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Peace Education in Islam: A New Dimension of Educational Approach for the Muslim Countries

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ABSTRACT

The world has reached on the highest peak of the development. Science has enabled the discovered other planets. But still people, the human race, the best creation of God (the Almighty Allah) are starving for food; killing, fighting and all sorts of destructions are going on in our everyday life. People are fighting with dogs over food from the garbage. They are sleeping on the footpath under the open sky. Rich countries in the world possessed three fourth of all the wealth of the world. People who have wealth are also searching for peace. Today the world is beset with huge problems, although modern amenities prevail everywhere. Humankind has reached a great peak of success, but humans are passing their days with anxiety because of tumult of problems in the world. These problems include hunger, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination, moral degradation and lack of health care. Bangladesh as a developing country is not immune to these problems. Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are the burning issues in Bangladesh that contribute to the absence of peace in the family and in society. Now, United Nations and various other organizations are working for peace. They also want to introduce peace education to bring peace in the society, as well as in the world. United Nations mandate University for Peace introduced Peace Education in Islamic Context for the Muslim countries.

Keywords: Peace, Education, Islam, New Dimension, Muslim.

Peace Education is very important for bringing peace and stability in the society. It is very difficult to assign a universal definition of peace education. Peace is not only a society without weapons. It is not just an absence of war; peace is something far beyond that: an environment in which all humans can enjoy the highest level of inner peace. Peace education "...is not only rooted in building peace with oneself, but it also interconnects and interrelates with every issue of life" (Bull, 2000, p 17). Peace education teaches a culture of peace that includes six important components: (1) educating for human rights and responsibilities; (2) educating for personal peace; (3) educating for environmental care; (4) educating for intercultural solidarity (5) educating for living with justice and compassion; and, (6) educating for dismantling a cultural of war (Toh, 2004). Peace education is not only concerned with the content of teaching, but also with the form and structure of teaching.

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This approach of education is known as “Peace Education”, which will address all existing concerns of positive and negative peace in society. Peace education is defined as education for transforming consciousness and worldviews towards a culture of peace and nonviolence. “It rests on developing a critical understanding of root causes of conflicts and violence, and empowering learners to dismantle a culture of violence, and to build a peaceful self and world; it takes place across all modes - formal, non-formal, informal - and levels, relying on participatory, creative, and critical pedagogies” (Groff & Smoker, 1996).

Peace education acknowledges its purpose as “...education to facilitate the achievement of peace and related sets of social values, largely through learning to recognize, confront and practice alternative, multiple form of violence” (Brenes, 2004). Peace education is a teaching discipline applicable to poverty, malnutrition and street children, and the causes of these hardships on local, national and global levels. It discusses how to empower people through cooperation and collaboration.

The gap between rich and poor is increasing, day by day all over the world. The United Nations Development Program’s Human Report of 1992 reported that in 1970 the richer fifth of the world’s people received thirty times more income than the poorer fifth; by 1989 they received nearly sixty times more. As a result, the richer fifth now receives more than 80 percent of the world’s income, while the poorer fifth receives 1.4 percent. From 1982 through 1990, debtor countries in the south have paid their creditors in the north six-and-a-half billion dollars in interest and another six billion dollars in principal payments per month, an amount that the entire developing world spends on education and health in the same span of time (Brecher and Tim, 1994, p 29).

Essential to peace education pedagogy, participation functions as a direct route to knowledge. Students and the teachers must both play the role of the learner. This education system helps students to empower themselves by learning how to critically analyze a situation. “Students have unique knowledge and perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful and improve their implementation” (Levin, 2000, p.156). Peace education does not follow the banking system¹, which suggests the teacher is the only source of knowledge. “Students are producers of school outcomes, so their involvement is fundamental to all improvement” (Levin, 2000, p.157).

Peace education is an academic field which seeks to understand the multiple ways in which education can be used to meet the demands posed by peacemaking and peace building challenges. Especially, peace education seeks to address issues such as protected conflict, nuclear weapons, poverty and discrimination. It aims to alleviate these problems by developing educational policies and educator skills and tools, which promote peace and also by designing culturally relevant peace education programs that can be implemented in various contexts. Peace education combines traditional pedagogy

¹ A system of formal education in which the student does not participate in the learning process.

(research, lecture) with interactive teaching methodology to engage students in learning process and obtain critical feedback from audiences, which help inform and shape lesson and program design and development. In this way, peace education takes an innovative approach to education – positioning the teacher as learner and the learner as teacher. (UNESCO).

The word Islam stems from the root meaning *silm* (Arabic), or peace. There is a general agreement among the scholars of Islam that Islam as a religion has been based on values and principles that promote peace and harmony. There are several approaches within the framework of Islam that facilitate conflict resolution, transformation and peace building in the society. It provides insight into the mechanism brought forward by the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (Sm.) and utilized in Islamic history for peaceful resolution of conflicts. It is meant to bring the focus back to Islam as a religion of peace.

“Afw” is an Islamic term which means forgiveness is the most valued virtue in Islam. In Islamic tradition forgiveness is held high in matter of conflict in the personal level and public level. Forgiveness is given preference over anger and revenge no matter how evil of the offense is. It is stated in the holy Qur'an, “And who shun the more heinous sins and abominations; and who, whenever they are moved to anger, readily forgive.” (42: 37). The Qur'an does not limit forgiveness only to the large conflict rather; it uses it as a manner of interaction among individuals and communities for the cultivations of peace and harmonious relations within the society. It is stated in the holy Qur'an explains, “Keep to forgiveness and enjoin kindness and turn away from the ignorant. And if it should happen that a promoting from Satan stirs thee up (to anger) seeks refuge with Allah: behold, He All- hearing, All- knowing.” (7: 199-200). Oqbah Ibn 'Amr reported that the Messenger of Allah said, “ you shall keep relationship with one who cut off from you, you shall give one who disappointed you, and you shall pardon one who oppressed you.” Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: “Moses son of 'Imran had asked: O my Lord! Who is the best honorable of Thy servants to Thee? He [the God] said: He who pardons when he is in position of power” (M. Amir Ali, 2010). Here, forgiving others while being in the position of power is a sign of generosity of spirit as well as humanity. In another Hadith Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of Allah said: “The strong one is not he who knocks out his adversary; the strong one is he who keeps control over his temper.” General amnesty to all the oppressors on the day of conquest of Macca and the distribution of war booty after the Battle of Hunayn to Maccans² who had joined hands with him to fight the war provides an understanding that forgiveness in Islam is not just forgetting and moving on but also an attempt to improve relationships with adversaries and gaining their respect and trust.

Worship without knowledge has no goodness in it, knowledge without understanding has no goodness in it, and the recitation of the Qur'an, which is not thoughtful, has no goodness in it. (Abu Dawd; Tirmidhi). Pursuit of knowledge and

² The people of Macca who have been the oppressors.

reasoning are themes central to Islamic tradition and text without creativity. Islam considers knowledge essential for both spiritual and mental development. However knowledge without creativity and critical thinking is vain. In the field of peace education creativity and critical thinking have been given more priority. Ijtihad or independent thinking is used as a principle of creative and critical thinking in Islam. (Syed, 2009). Creativity has been an integral part of Islamic reconciliation and conflict resolution. Prophet Mohammad (Sm.)'s inventive and noble approach to resolve the disagreement between tribes of Macca regarding the replacement of the black stone in Kaaba, is one such examples. "Black stone was the meteorite Abraham used in original construction of Kaba'h and was a reminder Meccan's noble ancestry. The dispute took place when every faction of Macca decided to have the honor of replacing the Black Stone after rebuilding of Kaabah which was badly destructed by heavy floods. Every tribe swore that they would kill if they weren't given honour. Prophet (Sm.) asked the chief of the each tribe to hold a piece of the sheet on which the black rock was placed; they jointly lifted the sheet, and then Mohammad, peace be upon him, lifted the rock and set it in place. Nobody felt slighted, and every clan had participated." (Michael Hart, 1992).

Each time individuals or communities disagree or face a conflict; there exists two approaches to conflict resolution: violent methods and nonviolent methods. Violence leads to destruction, anger and hatred, whereas nonviolence makes way for peaceful means avoiding violence and confrontation. The Qur'an tells us that Allah does not like Fasad or those who perpetrate Fasad³ (2:204-05; 28:4; 30:41; 26:150-52; 7:74). Islam is a religion which prefers nonviolence over violence. All most all the basic virtues revealed in the Qur'an like patience, kindness, forgiveness truth, generosity and respect for human life and dignity are also guiding principles for modern day nonviolent strategic action. For example the holy Qur'an attaches great importance to patience. One the famous Muslim scholar, Wahiduddin Khan elaborates more on the relationship between patience and nonviolence. He states: "Patience implies a peaceful response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. The word Sabr exactly expresses the notion of non-violence as it is understood in modern times. That patient action is non-violent action has been clearly expressed in the Qur'an." (Khan, 2010).

The holy Qur'an does not insist on pacifism but it gives preference to nonviolence and peace over violence and conflict. The holy Qur'an's entire spirit is consensus with peace and nonviolence and does not permit use of violence as a norm at all. Mohammad (Sm.) kept the recitation of the Qur'an peaceful and secret to avoid violent confrontation with the opposition after first revelation of the holy Qur'an in the Cave of Hera Mountain. Instate of retaliating and reacting violently Prophet Mohammad (Sm.) preferred secret migration to Medina from Makkah where there was growing opposition and violence against him. This is also an example of a nonviolent mechanism employed by

³ Fasad means violence, destruction.

Mohammad (Sm.). Similarly during the battle of Al-Ahzab⁴ when the tribe of Quraysh⁵ had initiated a war, then Mohammad (Sm.) with his companions dug trenches to avoid a violent battle. This is another example of Prophet's preference for nonviolence irrespective of circumstance.

Consensus building and consultation are essential ingredients which make conflict resolution and peace building strategies democratic. The holy Qur'an attaches great importance to mutual consultation and consensus building, and has therefore introduced the principle of Shura⁶. "Shura is solidarity in the society based on the principal of free consultation and genuine dialogue, reflecting equality in thought and the expression of opinion." (Abu-Nimer-2003). It is among fundamental principles of Islam which are justice, equality and human dignity. Shura is essentially parallel to the democratic principal in Western political thought, having analogous aspects and about the same tendency or direction. It is predicated on three basic teachings. First, that all persons in any given society are equal in human and civil rights. Second, those public issues are best decided by majority views. And third, that the principles of justice, equality and human dignity, which constitute Islam's moral core, and from which all Islamic conceptions of human and civil rights derive, are best realized, in personal as well as public life, under the Shura governance. (Sulaiman-1999). Islam is egalitarian in nature and dines any sort of authority, privilege and hierarchy. The holy Qur'an stresses on equality, dignity of human individual and popular consent, shared responsibility, personal freedom and above all justice. The holy Qur'an states, "Those who answer their lord establish the prayers and their affairs are by consultation; who spend of that which we have given them" (42:38).

Islam promotes peace and harmony both at interpersonal and communal level. Muslims are urged to settle their clashes and disagreements in a nonviolent manner, preferably through dialogue. "The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root Silm meaning 'peace', 'submission', 'deliverance' and 'safety'. From the Qur'anic perspective, attention should be paid to the relationship between the concept of Sulh⁷ and the concept of Salih Amal (good deeds). Salih, like sulh, comes from the same root and means 'to cleave to peace or to move towards peace'. (Sulaiman, 2007). Thus "a good Muslim is the one whose hand and tongue leave other Muslim in peace". According to both the Qur'an and Prophet's tradition, Muslims are supposed to settle their conflicts and disagreements with peace. As mentioned in the holy Qur'an "In most of their secret talks, save him who orders charity or kindness or conciliation between mankind and he who does this seeking the good pleasure of Allah, we shall give him great reward." (4: 14). In another verse of the holy Quran explicitly encourages Muslims to seek for peaceful

⁴ Al-Ahzab is plural number of Hazb. Al-Ahzab means many groups. Many groups of Quarish participated in the Battle of Al-Ahzab. It also called Battle of Khandaq or Battle of Trance.

⁵ Quraish was one of the most powerful tribes of Makkah which opposed Mohammad (Sm.). In fact Mohammad (Sm.) also born in this community

⁶ Shura means consultation.

⁷ Sulh means reconciliation, peace.

intervention to resolve an issue? The holy Qur'an says, "If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make you peace between them: but if one of them transgress beyond bounds against the other, then fight you (all) against the one that transgress till it complies with the command of Allah; but if it complies then make peace between them with justice, and be fair: for Allah loves those who are fair. Believers are but a single brotherhood: so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers, and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy." (49:9-10). The verses quoted above stress both the importance of peaceful interventions as dialogue and the need for the dialogue or any other effort, to just and fair.

Islam as a religion not only lays down foundational principles towards a peaceful and just society, but has also stressed upon putting these values and principle in practice for the empowerment of the weak and oppressed. In Islam passivity is looked down upon and there is great support for "dynamic social activism in terms of individual duties and sense of social responsibility." (Abu- Nimer -2003). The holy Qur'an discusses on characteristic of the right as the one who are active in executing tasks that will benefit others and says, "They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and compete in doing good. They are among the righteous." (3: 114). There is a clear indication in the holy Qur'an that whatever the conditions might be all Muslims are obliged to lend a helping hand to the people who are oppressed, "What reason could you have for not fighting in the Way of Allah – for those man, women and children who are oppressed and say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city whose inhabitants are wrongdoers! Give us a helper from you!" (4:75).

Zakat is obligatory whereas Sadaqah is voluntary Ibadat (worship) in Islam. Zakah and Sadaqah serve as mechanisms in Islam which relate to social and individual responsibility for the betterment of poor, needy, orphan and destitute slaves. (Abu – Nimer-2003). As Allah the Almighty says, "Sadaqat (used here as Zakat) is for the poor, needy and the concern employees, to wine over hearts, for the release of slaves, for the people burdened with debts, for the people engaged in religious struggles and for the travelers. This is the law of Allah." (9:60).

In Islamic point of view, all human beings have been created by one and the same God, and belong to one great brotherhood, that is why Islam has laid great emphasis on the activism to support the poor and needy members of society, to empower the society. Believing that all humans have the same origin, in Islam activism and advocacy for good is irrespective of differences of religion, race and gender. According to Islam, a nation cannot survive without making fair and adequate arrangement for the sustenance and welfare of all the poor, underprivileged, destitute members of every community. The ultimate goal would be the elimination of their sufferings and poverty. In brief, for Muslims good doing and justice, to both Muslims and non-Muslims are essential features of their religious practice. Understanding the complementary religious principles is helpful in achieving peace and harmony in the society.

Truth seeking in matters of dispute and its resolution holds great importance in any peacemaking effort which is to be sustained. Truth is the basic ethic and essence of Islam. The life and tradition of Prophet Mohammad (Sm.) also upholds truth, truthfulness and truth seeking both in action and word – particularly during in conflict. He said, “No man’s faith is complete if he doesn’t discard falsehood even in a joke and refrain from it even in a dispute, tough his cause may be just.” (Sheeh Al-Bukhari). If truth is missing in the actions and words of a Muslim his ownership lacks sincerity; truth-seeking in any matter is an essential quality for a believer. Similarly truth seeking is also an essential quality needed for peacemakers, peace-builders as well as peace educators for sustainable peace, development and peace education.

In conclusion, Islamic values and principles are in absolute harmony with the values and principles from the fundamentals of secular peace education, peacemaking, peace building and conflict resolution. For Muslims, peace education, conflict resolution and peace building are not latest trends towards establishment of peaceful society; rather these are embedded in Islamic tradition and text which needs to be revived once again, to address the violent realities of the world.

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