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***TEACHING TOLERANCE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR  
ACHIEVING IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS IN TAJIKISTAN***

**Abstract:** The current paper discusses about the religious pluralism in Tajikistan and the problem of religious tolerance in society.

First, the author speaks about the religious pluralism historically, from the Somonids' period until Tajikistan's getting independence, and shows the religions which make modern religious pluralism in Tajikistan. Then, the author, discussing about the scientific works on religious tolerance, tries to show the ways of inculcating the teaching of tolerance in society.

Thus, the author draws the conclusion that tolerance can support the religious pluralism, understanding each other and living in peace within society.

**Keywords:** *tolerance, pluralism, understanding, society, peace, teaching.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Mankind passed through lots of historical periods and created or learned different ideologies. The different ideologies became the reason for appearing many cultures and for dividing humanity into faiths, religions and nations.

Sufism is one of the religious practices of Islam. It influenced the Persian and the Tajik literature, by inspiring poems, prose fictions and songs. The great Sufi poets and writers, such as Khoja Abdullah Ansary, Mirsayid Ali Hamadani, Abuhamid Al-Gazali, Hafiz Sherazi, Jaloliddin Rumi, Shams-i Tabriz, Sa'di Sherazi, Kamal Khujandi, Omar Khayyam, Nizami Ganjavi, Fariduddin Attar, Abdurrahmon Jami, Husain Waiz Kashifi, and others, gave the wisdom of Sufism to the world. One of Islamic scholar wrote about Rumi: "Rumi's work is so great

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that if one has read and understood it one has learnt every philosophy there is. His poems are sung in the sacred assemblies of the Sufis as part of their worship. The lives of the Sufis were marvelous in their piety, in their humanity”<sup>1</sup>.

The great scholars wrote a lot of books about the stages of “Tariqat”, love, attitude, behavior, religion, theology, etc. The scholars, besides religious themes, paid a lot of attention to educational, ethical and moral issues too. Some examples are books such as: “Kimiyo-e-Saodat”, “Qobusnoma”, “Wasiyatnoma”, “Pandnoma”, “Makhzan-ul-Asror”, “Iskandarnoma”, “Baqiya-e-naqiya”, “Masnawi-e-Ma’nawi”, “Futuwwatnaama”, “Gulistan”, “Bustan”, “Bahoristan”, “Khiradnoma-e-Iskandari”, “Anwar-e-Suhaili”, “Arba’in”, “Akhloq-e-Muhsini”, “Badoe’-al-Waqae” etc.

Religious ideas were totally rejected in the Soviet period, when the atheistic ideology was supported for 70 years. Most of the books which were published in the Soviet period discussed atheistic values. During Stalin’s personality cult, most of the Tajik religious personalities were killed. Keeping religious books at home was prohibited by the Soviet government and by the Communists. That’s why, many people gave them away. Thus, the people were deprived from knowing their national culture and religion.

After the collapse of the Soviet government, on 9th of September, the Republic of Tajikistan became an independent country. The total area of Tajikistan is 142.6 km<sup>2</sup> and it borders China, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

There are many religions and faiths in Tajikistan. The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan is the guarantor of their existence, as stated in the 26th article: “Every person has the right freely to determine their position toward religion, to profess any religion individually or together with others or not to profess any, and to take part in religious customs and ceremonies”.

The majority of the population of Tajikistan is of Sunni Hanafi faith (data from April 2, 2009; the ratio is of 95%). There are 3000 mosques, of which 259 are conciliar. Officially registered *madrasahs* (Islamic religious educational institutions) are 19.

There is a Shia Ismaili religious minority in Badakhshan, which has its own history, starting with the X-XI centuries. In 2009, an Ismaili Centre was opened in the capital of the country. Ismaili people represent 4% of the population of Tajikistan.

There is also the “Naqshbandiya” Sufi order, which promotes peace and the ideas of humanism.

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<sup>1</sup>Wahiduddin Khan, *History of Sufis*, accessed July 15, 2014, [http://wahiduddin.net/mv2/VIIIa/VIIIa\\_1\\_1.htm](http://wahiduddin.net/mv2/VIIIa/VIIIa_1_1.htm).

There are 85 registered non-Muslim religious communities in Tajikistan. The most important are the Orthodox Christians, the Baptist communities (five), the Roman Catholic parish communities (two), the Seventh-day Adventists and the Lutherans. Two communities have derived from the South Korean church, Song Min. Other religious minorities are registered in the country, such as the Baha'i community, the Zoroastrian and the Jewish communities.

Most of the representatives of the non-Muslim faiths live in Dushanbe – the capital of Tajikistan.

All these religions, faiths and orders prove the free religious politics of the Republic of Tajikistan. Nevertheless, sometimes, we can notice that some people do not like this freedom.

When Tajikistan became independent, it gave people freedom in all spheres of thinking. Most people were not educated at all in respect of religion, so the problem of intolerance spread fast and this became the reason for the beginning of a civil war in society. Another problem was that the government was not politically stable and did not have enough power. Thus, a civil war began between the government and the opposition, headed by the “Islamic revival party”. As a result of the civil war, lots of citizens were killed.

During the civil war, the majority organized a new parliament, a government, decided the national symbols and the national hymn. After that, they invited new people to the new institutions, in order to make new laws. The citizens of Tajikistan elected the new Constitution and President on 11/06/1994. The civil war continued till 1997.

### **ISLAM AND TOLERANCE IN TAJIKISTAN**

Nowadays, when anyone discusses about Islam, we can see that most people think about Islam as terrorism, extremism and separatism. The reason is that people believe the media and they are not properly educated, from the Qur'an and the Hadith. There were terror actions in Khujand city and other places. Besides it, the security could stop terror actions and captured some terrorists several times.

When people hear about the wars from the Muslims world, about terror and extremism, they feel that this situation breaks the democratic values and pluralism, leading to conflicts.

Nevertheless, in 2009, the government of Tajikistan organized a celebration for honoring Imam A'zam, the founder and the leader of Hanafism. At that time, the whole country celebrated “The Year of Imam A'zam Abuhanifa Nu'maan Ibn Sobit”. So, the citizens came to know about Imam Abuhanifa, the founder of the “Hanafi” faith, which is famous for its tolerance in the Islamic world.

But many people are not familiar with the tolerant ideas. For example, once it happened to me that a man came near to me and saw me reading a book in Arabic language; it was not a religious book. He said: “Do you know that the Qur’an teaches killing?” I answered that the Qur’an does not teach killing. Thus, the debate begun between us and finally I could prove that the Qur’an does not teach violence, but peace and tolerance. Then he said: “I do not know the Qur’anic ideas but the man who taught me is a teacher and he knows about it”. He refused to pay any attention to my argument and, later on, he went to my brother and told him that I was a “fundamentalist” and a “fanatic”.

Sometimes, religious people have a negative understanding about the secular people and, at the same time, the secular have a negative opinion about the religious people. There are some factors that account for this intolerance:

1. The low educational level.
2. There is high influence of the Communist ideas from the Soviet period.
3. Some people are not properly educated about Islam.
4. Some of the teachers of philosophy, literature, ideology and psychology who were influenced by the atheist ideology don’t have a good impression about religion and religious pluralism. Instead, they stand on the atheist side.
5. The influence of the media makes people develop a negative impression about religion.

If we look at religions, they all have one goal – to determine man not to commit sin, to comply with God, to live in peace, freedom, in good economic conditions, to have a good behavior. When doing this, a person can go to paradise and can be judged by God as a good person.

When we pay attention to atheists and to secular people, we can notice that they also want to live in peace, in good economic conditions and to be free.

As we know, the majority of the population of Tajikistan is made of Muslims (99%). So, it is necessary to analyze the idea on tolerance and on religious pluralism, as taught in the Holy Qur’an and in the Prophet’s *Hadiths*, in order to educate people about tolerance.

Many research works were done about the place of tolerance in the world. The researchers are divided into two groups. The first group are the scientists who look critically upon the level of tolerance in Islam and the second group are the Islamic scientists who are in confrontation with the former ones. The first group are mostly atheists people or members of other religions while in the second group there are mostly Islamic researchers.

Most of the atheist researchers or those from other religions tried to contradict the tolerant view of Islam and, instead of it, they notice its intolerance and coercion. The issue of Islamophobia is influential in case of some researchers.

On the contrary, the books and the papers of the Muslim researchers discuss and show the Islamic tolerance in the Qur'an, Hadith, great scholars' books and the way it was displayed in historical situations.

For example, one of the researchers, Atif Noor Khan, said: "Islam teaches tolerance on all levels, individual, groups and states. It should be a political and legal requirement. Tolerance is the mechanism that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), and the rule of law. The Holy Qur'an says very clearly "To every People have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow, let them not then dispute with you on the matter, but do invite (them) to your Lord for you are assuredly on the Right Way. If they do wrangle with you, say, 'God knows best what it is you are doing.' 'God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ.'" (Qur'an, Al-Hajj, 76-69)".

The researchers or anyone who is interested in learning about tolerance in Islam can look to at least these 10 research works:

1. "Peace and Tolerance in Islam" by Muhammad Ahmad Qadri;<sup>2</sup>
2. "Religious Tolerance Revisited" by Rohail Khan;<sup>3</sup>
3. "Islam is the religion of peace" by Dr.Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Kareem Al-Sheha;<sup>4</sup>
4. "Generous Tolerance in Islam and its Effects on the Life of a Muslim" by Hamza Yusuf;<sup>5</sup>
5. "Islam and Peace" by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan;<sup>6</sup>
6. "Islam, Peace and Tolerance" by Zahid Aziz;<sup>7</sup>
7. "Religious Co-existence: Tolerance and Contestation amongst Hindu and Muslim Faith Groups of Indian Origin in South Africa" by Sultan Khan;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Qadri, "Peace and Tolerance in Islam," May 2004, California, USA, accessed July 15, 2014, [www.iercna.org](http://www.iercna.org).

<sup>3</sup>Rohail Khan, "Religious Tolerance Revisited," accessed July 15, 2014, [www.newageislam.com](http://www.newageislam.com).

<sup>4</sup>Abdurrahman Abdul-Kareem Al-Sheha, *Islam is the Religion of Peace*, translated and adapted into English with additions by Abu Salman Deya-ud-Deen Eberle, accessed July 15, 2014, [www.islamland.org](http://www.islamland.org).

<sup>5</sup>Hamza Yusuf, "Generous Tolerance in Islam and its Effects on the Life of a Muslim," accessed July 15, 2015, [www.newageislam.com](http://www.newageislam.com).

<sup>6</sup> Wahiduddin Khan, "Islam and Peace," accessed July 15, 2014, [www.wahiduddin.org](http://www.wahiduddin.org).

<sup>7</sup> Zahid Aziz, *Islam, Peace and Tolerance*, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K., 2006, accessed July 15, 2014, [www.aaiil.org](http://www.aaiil.org).

<sup>8</sup> Sultan Khan, "Religious Co-existence: Tolerance and Contestation amongst Hindu and Muslim Faith Groups of Indian Origin in South Africa," *Journal of Sociology and Social Antropology* vol. 4, nr. 1-2 (January-April 2013): 149-57, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/JSSA/JSSA-04-0-000-13-Web/JSSA-04-1-2->

8. "Tolerance in Islam" by Marmaduke Pikhtal;<sup>9</sup>

9. "Religious Tolerance in Islam" by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi;<sup>10</sup>

10. "Tolerance-in-islam" by Atif Noor Khan;<sup>11</sup>

11. "Islam: a religion of tolerance or terrorism (an analytical and critical study)" by dr. Farooq Hassan.<sup>12</sup>

If we look at the Islamic doctrine and at the historical situations involving Islam, we can notice that Islam never agreed with terror, extremism and coercion.

The issue of tolerance is approached only accidentally in the Qur'an, but there are many *ayats* which teach tolerance, peace and understanding.

The Holy Qur'an teaches that, if peace is wanted in society, Muslims will have to live in peace with other religions or with the secular people. But, along history, it happened that the Muslims were driven out from their homes and people of other religions fought against them. So, they were forced to defend themselves, according to the Qur'an: "Perhaps Allah will make friendship between you and those whom you hold as enemies. And Allah has power (over all things), and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity" (Qur'an, Al-Mumtahina, 7-8).

Muslims have no right to attack non-Muslim people in a peaceful society; the Qur'an says: "If they incline towards peace, you also incline to it, and (put your) trust in Allah. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower" (Qur'an, Al-Anfal, 61).

The Qur'an teaches in another *ayat* that the Muslims have to live life consulting with the others: "And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allah's) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)" (Qur'an, Aal-e-Imran, 159).

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<sup>9</sup> Marmaduke Pikhtal, "Tolerance in Islam," U.K., Islamic Mission Dawah Centre, accessed July 16, 2015, [www.newageislam.com](http://www.newageislam.com).

<sup>10</sup> Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, "Tolerance in Islam," accessed July 16, 2015, [www.al-islam.org](http://www.al-islam.org).

<sup>11</sup> Atif Noor Khan, "Tolerance in Islam," accessed July 16, 2015, [www.newageislam.com](http://www.newageislam.com).

<sup>12</sup> Farooq Hassan, "Islam: a Religion of Tolerance or Terrorism (an analytical and critical study)," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, Department of Humanities, NED University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi, Pakistan vol. 3, no. 10 (February 2012).

Muslims believe that men are free and have the right to make their own choices, as the Qur'an says: "The Truth is from your Lord: let him who please believe and let him who disbelieve" (Qur'an, Al-Kahf, 29).

And, in another *ayat*, it is said: "To every People have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow, let them not then dispute with you on the matter, but do invite (them) to your Lord for you are assuredly on the Right Way. If they do wrangle with you, say, 'God knows best what it is you are doing.', 'God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ'" (Qur'an, Al-Hajj, 76-69).

According to the Qur'an, Islam is against aggression: "Help one another in works of righteousness and goodness, and help not one another in sin and aggression" (Qur'an, Al-Maeda, 2).

The Qur'an tries to repress anger and to pardon men: "Those who spend [in Allah's Cause – deeds of charity, alms, etc.] in prosperity and in adversity, who repress anger, and pardon men; verily, Allah loves Al-Muhsinun (the good-doers)" (Qur'an, Aal-e-Imran, 134).

Islam is a religion of justice. The Qur'an said: "Truly God commands you to give back trusts to those to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice..." (Qur'an, In-Nisa, 58).

All these examples show that humanism and tolerance are present in Islam.

Besides the Qur'an, there are hundreds of *hadiths* which teach tolerance and peace. For example, the Islamic researcher Rohail Khan, analyzing the issue historically, stated: "In this article, I propose to remind both Muslims and Christians about a promise that Prophet Muhammad made to the Christians. Recognition of this promise can have an enormous impact on Muslims' conduct towards Christians, in particular, and towards other non-Muslims, in general. In 628 AD, a delegation from St Catherine's Monastery came to Prophet Muhammad and requested his protection. He responded by granting them a Charter of Rights, which is reproduced below in its entirety. St. Catherine's Monastery is situated at the foot of Mt. Sinai and is the world's oldest monastery. It carries a huge collection of Christian manuscripts, second only to the Vatican, and is a world heritage site. It is a treasure house of Christian history that has remained safe for 1,400 years under Muslim protection. "The Promise to St. Catherine Treaty" is reproduced as follows: "This is a message from Muhammad Ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them. Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah I hold out against anything that displeases them".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Rohail Khan, "Religious Tolerance Revisited," accessed July 16, 2015, [www.newageislam.com](http://www.newageislam.com).

Rohail Khan continued by giving another example: “On another occasion, Prophet Muhammad received a delegation of 60 Christians from the region of Najran, then a part of Yemen, at his mosque. When the time for their prayer came, they faced the direction of east and prayed. Prophet Muhammad ordered they be left in their state unharmed”.<sup>14</sup>

The Prophet said in a *hadith*: “The strong man is not one who defeats people by physical force but one who is able to control himself in anger”<sup>15</sup>.

The Prophet also taught about justice: “Listen, O people, if any one of you cruel towards a non-Muslim or does not give him his due rights or makes him do things beyond his powers, thereby causing him to suffer, or snatches anything from him against his wishes, then remember I will fight from his against you (the Muslim) on the day of Judgement”.<sup>16</sup>

The Prophet said that every Muslim must show mercy: “Who does not show mercy, Allah will not show him mercy”.<sup>17</sup>

The teachings of the Prophet require to the Muslims to be thankful to people: “Who did not thank to people, he did not thank to Allah”<sup>18</sup>.

Besides, the great Islamic scholars, like Imam A’zam, Mavlana Jaloluddin Rumi, Omar Khayam wrote a lot about tolerance. In the history of Islam, we can find many situations of great tolerance. The history of the Somonid or of the Andalus periods are the best examples for tolerance and religious pluralism within the Islamic society.

One of the best examples of peace, mercy and tolerance is the “Hajj”. David Clingingsmith, Asim Ijaz Khwaja and Michael Kremer, analyzing the “Hajj” process and its results, said that the “Hajj” spreads peace and tolerance to the whole world. In their work, *Estimating the Impact of the Hajj: Religion and Tolerance in Islam’s Global Gathering*, it is stated: “The evidence suggests that the Hajj increases tolerance, which seems to apply not just within the Islamic world, but also beyond it. Hajjis return with a more positive views towards people from other countries. Hajjis are also more likely to state that various Pakistani ethnic and Muslim sectarian groups are equal, and that it is possible for such groups to live in harmony. These views of equality and harmony extend to non-Muslims as well”.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad ibn Abdullah Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Riyad: Dorussalam Kitab Al-Adab Bab no 72, Hadith no 6114 (1999), 1066.

<sup>16</sup> *Sunan-e-Abi Dawud Abu Dawid*, Bab no 33, Hadith no. 3052, 548.

<sup>17</sup> Abdurrahmon Jomi, *Arbaini Jomi*, with introduction to Kozim Mudirshonachi (Mashad: Oston Quds Razavi, 1363), 48.

<sup>18</sup> David Clingingsmith and Asim Ijaz Khwaja, “Estimating the Impact of the Hajj: Religion and Tolerance in Islam’s Global Gathering,” April 2008, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://ssrn.com>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

### THE METHODS OF INCULCATING THE TEACHINGS OF TOLERANCE WITHIN SOCIETY

The issue of tolerance is highly important for the establishment of religious pluralism since, before attempting to build a multicultural and multireligious society, first we have to learn to have a tolerant attitude towards any kind of “otherness”.

Australia, taking into the consideration this issue, offered grants for teaching the practice of tolerance to the youth. Thus, Erebus International (Dr. Robert Carbines, Dr. Tim Wyatt and Ms. Leone Robb), with the assistance of Dr. Rapin Quinn and Dr. Declan O’Connell, made a project entitled “Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education”. It was submitted to the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, and it aimed at teaching communities and schoolchildren about tolerance.

Practicing the teaching of religious tolerance to young people is clearly stated in the introduction to the project: “This project originates from the work being done to contribute to a National Action Plan to address the threats to Australia’s social cohesion, harmony and security, being developed by the Council of the Australian Governments (COAG), following its special meeting held in September 2005. The development of the National Action Plan is guided by the Statement of Principles agreed at the Prime Minister’s Summit with Muslim community leaders, in Canberra, on 23 August 2005. One of the agreed Principles states that: “the Australian Government will ensure that its programs and policies enhance mutual understanding between the Islamic community and the broader Australian community and promote the Australian values of harmony, justice and democracy.”<sup>20</sup>

“The case studies [of the project] demonstrate good practices in three key areas:

- a) Interschool cooperation aimed at reducing the potential isolation and alienation of Islamic youth;
- b) Islamic schools assisting Muslim students and their parents to understand that Islamic culture can harmoniously co-exist with Australian civic values and cultures;
- c) Schools that promote the understanding of Islam among Australian students and demonstrate how it can be compatible with other Australian values and cultures”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Robert Carbines, Tim Wyatt and Leone Robb, *Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education, Report to the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training*, Erebus International, July 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Thus, we have to use the Australian model of teaching and spreading tolerance within society, a model which has given good results.

The values and the other issues related to tolerance are generally not shown in teaching books or in other educational aids.

### CONCLUSION

Tajikistan is the home of many religions and faiths, such as Islamic Hanafism, Ismaili, the Sufi order Naqshbandiya, and of minor faiths such as Christianity, Zoroastrism, Baha'i; there are also the Russian Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, about 3000 Evangelicals, 300 Roman Catholics, five registered organizations of Baptists, one congregation of Korean Protestants and lots of secular people.

The experience of Australia, in the field of teaching youth how to be tolerant and to live in multicultural country can be a good example for our society, with some adjusting to our national values.

The following points are very helpful for teaching people about living in peace, spreading religious pluralism, understanding each other, all these aiming at maintaining the national unity:

1) creating teaching aids and writing books for educating young people about human values, such as tolerance, peace, harmony, based on the Qur'an, on the *Hadith* and on the books of great scholars, like Rudaki, Firdavsi, Khayam, Unsuralmaoli Kaykovus, Nosir Khusrav, Sa'di, Hofiz, Ganjavi, Rumi, Jomi, Koshifi, Donish, Aini, Tursunzoda, B. Gafurov, Loiq Sheraly, Farzona and others;

2) organizing educational courses and seminars on the same issues;

3) organizing educational courses at high and secondary schools, in the institutes and universities, for sustaining religious tolerance, humanism, peace and ethics, based on the Qur'an and the *Hadith*;

4) organizing a new project for inculcating the new subject "Tolerance and pluralism" in the educational system;

5) organizing holiday camps and tours with members of different religions and secular people, for sustaining tolerance and pluralism.

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