

Good News

And give good news to those who do good (to others)

–Holy Quran 22:37

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Diversity Matters!

Racism Must Fall!

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Prejudices, based on skin colour and languages, have plagued humanity since the beginning of time. Attempts to address the injustices associated with such prejudices have been a long and hard struggle that is continuing well into the so called ‘enlightened’ 21st century.

The idea of a progressive secular, neo-liberal, freethinking society that would solve the racial problems of the world, has failed miserably. Instead, the ‘master race’ concept of European *colonialists* which started in the 15th century with the *Age of Discovery*¹ still dominates as recent events in America, spilled over to the rest of the world, have painfully revealed.

In South Africa, after more than twenty years of transformation, from *legislated* racial oppression (apartheid) - to a free and open society, racism still

raises its ugly head ever so often and opens wounds not yet entirely healed.

In America, even after the appointment of their first black president, more black people have been jailed and killed by white policemen. Thus the so called *exceptional* masters of the first world have given us nothing but racial discord, division and oppression – nothing but modern day enslavement by the *haves* of the *have nots* except now on a much larger scale.

From a religious perspective, it is regrettable though that human behaviours, despite the noble teachings of a Confucius, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, are still predominantly driven by desires of the ego, customs, superstitions, fanaticism, misguided beliefs, dogma, traditions, and blind nationalism. These provide the breeding ground for intolerance and prejudices, be it racial, religious or for whatever other reasons.

But if we look beyond the inevitable human inadequacies, according to *the*

¹ History of Colonialism - Wikipedia

teachings of Islam, mankind, we are told, consists of members of *one* family, and thus their division into nations, tribes and families should not lead to antipathy but should be seen as an opportunity to gain knowledge of and from each other. Superiority of one over another in this vast brotherhood, we are told, does not depend on nationality, wealth, or rank, but on the careful observance of duty to Almighty God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, i.e. those foremost in doing good to God's creation:

‘O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families **that you may know each other.** Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware.’ – 49:13

Islam also teaches us that *diversity* is a *sign* of God meaning a *blessing* not a *curse*.

‘And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours.’ – 30:22

Diversity thus matters! And must be respected! The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) echoed these sublime teachings of the Holy Quran in a practical way. He is reported to have said: ‘Hashimite or no

Hashimite (referring to the high ranking Quraish tribe he belonged to) if you do not walk in the way of God then you are not of me.’

Thus we find that Bilal, a freed black slave who became one of the earliest Companions of the Holy Prophet was given the honour of giving the *first* call to prayer by the Holy Prophet on his victorious return to Mecca after years of severe persecution and forced exile. Tears were flowing in the eyes of the believers on hearing Bilal's sonorous voice on that auspicious occasion, still regarded today as one of the most moving and momentous occasions in the history of Islam. When his followers were persecuted in Mecca, the Holy Prophet ordered them to seek asylum in Abyssinia ruled by a black King whom he described as a ‘just man’, and commanded his refugee-followers to be obedient to his rule. In fact, a whole chapter in the Holy Quran is dedicated to an Ethiopian sage, Luqman, whose words of wisdom are etched into the Holy Scripture and regularly recited and taught by millions of Muslims all across the world.

Thus we find that *equality* of the human race is not merely an abstract hypothesis in Islam; it is a practical way of life on which fundamental tenets are based. For example the formal five daily prayers bring together worshippers of all rank and file,

standing shoulder to shoulder next to each other, black and white, pauper and rich, king and subjects all together in worship and obedience of the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth.

On a global level, the annual Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) brings together nations of different colours and tongues, clad in the same white simple cloth with one focus on their minds, the unity of God and the unity of mankind. All racial and gender prejudices are prohibited during the pilgrimage thus giving rise to an awe inspiring spectacle of racial equality and harmony unmatched in any society in the entire world. Thus we find in Surah Baqra, the Cow, chapter 2 in the Holy Quran, after speaking about physical activism against religious persecution, injustices and abuse of human rights, the Holy Quran very appropriately introduces the subject of the pilgrimage. The reason being, the pilgrimage is the pivotal pillar of Islam which serves as the climax of the believers' spiritual journey and serves as the supreme example, perfectly scripted by the Hand of God, of how society should live in complete harmony, free of all social, racial, and religious prejudices, where there is no hatred only brotherly love and empathy. Celebrated commentator and translator of the Holy Quran, Muhammad Ali says it well:

‘No other institution in the world has the wonderful influence of the *Hajj* in levelling all distinctions of race, colour and rank.’ ‘Thus is every Muslim made to pass once in his life through that narrow gate of equality which leads to broader brotherhood. All men are equal in birth and death; they come into life and pass out of it in the same way, but hajj is the only occasion on which they are taught how to live alike, how to act alike and how to feel alike.’²

Regrettably many Muslims still practice social inequality, despite the noble lessons of *Hajj*. Class distinctions, based on lineage and social status, are rife among Arabs and Indo-Pak Indians. This is not due to, but despite of, the sublime teachings of *equality* we find in the Holy Quran. These nations have adopted these practices as an extension of their own backward national and cultural customs and practices and failed to incorporate the reform brought about by Islam.

Diversity, according to the Holy Quran, is indeed a *blessing* not a curse. This is how God created us. Imagine we all looked, spoke and thought alike. How boring and unappetising life on earth would have been. Intellectually, we would

² Ali, MM. *The Religion of Islam*

have stifled and no sooner have become extinct.

Because of its diversity each society in every age since the beginning of time has made invaluable contributions to civilization each in its own unique way. It is, however, a travesty of justice and most unfortunate that most Western societies have been fed false historical information that gives the impression that Europe is the forerunner of civilisation to the exclusion of all other races.

Objective studies, however, point to Africa as the origin of human life and civilisation. Now the truth of this assertion might be debated, but we know for a fact that African, Egyptian, Arabian, Indian, Mayan, Native American, and other Aboriginal cultures - long before Europe came on the scene - had made enormous contributions to human civilization. There was a time in history when for example Indian civilisation had already built palaces of marble and stone and feasted on delicately spiced foods and their women wore fine silk clothes, when Europeans were still roaming around in caves clad in buckskin and eating raw meat.

The native tribes of North America, for example, and the Khoisan of this country whose belief in the Great Spirit (Almighty God) had far superior moral standards of living that were more in harmony with nature and the environment than that of the

European ravagers and plunderers of their land. It is therefore regrettable that non-European contributions to civilisation are often suppressed, for obvious reasons, by Western historians. It is to eradicate such obvious prejudices that the Holy Quran encourages us to do proper research because we are told:

‘In their histories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding.’
– (12:111)

Another point the Holy Quran makes that is of prime significance in a multi-religious society as ours, is that although, biologically, our origin might be from the same source and essence, we have been endowed with *diverse spiritual paths*. This is in accordance with Divine Wisdom so that we may compete in the performance of virtuous deeds:

‘For every one of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people (on a spiritual plane), but that He might try you in what He gave you. **So vie one another in virtuous deeds.**’ – (5:48)

‘To every nation We appointed acts of devotion which they observe’ – (22:67)

‘And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.’ – (35:24)

As much as God's Beneficence (*Rahman*) such as the air, rain and the sun extends to all mankind, regardless of race, colour, religion or creed, so does His *spiritual light* encompasses His entire creation. The *humane* spirit of *ubuntu*, for example, that inspires brotherly love in a way that enriches our relationships should indeed be cherished. In this way our knowledge of foreign tongues, beliefs, cultures, etc. broadens and, when it does, we soon learn to embrace *diversity* and to treat everyone with the same dignity and respect we long for ourselves.



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