: IGNOU, 2012), 12-13.



conceived as the absence of something—the absence of turmoil, tension, conflict, and war.”³

Islam holds peace in high esteem. The very terms ‘*Islam*’ and ‘*Iman*’ signify peace. Another important term in Arabic denoting peace is *sulh*. It is the root word of *Islāh*, meaning improvement and development. This signifies an important linkage between peace and development, that is, peace is by nature progressive and must lead to development; otherwise it cannot be peace.⁴ The term *sulh* has been used in the Qur’ān to convey the concept of peace.⁵ The subject noun of *sulh* is *muslih* meaning ‘peacemaker,’ the plural is *muslihūn*. The latter has been used in the Qur’ān as an antonym of the wrongdoers and corruptors. A verse reads as, “and when they are told not to commit wrongdoing and corruption on earth they respond, ‘but we are only *muslihūn* (peacemakers).”⁶ Thus, in the Qur’ānic discourse corruption and peacemaking stand opposed to each other. Peacemakers are the agents of good engaged in righteous acts whereas wrongdoers are those who defy and fight the cause of peace.⁷ The emphasis laid by the Qur’ān on peace can be gauged from the verse which reads as, “And your Lord would never destroy towns wrongfully while (as if) their people were *muslimūn* (peacemakers).”⁸

The Islamic conception of peace begins with its attribution as a Divine name as the Arabic word *Salām*, meaning peace, is one of the ninety-nine (99) beautiful names of Allah.⁹ There are many references to peace (*salām*, *silm*, *sulh*) in the Qur’an that make it all the more evident that peace constitutes an important message of Islam.¹⁰ These references make it clear that peace in Islam transcends the negative understanding—the absence of war, oppression or tyranny; it permeates the whole existence of human beings in both their individual as well as social life. “It actually refers to a process in which human beings strive to establish foundations for interacting with God’s creation—human and non-human alike—in harmony and to institute just social, economic and political structures where they can fulfill their potential.”¹¹ Such an understanding of peace necessitates a condition of both internal

³Kenneth Boulding, *Stable Peace* (USA: University of Texas Press, 1978), 3.

⁴S. M. Farid Mirbagheri, *War and Peace in Islam: A Critique of Islamic(ist) Political Discourses* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83.

⁵Qur’ān: al-Hujurāt 49:09.

⁶al-Baqarah, 02:11.

⁷S. M. Farid Mirbagheri, *War and Peace in Islam: A Critique of Islamic(ist) Political Discourses*, 84.

⁸Qur’ān: Hūd 11:117.

⁹al-Hashr 59:23.

¹⁰al-i-Imran 3:83; an-Nisa 4:58; al-Maeda 5:8; Yunus 10:25; an-Nahl 16:90; an-Nisa 4:11; ash-Shura 42:15; al-Hadīd 57:25.

¹¹A. Kadayifci-Orellana, *A Standing on an Isthmus: Islamic Narratives on War and Peace in Palestine* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), cf. “Understanding an Islamic Framework for



and external order encompassing both individual and social spheres as “the individual must be endowed with the necessary qualities to make peace an enduring reality, not only in the public sphere but also in the private domain.”¹²

Despite being merely the absence of war, Islam projects peace as an ideal state of inward and outward equilibrium and harmony that can be realized through a persistence struggle against the destabilizing factors of individual and collective peace like selfishness, arrogance, envy, racism, exploitation of any kind, social injustice. “Peace through equity and justice is a cardinal objective of Islam, often championed by Muslim intellectuals and the vast majority of ordinary Muslims.”¹³

The Qur’ān designates the Muslims as a community of the ‘middle path’ (*ummatah wasatun*) which, together with its parallel concept of ‘mutual recognition’ (*ta’aruf*) for friendship, visualises Muslims as the agents and facilitators of peace. In the Muslim historical narrative, Islam is understood to have been a progressive, tolerant, and civilising force with binding rules constraining injustice and wanton violence. Islam’s self-identity as a “religion of peace” is based on the premise that Islam challenges the root causes of human violence.¹⁴

In the Qur’ān, the paradise or *Jannah* has been termed as *Dār al-Salām*, meaning the abode of peace¹⁵ The first human beings, Adam and Eve, lived in peace in their original abode until they were tempted by Satan. After Adam and Eve became victims of the Satan’s temptation, they (along with the Satan) were asked to descend to earth and it was declared that for a prescribed period of time they have to live their lives on the earth while remaining enemies to one another.¹⁶ Moreover, the Qur’ān declares in unequivocal terms that Satan only intends to incite enmity and hatred among humankind.¹⁷ Thus, “peace is a Divine condition of existence as experienced in Paradise whilst enmity and war are attributes of earthly affairs as the direct result of satanic deeds.”¹⁸ Again, the Qur’ānic discourse asserts repeatedly that those who will be declared worthy of Paradise in the final judgement will be welcomed by the greetings of peace (*salām*) by the angels and they will also greet one another with the same.¹⁹ What else is needed to glorify peace than the Qur’ānic statement that the people of Paradise will be greeted by Almighty Allah Himself with

Peacebuilding,” Accessed December, 27 2016, <<http://policy.islamic-relief.com/portfolio/understanding-an-islamic-framework-for-peacebuilding>>.

¹²Ibrahim Kalin, “Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition,” in *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Autumn 2005), 333.

¹³Mohammad Hashim Kamali, “Peace in the Islamic Tradition: One Vision, Multiple Pathways,” in *Islam and Civilizational Renewal 7:2* (Malaysia: IAIS, April 2016), 157.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁵Qur’ān: Yunus 10:25.

¹⁶al-Baqara 02:36; al- Arāf 07:24.

¹⁷al-Maeda 05:91.

¹⁸S. M. Farid Mirbagheri, 82.

¹⁹Qur’ān: az-Zumar 39:73.



the same word ‘peace (be upon you).’²⁰ Thus, it becomes all the clearer that peace is the condition intended for humankind by their Creator in eternity.

The *sūfi* understanding of peace is focused on an internal quest within each and every one. The outer peace cannot be realized at all unless the internal peace within every human being is nurtured. The UNESCO Charter rightly maintains, “That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed.”²¹ One who fails to achieve peace within him/her cannot be expected to deliver the same to others. “This peace within also resonates peace with our Maker, peace with the Universal Wisdom, with the entire Creation and with the beauty and the majesty of life in all its varieties.”²² Rumi states:

*Make peace with this father, abandon defiance so that the world
May appear to thee as a carpet of gold
Then Resurrection will become thy present state
Heaven and earth will be transfigured before thee, so straight
Since I am at peace with this Father, day and night
This world is like Paradise in my sight
At every moment a new form and a new beauty comes my way
So that from seeing the new (visions) ennui dies away.*²³

The concept of peace is intertwined with that of nonviolence. In the modern times, as violence has engulfed the whole world, peace can be realized only when nonviolence is not only advocated but also followed with full zeal and rigor. Nonviolence is defined as “a set of attitudes, actions, or behaviors intended to persuade the other side to change its opinions, perceptions and actions.”²⁴ It has become indispensable for sustainable peace building efforts. Martin Luther King Jr. identified the major principles of nonviolence as being physically non-aggressive, but spiritually dynamically aggressive; as not humiliating the opponent, but persuading the opponent and facilitating change through new understanding and awareness of moral shame to construct beloved communities; as directing its forces against the evil rather than against persons who are caught in these forces; as seeking to avoid both external physical and internal spiritual violence; and finally, as being based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice.²⁵

²⁰Qur’ān, Yāsīn 36:58.

²¹*Basic Texts*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2014 Edition), Accessed December 28, 2016
<<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002269/226924e.pdf#page=6>>.

²²S. M. Farid Mirbagheri, 83.

²³Rumi, *Masnavi*, Book IV, lines 3261–4.

²⁴M. Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace-building in Islamic Theory and Practice* (University Press of Florida: 2003), 14.

²⁵Martin Luther King Jr., “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” in *Christian Century*, vol. 6, (February 1957):165-167; A. Kadayifci-Orellana, “Religion, Violence and the Islamic Tradition of Nonviolence” *The Turkish Yearbook*, Vol. xxxiv, 37.



The Islamic teachings of peace and nonviolence were put into practice by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the best possible way. He is reported to have said that “the best among humankind is he who is the most beneficial for others.”²⁶ Again he asserts that, “The best among humankind is he from whom good is expected and evil unexpected, while the worst among mankind is he from whom neither goodness is expected nor safety from his evil ensured.”²⁷ “A Muslim is he who safeguards others from the evil of his tongue and hands.”²⁸ It implies that a real Muslim inflicts harm on others neither verbally nor physically. The Prophet (SAW) did not emphasize on peace only verbally but his own conduct epitomized the practice of peacemaking. His attitude towards peace and his diplomacy can be justifiably termed as “the reconciliation of hearts.”²⁹ Troger states that “coming to terms with adversaries and enemies and the contractual guaranteeing of agreements were cornerstones of [the Prophet’s (SAW)] policy.”³⁰

3. Wahiduddin Khān on Peace and Nonviolence in Islam

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is an Islamic spiritual scholar who has adopted peace as the mission of his life. Known for his Gandhian views, he considers non-violence as the only method to achieve success. Internationally recognized for his contributions to world peace, he has received, among others, the Demiurgus Peace International Award, the Padma Bhushan, the Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavna Award and the National Citizen's Award. A recent book, *The 500 Most Influential Muslims of 2009* by Georgetown University, Washington DC, has named him “Islam’s Spiritual Ambassador to the world.” His approach, the book points out, is “popular among Indians, both Muslim and non-Muslim.” Born in Azamgarh in 1925, the Maulana was educated in a traditional seminary. From his early years, he showed a voracious appetite for modern knowledge, spending entire days in the library. As a result, he became well versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. His extensive research led him to conclude that the need of the hour was to present Islamic teachings in the style and language of the post-scientific era.³¹

Wahiduddin Khan is a staunch advocate of peace and nonviolence so much so that he can be rightly regarded as ‘pacifist par excellence.’ He has written extensively on these issues as is evident from his books like *The Prophet of Peace*, *The Age of Peace*, *Islam and World Peace* as well as a number of scholarly articles

²⁶*Kanzul Ummal*

²⁷*Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah*, “Kitab al Zuhd,” Vol. 8, Hadith no. 127

²⁸Muslim ibn-e-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, “Kitab al-Imān,” Hadith no. 41.

²⁹K. W. Troger, “Peace and Islam: In Theory and Practice,” *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, 1:1, (1990): 17.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹“Maulana Wahiduddin Khan,” Accessed December 28, 2016.

<<http://www.cpsglobal.org/mwk>>.



presented in various national and international conferences as well as published in different issues of his monthly magazine *Al-Risalah*. He regards Islam and violence as contradictory terms. He says:

It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that *prima facie* it stands rejected. The fact that violence is not sustainable in the present world is enough to support the belief that violence as a principle is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam. Islam claims to be an eternal religion, and an eternal religion cannot have a principle in its scheme which is not sustainable in successive periods of human history. Any attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts to casting doubt on the very eternity of the Islamic religion.³²

Khan advocates reconciliation that is integral to peace. Drawing on the Qur'ānic statement that 'reconciliation is the best', he regards it as the key to success and achievement that would be simply impossible by having recourse to violence.³³ Inspired by the Prophetic (*SAW*) *Sunnah* of choosing the easier option, Khan favors peaceful activism to violent one arguing that the former is the easier option, while the latter is the harder one.³⁴

One of the characteristics of Khan's peace discourse is his presentation of Prophet Muhammad's (*SAW*) mission as a peaceful mission. He heavily draws upon various events from the Prophet's (*SAW*) prophetic life period and substantiates his stand on peace with the same to illustrate, Khan argues that despite the fact that *Tawhid* (monotheism) constitutes the fundamental message of Islam, the Prophet (*SAW*) avoided confrontation with the polytheists of Makkah regarding the presence of idols in the very *Kabah* for a long period of his Prophetic life (*SAW*) (20 years out of 23). The Prophet (*SAW*) along with his companions even offered *umrah* (the lesser pilgrimage) and circumambulated the *Kabah* while the idols were still present there. To establish and maintain peace, the Prophet (*SAW*) accepted the one-sided conditions of his opponents and concluded the peace treaty of *Hudaibiya* with them. Likewise, in 627 CE, the Prophet (*SAW*) ordered a long and deep trench to be dug around the city of Madinah creating a buffer between the Muslims and their opponents, in order to avoid direct confrontation. Khan refers to these events to argue for a peaceful atmosphere that is conducive for the spread of Islamic message aiming at a spiritual revolution.³⁵

Khan vehemently rejects terrorism arguing that Islam does not allow for terrorism under any circumstances. Claiming that Islam is altogether a peaceful message, he regards the term 'Islamic terrorism' as a misnomer. He, very disdainfully, equates the term with 'pacifist terrorism.' He argues that the wars

³²Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam and World Peace* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2015), 7.

³³*Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, 10-11.



permitted in the Qur'ān and waged by the Prophet (SAW) were meant to end the religious persecution. In modern times, he regards war solely as the prerogative of a duly established government, if necessitated by the circumstances. He says:

No matter what the conditions, it is improper and impermissible for non-state actors, including both individuals and groups, to adopt violent methods. If an individual or group has grounds for complaint, there are only two legitimate courses that can be adopted. One is to seek to resolve the problem using peaceful means. The other is to leave the matter with the courts or the government so that it can be solved according to the law.³⁶

Any discussion on Khan's peace discourse will be a handicap until his views on *jihad* are not mentioned. He views *jihad* as a continuous life long struggle of a believer and differentiates it from the terrorism. He regards *dawah* as an aspect of *jihad*. He refers to several prophetic traditions as well as historical events like the treaty of *Hudaibiyah* to establish that peacemaking constitutes an important *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). He is critical of the contemporary armed struggles in the name of *jihad*. He maintains that "no movement can turn into a *jihad* simply because its flag-bearers give it that label. An action can be considered an Islamic *jihad* only if and when it is fully in accordance with the conditions that Islam has laid down in this regard."³⁷ Drawing on Qur'ān and Prophetic (SAW) sayings, Khan includes such actions as peaceful communication of the Islamic message, taking proper care of one's parents, and resisting one's base desires for the goodwill of Allah, into the fold of *jihad*. Thus, he views *jihad* in a wider context rather than in the narrow sense of armed struggle of Muslims against their opponents. Khan is supportive of only defensive war in Islam termed as *qital*.³⁸ He writes:

However, in its extended sense, *qital* can also be called *jihad*. But as Islam sets certain conditions for the proper performance of all actions, similarly, there are necessary conditions for defensive war. For instance, it is an established principle in Islam that war can be waged only by a properly established government. Individuals and non-governmental organizations are definitely not permitted to wage an armed struggle. To them, Islam allows only peaceful struggle.³⁹

Grappling with the question of oppression, Khan supersedes every limit of pacifism by regarding as a part of God's creation plan. He considers oppression as a misuse of God-given freedom on the part of the oppressor and is suggestive to the oppressed of using his God-given intellect to convert the situation of exploitation into an opportunity. He stresses that any struggle against oppression should be judged in the light of its results and it should be ensured that no greater harm is produced while fighting for the eradication of a lesser evil. He likens the situation of

³⁶Ibid., 23.

³⁷Ibid., 31.

³⁸Qur'an: al-Hajj 22:39.

³⁹Wahiduddin Khan, *The Prophet of Peace* (Haryana, India: Penguin Books, 2009), 88.



oppression and exploitation to that of a thorn on a rose stem which cannot be eradicated but care can be taken to avoid its harm.⁴⁰

The philosophy of patience constitutes the bedrock of Khan's discourse on peace and nonviolence. He views patience (*sabr*) as an essential value that supports nonviolence. According to him, more than 200 verses of the Qur'ān are focused on patience while there are a number of indirect references too. He maintains that patience enables one to find a positive and successful solution to a problem.⁴¹ He further writes:

The tree of success always grows on the land of patience. History tells us that the majority of the world's pacifists have failed to achieve their aims, the commonest reason being that while they recognized the value of peace, they ignored the value of patience. Without exercising patience, it is impossible to launch a peace movement with any hope of success.⁴²

For Wahiduddin Khan the greatest problem of the Muslim world is that it has forgotten the *Sunnah* of non-violence and resorted to violence. This resulted in losing what had been gained before. The contemporary realities require a return to the principle nonviolence of the Prophet, to rejuvenate the *Dawah*, the peaceful struggle for the propagation of Islam. However, Muslims today, he observes, are easily provoked and become violent at anything against their way of thinking, or even not to their liking.⁴³ Although not all Muslims are involved directly in violence, he states that according to Islam, keeping silent makes them indirectly responsible. He criticizes the modern *ulama*, intellectuals, and leaders of movements for adopting a violent narrative, and spreading this narrative among the young populations. This violent mentality, he argues, is responsible for having alienated them from their neighbors, and the only way for them to change this situation is to 'return' to non-violence.⁴⁴

Wahiduddin Khan's book, *The Age of Peace*, is reflective of the fact that he is not only a staunch advocate of peace rather he is obsessed with it. One finds that there is no alternative to peace in his ideology. The subtitle of the book "Peace is the only culture for both man and the universe," is undoubtedly catching. Moreover, it signifies that for Khan, peace is not only an abstract concept but a culture that Maulana strives to establish through his peace literature. In this book, Wahiduddin Khan has discussed about peace and nonviolence from a multifaceted perspective. It includes discussions on pacifism, peace and justice, exploring peace opportunities in

⁴⁰Ibid., 113.

⁴¹Wahiduddin Khan, "Non-Violence and Islam," paper prepared for the Symposium: *Islam and Peace in the 21st Century* (Washington D.C. February 6-7, 1998), 1.

⁴²Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam and World Peace*, 30.

⁴³Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴A. Kadayifci-Orellana, *A Standing on an Isthmus: Islamic Narratives on War and Peace in Palestine*, 49.



the present age, policy of mutual non-interference, peaceful activism, and living with a balance between idealism and pragmatism, Islam as a religion of peace, etc.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵Wahiduddin Khan, *The Age of Peace* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2015), 192.