

Generosity in Islam : An Analytical Discussion

Mohammad Zafar Ullah*

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Abstract

Generosity is a fundamental principle in Islam. Islam encourages generosity and promotes its adoption in all aspects of life, including religious practices, rituals, attitudes, transactions, and behavior. Islam strongly opposes extremism in any form. However, certain acts of extremism by a small group of individuals provide an opportunity for critics to associate extremism with Islam. This study analyzes these issues in light of Shariah texts, examining whether Islam has any connection with extremism and how its values of generosity and moderation refute such claims. The study employs analytical and descriptive approaches to assess the data. The findings reveal that Islam is a religion that fosters generosity in all aspects, firmly rejects extremism, and has no fundamental connection with extremist ideologies. The study offers both supporters and critics of Islam an understanding of its true essence and enables sincere Muslims to reject extremism in all areas of life.

Introduction

Generosity in Islam refers to following the path of moderation, bearing a broader view and mentality regarding *Shariah* affairs, avoiding rigidity and strictness in them, being tolerant and respectful towards other's views and doctrines, being forgiving and not being the avenger. On the contrary, extremism is quite opposite to generosity and moderation, which means holding an extreme view and ideology, not respecting and tolerating different views and faiths, going beyond a prescribed limit, etc. Islamic *Shariah* texts are affluent with admonitions to hold on to generosity. The Prophet (S.) of Islam, his companions and their pious successors also practiced and exemplified generosity and moderation in all their engagements and set glaring

* Professor, Department of Arabic, University of Chittagong. mzuacu@gmail.com

examples for the upcoming *Ummah*. This paper aims to explore the generous character, and moderate nature of Islam analyzing the *Shariah* texts and the glorious history of Islam which demonstrated generosity in abundance and opposes extremism in Islam.

Methodology

The method adopted here is descriptive and historical. But analytical approach is also adopted in a qualitative manner. The study is mainly based on Islamic Sharia text.

Review of Literature:

For the empirical purpose, we have studied many books and articles. From them the most relevant ones that we found are (i) Islamic Awakening between Extremism and Rejection and (ii) *Al Islam wal Unf*, by Dr. Yousuf al Qaradawi (iii) *Islam a Religion of Moderation or Extremism* by Thameem Ushama (iv) *Fatwa on Terrorism* and if books *Suicide Bombing* by Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri.

The main objective of the research is to demonstrate the Islamic perspective on generosity as well as the difference between Islam and Extremism.

The Meaning of Generosity

Generosity is a willingness to give help or support, especially more than what is usual or expected. Generosity is also the spirit and action of freely and frequently giving to others. It also can refer to an overall spirit of kindness like honesty and patience.

Generosity in Islam

Generosity in Islam thus denotes tolerance to other faith, doctrine, views and thought, not harming other's feelings, coexistence with differences in ideologies, forgiveness of other's fault, not finding fault with silly matters, and receptiveness to the extent of an acceptable level.

Generosity and tolerance are two special qualities of Allah (swt), the Highest. It is opposite to impatience, intolerance and narrow-mindedness, austerity, meanness, indolence. These things are disliked by Allah (swt). Those whose hearts are freed from vices are successful. Allah (swt) says,

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ - إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

“On that day, wealth and children (power) will not be of any use, but those who will come to Allah with hearts free of strife” (Qur’an, 26: 88-89).

Generosity has two phases: One is appreciable, indeed and another is blamable One is “*Mudarat*” which is synonymous with kindness and means treating one’s opponent well and gently and not violating any of his rights; rather, all his rights should be properly realized. Another is “*Mudahanat*”, i.e. showing laziness or laxity. That is, to consider creeds and ideals lightly, accepting or supporting the faults, mistakes and misguidance of others in order to please them. It is neither generosity nor moderation, rather, not meeting the minimum demand of Shariah, and hence, it is forbidden in the eyes of Islam and it is a very terrible form of hypocrisy. Due to a lack of proper Islamic knowledge and sometimes weakness of faith, many indulge in laxity in the name of generosity. Therefore, it is important to practice the correct identity and reality of these two widely.

Islam is a religion of harmony, generosity and tolerance. Generosity brings harmonious and peaceful coexistence while narrowness and meanness beget chaos, conflict and turmoil on the earth. Samuel Huntington says “The key reason for the clashes among civilizations in the future will be “Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance and Cynic assertiveness”. (Huntington, 1996). But the so-called Western and European civilization’s flag bearers are constantly intolerant towards other religions, preventing them from practicing their religion freely. In order to remove the smoke of confusion in such a situation, this article sheds light on the generosity and tolerance of Islam. The embodiment of generosity, Mohammad (S.) after starting preaching Islam in Mecca, the steam-roller of persecution of infidels came down. Possessing a big heart, the Prophet (S.) showed extreme patience and generosity and tolerated their torture and oppression.

Islam Rejects Forcefulness that Contradicts Generosity

Islam being a religion of generosity, rejects coercion in bringing faith. The Holy Qur’an makes it very clear to the believers that Islam forbids using force or coercion, or to put it another way, no believer can make someone else adopt a certain faith tradition or viewpoint. Islam was founded with a message for all of humanity. Hence, Muslims are advised to invite people to join them in their faith. However, the choice must be made deliberately and from the heart. The Qur’an states,

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

“And say, “The truth is from your Lord”: Let him who will believe, and let him who will reject (it).” (Qur’an, 18: 29)

Islam is also not opposed to other rituals and religious traditions, regardless of how absurd or incorrect they may be, Islam is a true belief system. Islam calls for respect for the ideologies and ceremonial of others. The Qur’an explicitly states:

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ فَلَا يُنَازِعُكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَاذْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُسْتَقِيمٍ - وَإِنْ جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ - اللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

“To every People have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow: let them not then dispute with thee on the matter, but do thou invite (them) to thy Lord: for thou art assuredly on the Right Way. If they do wrangle with thee, say, “Allah knows best what it is ye are doing.” Allah will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which ye differ.” (Qur’an, 22: 67-69)

Allah the Almighty has sent all the Prophets and Messengers with the responsibility of *Da’wah* (invitation) and *Tabligh* (preaching) to spread the truth, not to force a compulsory belief. He the Almighty says,

فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا إِنْ عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ

“And if they run away, We have not sent thee as a guard over them. Thy duty is but to convey (the Message).” (Qur’an, 42:48)

Allah the Almighty has given people the freedom of thought and the ability to make decisions. So nothing can be imposed on people. Allah (swt) says,

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error.”(Qur’an. 2:256.)

The Qur’an encouraged religious tolerance and freedom to the extent that it forbade its adherents from disparaging the deities of other religions. Allah (swt) says in the Qur’an,

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ

“And revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance.” (Qur’an, 6:108.)

We can thus see the Prophet (S.) and his companions minutely followed these scriptural instructions and never resorted to forceful behaviour in the way of propagation of Allah’s *Deen* or invitation to the non-believers.

Islam Asks to Approach the Opponent with Good

Islam, being a religion of generosity, wants its follower to face their adversaries with lenience, tolerance, and flexibility, not in a harsh and tough way. Allah (swt) commands them to repel the confusion and errors of erroneous people with the good, good advice, wisdom and best argumentation, not in an extreme way. Allah (swt) says in this regard,

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

“Invite to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious:” (Qur’an, 16:125.)

Elsewhere, commanding us to approach one with good, He (swt) says,

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it is with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury).” (Qur’an, 29:46.)

Every sect considers its ideology to be true and is satisfied with it as the Qur’an states,

كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

“Each party rejoicing in that which is with itself.” (Qur’an, 30: 32)

Of them, many religious ideologies, such as Islam, Christianity, etc. have missionary programs to propagate their beliefs and creed. And that is their right too. In that case, Islam urges its preachers to propagate it with wisdom and beautiful advice avoiding conflicts, slander and disregard. If there is a disagreement or difference of opinion with someone, with any other view and ideology, it should be explained nicely. Allah (swt) says,

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

“Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate!” (Qur’an, 41: 34).

Condemning such narrowness Allah (swt) says,

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

“And they say: “None shall enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian.” Those are their (vain) desires. Say: “Produce your proof if ye are truthful.” (Qur’an, 2: 111)

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَى عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

“The Jews say: “The Christians have naught (to stand) upon”; and the Christians say: “The Jews have naught (to stand) upon.” Yet they (profess to) study the (same) Book. Like unto their word is what those say who know not but Allah will judge between them in their quarrel on the Day of Judgment.” (Qur’an, 2:113).

Such generous approaches, as prescribed in *Shariah* texts, have aided in people’s better understanding of Islam and sheltered them under its soothing shadow throughout the ages.

Islam promotes forgiveness and generosity

Islamic generosity nature speaks of forgiveness, not revenge or retaliation until it brings any further casualty. In numerous places of the holy Qur’an, Allah (swt) put special stress on generosity and forgiveness. Giving us instructions on how we should be generous to non-harming disbelievers Allah (swt) says,

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

“Allah forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just.” (Qur’an, 60:8)

Allah (swt), who is forgiving and most gracious, loves and applauds those who forgive and show generosity towards one another. As a result, He orders believers to provide forgiveness to one another not only for the sins that man has committed against Allah (swt) but also for their interactions with other people, who

undoubtedly make mistakes and commit faults too. No matter how much our fellow humans have wronged us, Allah (swt) commands in the Qur'an that we should forgive them. As He (swt) said:

وَلَا يَأْتَلِ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give (aid) to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allah, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is forgiving and merciful.” (Qur'an, 24:22)

Praising a forgiving and generous-hearted believer Allah (swt) states,

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; - for Allah loves those who do good;” (Qur'an, 3:134)

Islam discourages revenge, for this makes one feel nothing but tortured and obsessed with retaliation, and one becomes imprisoned oneself in a negative and hard-hearted attitude.

Allah (swt) says,

وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةً مِثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ

“And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is (due) from Allah. Indeed, he does not like wrongdoers.” (Qur'an, 42:40)

This sort of generosity also has undeniably and unthinkably drawn public attention at all times.

The Prophet's (S.) Generosity and Forgiveness

The generosity and forgiveness shown by the Prophet Muhammad (S.) to his worst enemies who are non-believer in the history of humanity.

When the merciful, forgiving and generous Prophet (S.) was subjected to cruel torture by unbelievers in Ta'if while he was preaching Allah's Deen there, the angel Jibrail (A.) who was accompanying the angels of mountains visited him and asked him if he would destroy that territory by having a mountain fall upon them if he wanted. Even in this most heartbreaking situation, the compassionate Prophet (S.) modestly declined to punish them in this manner, saying,

“Rather, I hope that Allah will bring forth from their kinship someone who will worship Allah alone and will set no partner with Him.”¹

The compassionate Prophet (S.) prayed to Allah (swt) for the pardon of the unbelievers who stained his body with blood, and so that He would not punish them for the suffering they caused him. He (S.), wiping the blood on his forehead, said, “Oh my Lord! Forgive my people, for they do not know.”²

Allah’s Messenger (S.) adopted a marvelous humanitarian approach while preaching the religion and battling horrible brutality imposed upon him. He thereby provided the world with universal lessons of generosity. He and his disciples had endured unsounded oppression during the first 13 years of their stay in Makkah, but they never sought revenge on the offenders; instead, they tried to persuade the wrongdoers with open dialogue and forgiveness to turn them away from their wrongdoing. The Prophet (S.) himself gave the criminals medical attention when they were unwell. He was physically assaulted, beaten, and humiliated by the offenders before they left and he went home without retaliation or saying anything harsh.

The generosity he showed to the war prisoners is also unprecedented. The Prophet (S.) directed Muslims to treat captives so generously, to the degree that their captors would give them their bread while retaining the dates for themselves. Ibn Abbas (R.) said: “The Messenger of Allah (S.) commanded his companions to be generous to the prisoners on the day of Badr and they would give preference to them in meals over themselves.” Such was reported by Sa’eed Ibn Jubair (R.), A’ta, Al-Hasan, and Qatadah. Abu Aziz Ibn Umair (R.) himself gives testimony: he reported: “I was among the prisoners of war on the day of Badr. The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “I enjoin you to treat the captives well.” After I accepted Islam, I was among the Ansar and when their time of lunch or dinner arrived, they would take dates (cheap commodities) while I had been fed bread (costly commodities) due to the command of the Prophet.”³

Following the Battle of Badr, prisoners of war were taken inside. One of them was Al-Abbas, the Prophet’s uncle. The Prophet (S.) went in quest of a shirt since he was missing one and discovered that Abdullah Ibn Ubayy’s shirt was the right size. The

Prophet (S.) then handed it to Al-Abbas for him to wear while compensating Abdullah with his own shirt.

The Prophet (S.), the legcptomendary of generosity and forgiveness who by declaring unprecedented amnesty for the Quraysh leaders, including the famous enemies of Makkah, on the day of the conquest of Makkah, changed the history of humanity.⁴

On the day of victory over Makkah, when the Holy Prophet (S.) entered Makkah in a heroic mood, fear spread among the Quraysh thinking the perceived revenge for their so-long persecution. But the generous Prophet (S.) did not show the slightest desire for revenge. Rather, he announced an amnesty for his bitter enemies. The Messenger of Allah (S.) said to the Quraish, "O Quraish! How do you think I will treat you? They said, "We expect you to treat us well. You are a generous brother and a generous nephew. He said, "I am telling you the same thing that Yusuf (A.) said to his brothers - *"I have no complaint against you today"* Go free all of you."⁵ Even when Sa'd Ibn Obadah (R.) seeing Abu Sufiyan, said, "O Abu Sufian, today is the day of fighting and slaughter. Today is the day that haram becomes halal. Today Allah has humiliated the Quraish. On hearing that, Prophet (S.) stopped him and said, No! Today is the day of forgiveness and mercy, today Allah has honoured the Quraysh."⁶

The historian Gibbon rightly said about this amnesty, "In the long history of the world, there is no instance of magnanimity and forgiveness which can approach those of Muhammad when all his enemies lay at his feet and he forgave them one and all." "Muhammad (S.) set an example of generosity and forgiveness by forgiving all his enemies, which has no other example in the long history of the world".⁷

The Messenger of Allah (S.) even forgave Abu Sufyan, a known enemy of Islam. Not only that, but he also declared, "Whoever enters the house of Abu Sufyan is safe. He who closes the door of his house is safe. He who throws the weapon (self-confessed) is also safe".⁸

Generosity Followed by the Prophet's (S.) Companions

Generosity and tolerance showed to different faith systems and non-Muslim *Zimmis* were not restricted to the Prophet's (S.) time. All of the Prophet's (S.) successors, as

well as the Rightly Guided Caliphs, continued to provide the non-Muslim citizens complete recognition.

Hazrat Abu Bakr (R.) used to have a sympathetic and tolerant attitude towards the followers of different religions from the past. After Askiy for his opinion on the prisoners of war of Badr, he agreed to release them in exchange for ransom.⁹

Iran, Iraq, Syria, Rome, and Yemen all fell under the control of Islam during his reign. Due to tribalism, the rulers of these areas oppressed and deprived the residents of their rights. The generals deployed to those areas were given explicit orders by Abu Bakr (R.) to treat every member of the conquered country equally, regardless of race, religion, or caste.

His generosity towards non-believers is demonstrated in the arrangement he negotiated with Christians in the Hira region of Iraq. He guaranteed the safety of the non-Muslim *Zimmi's* lives and property under this deal. In addition, he reduced the tax amount and conditions without adding more *Jizia* to them.¹⁰

Hazrat 'Umar(R.): During his reign, the Islamic caliphate expanded from the borders of the Indian subcontinent to Egypt and Syria. He established a welfare state by strengthening the bonds of harmony between different races and religions living in different parts of this vast empire under his rule. The conquered areas' The start with the non-Muslim citizens were treated with such generosity and reverence that they felt safer and far freer at that time than they had previously. Montgomery Watt admitting this said, "The Christians were probably better off as *Zimmis* (under protection) under Muslim-Arab rulers than they had been under the Byzantine Greeks".¹¹

From 'Umar's (R.) letter to Abu Ubayda (R.), the then-Governor of Syria, which stated, "You must forbid the Muslims from oppressing and harming their non-Muslim citizens and devouring their wealth except that which is due,"¹² the level of generosity accorded to non-Muslim citizens can be understood. He would instruct his officials to treat non-Muslim subjects with the utmost care and further advise them to give them tax breaks in charging and collecting taxes. 'Umar (R.) once saw that his tax collectors were forcing the non-Muslim people to stand in a line in the heat while their taxes were being collected during his visit to Syria. At this, he said,

“Exempt them from this and do not burden them with what they cannot bear. For I did hear the Messenger of Allah (S.) saying, “Do not inflict pain on people, for those who inflict pain on people in this life Allah will inflict torment upon them on the Day of Resurrection.”¹³

Ghalib Abdul Kafi al-Qurashi said, “This is the generosity of Islam. What can be more examples of generosity than this? No rule or ruler is capable of treating another race and another religion in this way” (al-Qurashi, 1983)

Hazrat Uthman (R.) minutely followed the Prophet (S.) and his previous upright caliphs when it came to governing the nation. The adherents of numerous religions coexisted in harmony in this vast region. This generous caliph respected the *Zimmis* fittingly and guarded their fundamental rights. Imam Abu Ubayd, al-Baladhuri etc. have cited the following words of Uthman’s (R.) official order-

“I hereby command you to deal with the non-Muslim citizens in an excellent manner, for they are a folk with a complete guarantee (of protection and their rights).”¹⁴

He sent letters of instructions to the generals, revenue agents, and provincial governors after taking over the caliphate. These decrees provide clear evidence of his generosity towards non-Muslims and the emergence of inter-communal harmony.

Hazrat Ali (R.): Non-Muslim citizens continued to receive the same generosity and privileges throughout his reign as they enjoyed during the Prophet’s (S.) time and that of three former caliphs.

A delegation of Christians from Najran and Iraq, welcomed him as caliph. They wanted his vocal endorsement and formal consent before departing for their native Najran in Yemen. Despite his disagreement with their demands, Ali (R.) consented to a covenant that would guarantee their safety. Despite the fact that he thought their requests were absurd, he remained cautious about respecting their rights. He sent a letter to them in which he wrote:

“In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind. This is to the inhabitants of Najran from *Amirul Muminin* Abdullah Ali Ibn Abi Talib. You have brought to me a letter from the Prophet (S.) regarding the protection of your life and property.

The rights that are given to you by the Prophet (S.), Abu Bakr (R.), and ‘Umar (R.) would remain unchanged.”¹⁵

Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (R.): After the conquest of Damascus in 14 Hijri, Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (R.), the general, concluded a treaty with the people of Damascus granting religious freedom to non-Muslims. The agreement is as follows: “Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim.” Khalid bin Walid (R.) gave this pledge to the people of Damascus when he entered the city. He gave them the security of life, wealth and church. The wall of their city shall not be destroyed, and no dwelling shall be taken for them to dwell in. In this regard, Allah, His Messenger, the Caliphs and the common believers will be responsible for them. If they pay *Jizya*, as usual, they will be treated well.”¹⁶

Hazrat Omar bin Abdul Aziz (Rh.): Not only the freedom of religious practice but also non-Muslims were even provided financial security. Omar bin Abdul Aziz (Rh.) wrote to the governor of Basra:

“See to it yourself that among the non-Muslim citizens who have become old and incapacitated and who have no means of income, you give them the money they need from the state treasury.”¹⁷

These are a few accounts from numerous examples of generosity that the companions of the Prophet (S.) and their pious successors showed to the people irrespective of faith, castes and creeds. This generosity could act upon making a better world for people of all classes to live in peace and harmony and lessening ethnic and religious conflicts to a large extent.

The Generosity of Islam Evident in Framing the Charter of Medina

The “Constitution or the Charter of Medina,” or in Arabic, ميثاق المدينة, *Mithaq al-Medinah*, which served as the foundation for a multi-religious Islamic kingdom in Medina (Lecker, 2014) is the most distinctive example of the Prophet Muhammad’s (S.) tolerance for other religions and generosity towards the people of other faith systems. With the migration to Medina in 622 CE, the Prophet’s (S.) role now began as the political head of a state, regulated by the precept of Islam. In order to preserve harmony and stability in a society that had previously been ripped apart by decades of tribal conflict, a state of flawless laws in governance was necessary. Within this

state, polytheists, Muslims, Christians and Jews must coexist in peace with one another. For this reason, the Prophet (S.) drafted a ‘constitution’ defining the obligations of all residents of Medina, their obligations to one another, and certain limitations put on everyone. Every community was obligated to abide by its provisions, and any violation of them was viewed as treason. All were regarded as a common nation i.e. the members and citizens of Medina society, regardless of religion, race, or family background.¹⁸

The generosity of the Prophet (S.) towards other faith traditions is distinctive here in that he made a deal that tried to ensure the harmonious co-existence of different faiths, allowing each faith to make decisions about their own concerns in accordance with their own scriptures as long as they did not conflict with specific provisions of the constitution (Abdulsalam, 2006). The “Charter of Medina” thus, set a shining example of generosity, tolerance and open-mindedness for world humanity.

Moderation and generosity vs extremism

Moderation is one of the universal values that Islam attached great importance to. Literally, it refers to the idea of a middle position between two opposites or two extremes. The more accurate word for moderation in Arabic is ‘*wasatiyyah*’. The antonym is ‘*tatarruf*’ or ‘*Ghulu*’ which means extremism, excess, and inclination toward the peripheries. The source root and its derivations all have the same meaning: that is, going beyond the limit and measure. Having extreme religious and political beliefs is another way to characterize extremism. It tries to force one’s ideology and point of view on others and is intolerant of views that are in opposition to it. The extremist is characterized by adhering to his religion in an extremely strict and severe manner (‘*al-tashaddud*’, another synonym of ‘*tatarruf*’).

He also exhibits harshness and impoliteness in his relationships with others. (‘*al-unf*,’ another synonym of ‘*tatarruf*’). He is also known for going far and above what is necessary when it comes to performing religious acts.

The term ‘*wasatiyyah*’ is derived from the Qur’an, surah al-Baqarah, verse 143 where Allah (swt) characterized the Muslim as “*ummatan wasatan*”. Muslim Ummah is aspired to be the middle Ummah due to its credibility in becoming a witness over the nations. This means that the Muslim *Ummah* or community is the

‘justly balanced community’ or ‘middle nation’ or ‘moderate nation. Allah (swt) made these followers of the Prophet (S.) a moderate nation. He said.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

“Thus, We have made you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves.” (Qur’an, 2:143)

The Muslim exegetes have presented varied interpretations of the meaning of *ummatan wasatan* and the majority of them interpreted *wasatan* vefering to the fairness and generous dealing. The principle of *wasatiyya* in Islam is a key element for curbing extremism and promoting generosity. Islam is a moderate faith, not an extremist one. In a well-known saying, the Prophet of Islam (S.) urged Muslims to always look for the middle ground rather than the extremes on each side. This balance in religion shows that one can neither exaggerate; nor transgress Allah’s (swt) restrictions nor does completely ignore them. All Muslims are advised to exercise moderation in any things that are permissible, but Islam consistently, and categorically condemns all manifestations of extremism, including ‘*ghulu*’ (excess), ‘*tanatu*’ (zealotry) and ‘*tashaddud*’ (extreme practices) in its tenets, beliefs, and practices. These types of extremism are, therefore, not permitted by Islamic teachings, which recognize extremism as morally flawed and useless because it goes against human nature.

This verse cited above demonstrates that regardless of variations in viewpoints, interpretations, or circumstances, the Muslim community is a moderate nation. And they should be moderate in all aspects. Even though one may display enthusiasm and ardent desire for religious rites or prayers, he is not allowed to be extreme or obsessed but follows the middle course as stipulated. Therefore, it is demonstrated by the aforementioned verses that the Muslims as a people employ moderate methods in all their dealings and do not engage in immodesty, extremism, laxity, or lackadaisical behaviour. If they proceed in this manner, they will lose their status as “moderate nations” and turn to extremist communities like the Jewish and Christian, for example. The Prophet (S.) is reported to have adopted ease or flexibility as a method in his life.

Our holy Prophet (S.) demonstrated this moderation in his practices. An example of such a practice is highlighted in a tradition which states: “Narrated A’yshah (R.), she says, “Whenever the Prophet (S.) was given a choice between two things, he used to select the easier of the two as long as it was not sinful; nevertheless, if it was sinful, he would remain far from it”.¹⁹

Jabir ibn Samurah (R.) reported:

“I was praying with the Messenger of Allah (S.) and his prayer was of moderate length and his sermon was of moderate length.”²⁰

As Islam commands its followers to hold on to moderation and adopt a middle course in every sphere of life, so does it prohibit them from coming extreme. Because both immoderation and extremism are contrary the generosity and hence, in Islam, there is no room for them.

Allah (swt) warned us about not going extreme which may lead us astray. He says,

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا أَهْوَاءَ قَوْمٍ قَدْ ضَلُّوا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَضَلُّوا عَنْ سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ

“Say: “O people of the Book! exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by,- who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the even way. ”.” (Qur’an 5:77.)

In the aforesaid verses, the word ‘*Ghulu*’ has been used to refer to falling into extremism. That is, going beyond the limit in following one’s evil desires and straying from the right way thereby.

People of books deviated from the straight path because of extremism. Similarly, if we do the same, we must receive their fate.

Allah (swt) further says,

وَلَا تَطْغَوْا فِيهِ فَيَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبِي

“But commit no transgression therein, lest My wrath should justly descend on you.” (Qur’an, 20: 81,)

The Prophet (S.) also cautioned us about extremism least it should lead to destruction. He (S.) said

“Beware of going beyond the bounds of the religion (falling into extremism). The people before you were destroyed by going to extremes in the religion.”²¹

The holy Prophet (S.) advised us to hold on to generosity and take ease in religious practices too, and not to be rough and tough in this regard. He (S.) said

“No one overburdens himself in the religion (with) hard except that it overcomes him (and he will not be able to continue in that manner).”²²

Extremism in Ibadah can take the form of forcing oneself or others to do something that Allah, the Lawgiver, has not deemed obligatory. This specifically relates to actions of devotion. The Prophetic Tradition attests to this: “Anas ibn Malik narrates: Once the

The Prophet (S.) entered the Mosque and saw a rope stretched between its two pillars. “What is this rope?” he inquired. “This rope is for Zainab, who holds it (to maintain standing for the prayer) when she feels fatigued,” the Prophet (S.) stated. Don’t use it. Remove the rope from here. You should pray for as long as you feel energetic, and then sit down if you get exhausted.”²³

Extremism can also take the shape of forbidding the good deeds that Allah (swt) has approved of or opposing simplicity. The following Prophetic tradition makes this clear:

“Anas (R.) said that a few of the associates of Allah’s messenger (S.) questioned his (the Prophet’s) wives over the actions he performed privately. Each of the groups made the following determinations: “I will not marry women,” “I will not eat meat,” and “I will not lie down (sleep).” When the Prophet (S.) heard about this, he praised Allah (swt), glorified Him, and asked: “What has become of these people that they say this and that, when I, by Allah, observe prayer and sleep too; I observe fast and postpone observing them also; I marry women similarly.” And whoever rejects my Sunnah (Patterns) is not from me.”²⁴

Discussion

In fact, there is no room in Islam to build a wall of discrimination between the majority and the minority of the citizens of the same country. In an Islamic state, Muslims and non-Muslims, religious majorities and minorities have equal civil rights. In an Islamic state, even non-Muslim citizens are protected to a full degree of

personal freedom. The formula that the Islamic jurists have decided at this stage is, “The rights and facilities that are for us are also for them and the responsibilities that are on us are also on them.”

Ali (R.) said, “Non-Muslim citizens pay *Jizya* so that their wealth and blood will be protected like the wealth and blood of our Muslim citizens”²⁵

The Messenger of Allah (S.) warned against killing the *Dhimmi* (covenant) for no reason, saying, “Whoever kills a *Dhimmi* (covenant) will not even get the fragrance of Paradise, although his fragrance can be found even from a distance of forty years’ journey.”²⁶

He (S.) also said, “Whoever kills a *Dhimmi* (covenant) without committing any crime, Allah will forbid Paradise for him”.²⁷

In an Islamic state, a non-Muslim citizen enjoys the freedom of expression and freedom of worship.²⁸

In the treaty which the Prophet (S.) made with the people of Najran, it was said:

“The lives, religion, land, wealth, their presence and absence, their animals and their messengers of Najran and its surroundings will be under the protection of Allah and the responsibility of Allah’s Messenger Muhammad (S.) can Neither their current status can be changed, nor their rightful dues can be interfered with. No priest of their church shall be removed from his priesthood, no clergyman from his office, no manager from his management, whether whatever is under them be less or more.”²⁹

Such is the manifestation of generosity in Islam that the Qur’an enjoins liberal treatment of polytheist parents when they strive to lead Muslim children to polytheism and disbelief, saying,

وَصَاحِبُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا

“Yet bear them company in this life with justice (consideration).” (Qur’an 31:15)

Maintaining harmony in the midst of creedal differences is needed for social stability. Likewise, unity among Muslims amid differences of opinion is also vitally required for the greater benefit of the Ummah. Warning about the evil impact of disunity Allah (swt) says,

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

“Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear signs; for them is a dreadful penalty.” (Qur’an, 3:105)

It is to be noted that, the difference of opinion among the Imams of *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama’ah* on the basis of evidence, is neither seclusion nor isolation. Because despite such differences they were united and their differences were not due to deviating from the clear rules of Allah’s protection. It was *Ijma* and *Ittihad* on ‘*Bayyinat*’ and then differences based on documents on some branch matters.

Findings:

This study revealed the following findings:

1. Allah (swt) commanded to advocate generosity all throughout Quran and highly praised those who follow it.
2. Owing to the Godly instructions the generous Prophet of Islam Hazrat Mohammad (S.) held firm on generosity, tolerance and forgiveness.
3. He (S.) and his companions and their pious successors also practised these uniquely by showing it toward people regardless of caste, creed and religion, and set an unparalleled example of those for the upcoming Ummah and world humanity.
4. Contextually, this study also demonstrated that Moderation is another unique feature and principle of Islam that the Qur’an and Prophetic Sunnah strongly recommended. Side by side, it showed that extremism is quite opposite of generosity and moderation that Islam firmly rejected.
5. The Prophet (S.) and his followers grasped moderation thoroughly in their overall practices including devotion, prayer, rituals, behaviour, etc. and abandoned extremism in them completely.
6. So, In Islam, there is no scope for intolerance, narrow-mindedness, and extreme approaches. Islam replace all irrespective of creed and faith, thought and views coexist with peace, security and harmony and build a safer and better world for all of humanity. Those who work against this strategy i.e. against generosity, and moderation and walk in the lane of extremism are practicing in direct opposition of the tenets of Islam.

Conclusion

Generosity serves a common and personal purpose. On a general level, generosity creates a healthy community wherein members are always concerned with the

welfare of each other. When people give freely out of their wealth, time, and love to one another, society will naturally become more harmonious. Islam is a religion of harmony. It binds other religious communities in a bond of harmony. This ensures the peaceful co-existence of different communities with varied beliefs and creeds, views and ideologies. This is greatly needed for maintaining peace, security and stability. The Quranic instructions, the holy Prophet (S.) and his righteous companions established a bright example of how a generous approach toward others brings about a desired change in building a positive attitude and finding harmonious living. This lost glory can be revived only by adhering to that glorious past of Islam and by following Islam and its principles completely.

Nowadays, Muslim society has been so deeply impacted by religious intolerance, bigotry and narrow-mindedness that disagreement of views is construed as a terrible crime, and dissent is met with murder and annihilation. This heinous practice is directly at odds with the tenets of Islam, which preaches tolerance. The masses lacking a thorough understanding of Islam are easily swayed by emotive appeal and thus are conducive to the spread of intolerance resulting in disunity. On top of it, stubbornness, narrow-mindedness, selfishness, self-centeredness or egocentric mentality, etc. are the key elements for this disunity. These spread hatred toward people of diverse opinions and views. To comprehend and evaluate this tolerance that helps bring about unity, peace and harmony, one must consider the time when Islam was a formal state, with the precise rules established by the Prophet (S.) in conformity with the principles of the religion. We can refrain from slandering, calumniating, mocking and calling one's evil names if we consider the opponent as a human being at least in the case of disputes and disagreements! Our religious leaders and preachers need to review the teachings of Islam and the personal example set by the Holy Prophet (S.), his rightly guided Caliphs and virtuous companions regarding tolerance, generosity, moderation and forgiveness. If it is done so, our world will surely transform into a better place for all of humanity to live in peace, safety and harmony.

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 هذا كتاب من محمد النبي الأُمي بين المؤمنين والمسلمين من قريش وأهل يثرب ومن تبعهم . ٨ فلحق بهم وجاهد معهم.أنهم أمة واحدة من دون الناس... وأن على اليهود نفقتهم وعلى المسلمين نفقتهم، وأن بينهم النصر على من حارب أهل هذه الصحيفة، وأن بينهم النصح والنصيحة والبر دون الإثم.(صحيفة المدينة)
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