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RELIGIOUS CO-EXISTENCE IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIM-HINDU RELATIONSHIP IN SATKHIRA

BY

MUHAMMAD OBAIDULLAH

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the present condition of religious co-existence in Bangladesh, a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic yet Muslim majority country in South Asia, on the basis of a sample survey conducted in Satkhira, a southern district of Bangladesh. The study also articulates the concept of religious co-existence, its principles, objectives and methods from a Muslim perspective. The methodology applied in the study was both qualitative and quantitative. Using random sampling, a number of 681 respondents (452 Muslims and 229 Hindus) were secured from a total of 2,000 questionnaires distributed to the two communities in Satkhira in 2012. Based on feedback from the respondents, the data were analysed critically and presented statistically using SPSS. The study then examines Muslim-Hindu relationship due to an allegation that the relationship has not been peaceful. There were claims that the minorities were persecuted, neglected, deprived and tortured by the majority. However, this study found that such claim cannot be supported. In general, 85.8% Muslims and 83% Hindus agreed that there is peaceful religious co-existence between the two communities in terms of recognition and tolerance, mutual understanding and co-operation, equality and mutual benefit, willingness to work for the common good, agreement on non-violence and peaceful existence. In addition, the study has also explored the reasons put forward by the remaining small percentage of respondents (approximately 15%) who felt that there is no peaceful religious co-existence between the two communities. Among the reasons are lack of knowledge about religion and religious teachings, national and international political views on religion and religious adherents as well as politicians using religion for political gain.

ملخص البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة عن الوضع الحالي للتعايش الديني في بنغلاديش، بلاد الثقافات والأعراق المتعددة، والدولة ذات الغالبية السكانية المسلمة في جنوب آسيأ وذلك من خلال الدراسة الميدانية والمساحة العينية في مقاطعة ساتخيرا، المنطقة الجنوبية من بنغلاديش. وتوضح الدراسة مفهوم التعايش الديني، ومبادئه، وأهدافه، وأساليبه من منظور الإسلامي. المنهج الذي يستخدم في هذه الدراسة على حد سواء المنهج النوعي والمنهج الكمي. وتم توزيع عدد 2,000 استبانة بين المجيبين (1,000 للمسلمين و1,000 للهندوس). وكان هناك 452 مجيبًا من المسلمين و229 من الهندوس. بناءً على تلك الملاحظات من المجيبين، قد قامت هذه الدراسات تحليلاً إحصائيًّا دقيقًا باستخدام SPSS. وبناءً عليه تؤكّد العلاقة بين المسلمين والهندوس لإظهار الحالة الحقيقية للتعايش الديني، حيث يتور جدل حول العلاقة بين هذين القومين. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإنه يقال أيضًا إن الأقليات تتعرض للاضطهاد، والإهمام، والحرمان، وتعذب بالأغلبية السكانية. ولكن قد كشفت هذه الدراسة أن تلك المزاعم ليست صحيحة. لأن 85.8 في المائة من المسلمين و 83 في المائة من الهندوس يجمعون على القول بأن هناك تعايشًا سلميًا بين هذين القومين على أساس ست قضايا رئسية من التعايش مثل الاعتراف والتسامح، والتفاهم المتبادل والتعاون، والمساواة والمنفعة المتبادلة، والاستعداد للعمل من أجل المصلحة العامة، والاتفاق على عدم اللجوء إلى العنف، والتعايش السلمي. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، استكشفت الدراسة أيضًا الأسباب التي طرحتها النسبة لصغيرة المتبقية من المشاركين الذين اختلفوا حول وجود التعايش السلمي الديني بين الطائفتين. ومن الأسباب، عدم معرفة الدين وتعاليمه والآراء السياسية الداخلية والدولية حول الدين والمتدينين، واستخدام الدين من قبل السياسيين لتحقيق أهدافهم السياسية.

APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Muhammad Obaidullah has been approved by the following:

_____
Thameem Ushama
Supervisor

_____
Maziah Mustapha
Co-supervisor

_____
Haslina Binti Ibrahim
Internal Examiner

_____
Muhammad Belal Hussain
External Examiner

_____
Muhammad Abu Eusuf
Chairman

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Muhammad Obaidullah

Signature …… Date ……

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My dear parents
LATE SUFIA AMIN
A pious mother I have ever seen,
who responded to the call of the Almighty on October 12, 1989;
May Allah rest her soul in peace and success.

PRINCIPAL MAWLANA MD AMIN UDDIN GAZI
A great man of wisdom and Knowledge,
&
SALEENA AMIN
A pious mother

Who brought me up with nothing to this position;
May Allah reward them the best.

My beloved Son,
JAWAD AMIN
May Allah accept him as one of His chosen servants,

And
ASMA KHANAM
My Wife, the ideal woman in my life

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In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, The Most Merciful.

Life as a journey had been long, dark and perilous. The road was fraught with danger from the beginning, the forest was thick, the mountains were high, the darkness was terrifying. Nonetheless, I traversed the path with faith and hope at the end of the tunnel to finally see the light and to find cool water where I could safely drink and bathe, all by the grace of Allah.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	*Awami* League
app.	Appendix
art./arts.	Article/articles
b.	born
BD	Bangladesh
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
c.	copyright
ca.	(circa): about, approximately
CEI	Co-Existence Internationa
cf.	Compare
chap./chaps.	Chapter/chapters
col./cols.	Column/columns
comp./comp	compiler/compilers;
d.	died
dept./xixept	Department/departments
s..	
div./divs.	Division/divisions
e. g	*(exempligratia)*; for sc. Scene example
ed./eds.	Edition/editions; editor, edited by
et al.	*(et alia)*: and others
et seq	*(et sequers)*: and the
Etc	*(et cetera)*: and so forth
fig./figs.	Figure/figures
IBBL	Islamic Bank Bangladesh Limited
ibid.	*(ibidem*): in the same place trans.
Id	*(idem)*: the same below
IFB	Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh
IIRD	Institute for Interreligious Dialogue
l. v.	*(locus variis)*: various
ms./mss.	Manuscript/manuscripts
n. d.	No date
n. s.	New series
n.p.	no place: no publisher
no./nos.	Number/numbers
o. s.	Old series
pbuh	Peace Be Upon Him
p./pars.	Paragraph/paragraphs
PRCE	Peaceful Religious co-existence
pt./pts.	Part/parts
q. v.	*(quode vide)*: which see
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RAT	Rapid Action Team
REC	Religious Co-Existence
s. l.	*(sinoloco)*: no place of places (of publication)
s. n.	*(sine nomine)*: no pages that follow publisher
s. v.	*(sub-verbo, sub-voce)* under the word of heading
S. W. T.	*Subḥanahu Wa Taʿāla* (Praise be to Allah and the Most High)
sec./secs.	Section/sections
sic.	So, thus
trns.	Translator/translated by
UGC	University Grant Commission
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
v./vv.	Verse/verses
viz.	*(videlicet)*: namely
vol./vols.	Volume/volumes
WCC	World Council of Churches

TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

Table of the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used by the International Islamic University Malaysia.

B	=	ب	z	=	ز	f	=	ف
t	=	ت	s	=	س	q	=	ق
th	=	ث	sh	=	ش	k	=	ك
j	=	ج	ṣ	=	ص	l	=	ل
ḥ	=	ح	ḍ	=	ض	m	=	م
kh	=	خ	ṭ	=	ط	n	=	ن
d	=	د	ẓ	=	ظ	h	=	ه
dh	=	ذ	‘	=	ع	w	=	و
r	=	ر	gh	=	غ	y	=	ي

Short: **a = ´ ;** **i = ِ ;** **u = ُ**

Long: **ā = ا ;** **ī = ي ;** **ū = و**

Diphthong: ay = يا ; aw = وا

BENGALI TRANSLITERATION SCHEME

(According to ALA-LC – *American Library Association and the Library of Congress* – Romanization Schemes for non-Roman scripts, 1997 edition)

Vowels and Diphthongs

Bengali Term	Transliteration	Bengali Term	Transliteration
অ	a	ঋ	r
আ	ā	এ	E
ই	i	ঐ	ai
ঈ	ī	ও	O
উ	u	ঔ	au
ঊ	ū		

Consonants

Bengali Term	Transliteration	Bengali Term	Transliteration
ক	ka	ন	na
খ	kha	প	Pa
গ	ga	ফ	Pha
ঘ	gha	ব	Ba
ঙ	ng	ভ	Bha
চ	ca	ম	Ma
ছ	cha	য	Ya
জ	ja	র	ra
ঝ	jha	ল	La
ঞ	ña	হ	Ha
ট	Ta	শ	□a
ঠ	Tha	ষ	Sha
ড	Da	স	Sa
ঢ	Dha	ড়	Ra
ণ	Na	ঢ়	Rha
ত	ta	য়	Ya
থ	tha	ৎ	ṭa
দ	da	ং	ṃ
ধ	dha	ঁ	Ñ

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Religious co-existence is one of the key issues discussed by prominent scholars and intellectuals. At the outset, it should be noted that the term "religious co-existence" refers to the idea of two or more persons, groups of people with different thought patterns and religions living with mutual understanding and cooperation in a land or country by mutually sharing the available resources. In short, everyone can exist in society peacefully and practise his/her religious beliefs independently.

It is noteworthy to highlight that religious doctrine influences the way people behave. History proves that the predicament of living within religious diversity, of minority and majority, is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, it is unfortunate that in some instances the minority is being discriminated by the majority. Ironically, all religions teach their adherents to be tolerant, just, fair and respectful to all human beings. Islam, specifically, pays attention towards establishing non-Muslims' rights and honours them.[1] It declares first the equality of human beings as they are created from one.[2] It commands its followers to respect and live with others peacefully in both situations, either as a majority or a minority group. For example, in Islam, the Qur'an says: "*Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against*

[1] Saleh Hussain Al-Aayed, *The Right of Non-Muslims in the Islamic World,* Translated from Arabic by Alexandra Alosh (Riyadh: Dār Eshbelia for Pub. & Dist., 1st edn. 2002), 5.
[2] Ibid., 13. Allah says in this regard: *"Mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women...."* Sūrah al-Nisā' 4:1.

you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily Allah loves those who deal with equity."[3]

Moreover, almost every religious ethics supports basic human values despite significant differences they may have on religious fundamental doctrines and practices. Yet formal differences sometimes may lead to discrimination due to many reasons among which is lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of each other's religions.

Today, as people are more exposed to living in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, the concept of religious co-existence, therefore, has been one of the major concerns among religious scholars and intellectuals. Islam has played a significant role in providing an amicable formula for religious co-existence. It urges people to make a peaceful, just and balanced society where everyone can exist with 'the Other' peacefully.

It should be noted here that Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim majority country in the world with a population of about 158.57 million,[4] located in South Asia. There are many religions across ethnicities such as Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, *Upajati*[5] and so on. Ali Riaz highlights in his work entitled *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh* that the non-Muslims who are the minorities in Bangladesh are discriminated and their religions are neglected.[6] However, others such as Razia Akhter Banu[7], say that there has been peace in social,

[3] Sūrah al-Mumtahanah 60:8.
[4]The world factbook, Bangladesh. See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world factbook/geos/bg.html#Peoplea>, viewed on 11 March 2011.
[5] The tribes of Bangladesh are living in Chittagong Hill-tax area.
[6] Ali Riaz, *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh* (United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2004), 60.
[7] Razia Akther Banu, Islam in Bangladesh (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), xiii.

political, religious and other aspects of life since the country's independence on March 26, 1971.

As there have been debates about the situation of religious co-existence in Bangladesh, this study wishes to conduct a survey among the people to measure their perceptions on religious co-existence. The survey would also measure the level of Muslim and non-Muslim relationship in Bangladesh and how it affects and promotes religious co-existence.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

History speaks that there is good socio-religious relationship among the Bangladeshi people (Muslims, Hindus, Christians and others) since her independence in 1971. However, a question has been raised toady as to whether the people there exist peacefully or not. Some people argue that there is peaceful co-existence.[8] However, others claim that the minority people are persecuted and their religions are neglected[9] so, there is no peaceful co-existence. What is the reality? What are the reasons behind these arguments and how it can be solved from the Bangladesh perspective?

Religion plays a vital role in the life of the Bangladeshi people. Most of them submit to one of the major religions of the world such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Moreover, Bangladesh can manifest itself as a model nation of amicable Muslim and non-Muslim relationship in promoting religious co-existence in the world today. Since the Muslims are the majority, they are in the position to uphold the true teachings of Islam. This is important in order to prove that Islam and

[8] Among them, Razia Akhter Banu (1991:xiii), Rafi Ahmed (1983:67), Charles Peter O'Donnel (1984:28), Craig Boxter (1997:141), Mehdi Hasan Palash (2001:6) and Sifuddin Ahmed (2000:54) are mentionable.

[9] Among them, Ali Riaz (2004:60), Hiranmay Karleka (2005:87), Badruddin Umar (2011:14-15), Imtiaz Ahmed (2009), Abul Kalam Azad (2009:62), Kabir Chawdhury (2008:55), Shahriar Kabir (2006:7), A M M Shawkat Ali (2005:16) and Kongkor Singha (1999:6) are mentionable.