

## **PEACE BUILDING BETWEEN ISLAM AND MODERN WORLD: THE PERSPECTIVE OF SAID NURSI'S *RISALE-I-NUR* WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE QUR'AN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The main objective of this research is to find out the ways of peace building between Islam and the modern world from Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's (1877-1960) views revealed in Risale-i-Nur with special devotion to the Qur'an. It is indeed sad to observe that how efforts and resources are being wasted in Muslim brethren's fighting each other instead of preaching the glories of Islam to the world. What is more heart-rending is Muslims are facing trouble to accommodate themselves with the modern world. Thus, the present world is enthusiastically looking for the ways to overcome those problems. This study finds that Nursi's fervent call for Islamic Unity is all the more needed in our contemporary times especially when Muslims nowadays seem to forget the very Qur'anic maxim of unity stated in the verse ÓÎÊ ÑImrÊn, 3: 103. This study finds that the Nursi's Risale-i-Nur could be one of the most persuasive guides and useful expounded works for eradicating horrible situation of the unhealthy realm and it can play a significant role towards promoting the harmonious relationship between Islam and Modern world as well. In this regard, this study emphasizes on the six major issues such as (1) true meaning of Islam, (2) religious freedom, (3) issue of head-scarf, (4) relationship between religion and science, (5) relationship between Islam and the West, and finally (6) the requirements for the world peace. The methodologies applied in this study are descriptive and analytical.*

**Keywords:** *Qur'an, Islam, Peace, Said Nursi, Risale-i-Nur, Modern world.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's (1877-1960) contribution to unite Muslims has been concentrated by the modern scholars, thinkers, policymakers and others. His famous work entitled "Risale-i-Nur" got attention by the people towards numerous issues of modernity and Islam. Among them, peace

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building between Islam and modern world could play a good role towards eradicating conflict between two groups. His call for Muslim unity is also a very significant theory that can be used in promoting relationship among Muslims' sects and groups.

The paper highlights Said Nursi's biography in brief and his contribution towards promoting peace between Islam and the modern world. The study, in this regard, highlights only six significant issues which are the most discussed issues in the present-day world. How the challenges of those issues could be overcome from Nursi's thought reflected in "*Risale-i-Nur*" with special reference to the Qur'an. The present study, therefore, would answer the following questions:

1. Who is Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and what is "*Risale-i-Nur*"?
2. What are the challenges towards promoting peace between Islam and the Modern world?
3. How the ideas of Said Nursi reflected in "*Risale-i-Nur*" can be useful towards overcoming those challenges with special reference to the Qur'an?

### 1.1. Objectives of Research

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To introduce Said Nursi and his most famous work "*Risale-i-Nur*".
2. To find out the most significant challenges towards peace building between Islam and Modern world.
3. To study the ideas of Said Nursi imitated in "*Risale-i-Nur*" towards overcoming those challenges with special reference to the Qur'an.

### 1.2. Literature Review

A good number of literature is found on the biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and his works. However, not much literature is found on the concept of peace building with special reference to *Risale-i-Nur* and the Noble Qur'an. For example, "Islam and Modern Turkey (Kurdistan: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi)" by Sukran Vaide, "Globalization, Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi" and "Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue" by Ian Markham, "An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings" by Suendam Birinci and Suendam Birinci Pirim, "Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi" by Serif Mardin and "Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi" by Sukran Vahide emphasize on the biography of Said Nursi and his thoughts on the contemporary world. These works also demonstrate how Nursi's thoughts influence on the contemporary issues. The present world only concerns on His thoughts on few modern issues on the basis of *Risale-i-Nur* and links with the noble Qur'an.

## 2. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

As the nature of this study is to study Said Nursi's ideas on Islam and Modernity which has been reflected in his famous work entitled "*Risale-i-Nur*" with special reference to the Qur'an, the methodologies used here are analytic and descriptive. The Qur'an and the *Risale-i-Nur* have been treated as the primary sources of the present study. Some other secondary sources have also been studied carefully, analyzed critically and quoted prudently in an academic way.

### 3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### 3.1. A Short Biography of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960)

Said Nursi was born in 1877 in a Muslim family in eastern Turkey (Fedotoff: 2004). From the childhood, his gigantic memory was appreciated by people. He started his education in a religious school (madrasah) and completed at the age of fourteen. Later on, he studied various branches of knowledge such as physical sciences, mathematics and philosophy.

At the end of the second decade of his life, he realized that the religious education system especially the curriculum is not adequate to provide complete knowledge of Islam which can lead the people towards facing the modernity and modern world. Therefore, he constructed a new curriculum for the Turkish *madrasah* education. He also tried to establish an university namely *Medrestu'z Zehra*, (the Resplendent Madrasah) in the Eastern Provinces (Risale-i-Nur: accessed 2015). In 1917, he arrived in Istanbul to collect fund for the institution and met Sultan Abdul Hamid (Ibid.). He could collect the sufficient fund for establishing the university but he could not do that because of the World War-I (Ibid).

Said Nursi's remarkable work is Risale-i-Nur. Risale-i-Nur is an attempt to establish links between the Qur'an and the natural world. Many people make the mistakes as they consider it as the *tafsir* (commentary) of the Qur'an (Sukran Vahide, Sozler Nesriyat A. S., Istanbul: 1995). It was an attempt to show that there is not conflict between religious and science (Ibid.). He started to write this work during the World War (Fedotoff: 2004). Once he was caught that thrown into the jail by the Russians, he could not continue the writing. Later on, he completed the work. Now the book has been translated into many languages are available on internet (<http://www.iikv.org/en/the-risale-i-nur>).

Besides, Nursi also wrote a treatise on Resurrection and thirty-three other pieces which were later collected as *Sozler (The Words)*. This was followed by *Maktubat (Letters)*, a collection of thirty-three letters of varying length written to his students. Two other works namely "*Lem'alar (The Flashes)*" and "*Sualar (The Rays)*", were completed in 1949. In addition, there are three collections of additional letters, *Barla Lahikast*, *Kastmonu Lahikast*, and *Emirdag Lahikast* from each of Bediuzzaman's three places of exile.

Said Nursi responded to his Almighty's call on March 23, 1960. A very short lifetime of eighty years was end. He spent his life for serving of faith for seeking the pleasure of Allah (s.w.t.) and he did so with complete honor, dignity, and victory (Fedotoff: 2004).

#### 3.2. Challenges towards peace building between Islam and the Modern World

There is no doubt that Islam is facing a lot of challenges in this modern and scientific era. The challenges are not from only outside of Islam and Muslim but also from its inside (Watson: 1999). The core challenges have been mentioned by the scholars and thinkers. Muslim world is trying to overcome those challenges. The challenges have been facing by Islam and Muslims in this modern world may include the lack of understanding the true meaning of Islam, the term used by the west such as fundamentalism, terrorist, extremist, etc., religious freedom and the concept of secularism, crises of unity, gender issue, revenges and forgiveness, issue of modern science and religion, issue of development, issue of modern and modernity and so on.

Watson (1999) states that the challenges from outside of Islam and Muslims could be overlooked as it is because of lack of knowledge and understanding but from the inside is the tensions. Most of the Muslim scholars emphasizes on the crises of unity and *ummahtic* attitude (Khatami: 1997). Allah says in the Qur'an: "*And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided*" (3:103).

However, the consequent discussions are going to highlight only the challenges relating to the modern world.

### **3.3. Selected Challenges and the Ways to Overcome them**

#### **3.3.1. The Origin and Meaning of Islam**

The first challenge faced Muslims is the lack of understanding of the true meaning of Islam and its origin. The misunderstanding of Islam is of the following:

##### **i. Origin of Islam**

Some people may think that Islam refers to only the religion that Prophet Muhammad (sm.) brought from Allah (s.w.t.) to the mankind. It leads religious people to be divided into many groups such as Muslims, Christians, Jews and so on. However, Islam is the religious for all prophets from the first man and prophet Adam (as) to the last Prophet Muhammad (phAuh). Said Nursi's views go to support the same believe as he says that the earlier Prophets were Muslims by virtue of receiving revelation and submitting to the same God (Allah) and last in the sense that Muhammad was the final, the "seal of the Prophets" (Alatas: 2004). It is also proved by the Qur'an that all the prophets believed in One Allah and they worshiped Him alone and called the people to His way. For instance, regarding Ibrahim (AS), the Qur'an states that "*Ibrahim (Abraham) was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim Hanifa and he was not of Al-Mushrikun* (3:67)." The Qur'an also says about Jesus (AS) that "*Then when 'Isa (Jesus) came to know of their disbelief, he said: "Who will be my helpers in Allah's Cause?" Al-Hawariyyun (the disciples) said: "We are the helpers of Allah; we believe in Allah, and bear witness that we are Muslims* (3:52)."

Therefore, if we do believe that we, the religious people such as Christian, Jews, and Muslims are from the same origin so there will not be any conflict among us. The conflict between Muslims and Christians, between Muslims and Jews or between Christians and Jews are observed in around the world can be overcome with mutual understanding.

##### **ii. True Meaning of Islam**

Another misconception regarding the conflict is to understand the true meaning of Islam. The Arabic word "Islam" itself means peace and submission from two different Arabic roots. So, the Muslim is who is considered as peaceful and submissive man. It means A Muslim who is peaceful to the creations and submissive to the Creator, the Lord, Allah. Therefore, a Muslim can be harmful for anyone neither for Muslim nor for non-Muslim (Bukhari).

Nursi states in this regard that Islam as a civilization and a way of life refers not just to beliefs in the narrow sense of the term but also to knowledge of God and of creation. It is for this

reason that the Muslim scholars of the past cultivated with great fervor a wide variety of sciences (Alatas: 2004).

### ***3.3.2. Religious Freedom***

Religious freedom is another challenge in the modern era. In the name of religious freedom people are doing anything whatever they will and wish. Yes, Islam permits religious freedom but with such conditions. For example, it cannot be harm full to any ones' beliefs or religion. Moreover, there are some extremists who do not want to allow this kind of freedom.

In this regard, Nursi has an own thought of religious freedom. Among Muslims, there is a broad consensus concerning human duties in the first and of human rights in the second place. Nursi's fifth word mentions two duties: "The first creation and maintenance of life are responsibilities of the Creator alone. The second is our responsibility-begging from the Creator and Sustainer, relaying on Him totally... to avoid being a trouble or burden on others..." Thus, from the inner duty to practice religion there results an inner freedom granted by religion (Risale-i-Nur, Quoted from: Elsas: 2004).

However, Nursi's Eighth word is explaining the path of Islam which promises such security and freedom on the one hand puts people under the obligation to observe the Islamic laws and prescriptions and on the other hand as such should be chosen freely and consciously (Risale-i-Nur).

With Nursi's sixteenth Word, daily the five obligatory prayers of Islam can be seen "as a kind of ascension to heaven" and, its words being the words of God Himself, "as an example of pure grace (Ibid.)."

### ***3.3.3. The Issue of Head-Scarf***

Yet the gender issue is one of the most significant challenges in this modern era, Muslim world especially Muslim women are facing another challenge and that is issue of head-Scarf. The modern world does not women to be used of head-scarf. Few countries have already banned the head-scarf to use. Moreover, it is obviously dangerous that few Muslims countries also neglect and discourage to use head-scarf. Thus, the issue of head-scarf has been concentrated by the contemporary scholars. It is obvious that there is a common feeling in Muslim countries to belong to "*the best peoples evolved for mankind*" (3:110). In 1931, Nursi therefore emphasized in an article on "Nationalism in the View of Islam", now the Third Topic of the Twenty-Sixth Letter, that "positive nationalism must serve Islam", quoting Qur'ān 5:57; "soon will God produce a people whom he will love as the will love Him, lowly with the believers, mighty against the rejecters, fighting in the way of God" (Elsas: 2004). Although he was Turkish citizen of Kurdish origin, Nursi felt urged to utter a warning, because he perceived the danger of foreign infiltration by the west and by Christianity of rather by blind imitation: "O my Turkish brothers! You watch out in particular! Your nationhood has fused weigh Islam and may not be separated from it. If you do separate them, you will be finished! All your glorious deeds of the past are recorded in the book of Islam's deeds" (Risale-i-Nur).

Nursi declares in the Fourteenth Ray he would only acknowledge his sentence at court which he received for his explanation of the Qur'ān “if it is possible to deny numerous of its explicit verses, which do not bear interpretation, about the veiling of women, inheritance, polygamy...and if you can ... abolish ... freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, and intellectual and scholarly opposition...” (Risale-i-Nur). In his Twenty-Fourth Ray “On Islamic Dress for Women”, Nursi relates to Qur'ān 33:59: “*O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad)...*”. Contrary to modern criticism, which “does not consider the veiling of women to be natural and says it is a slavery of a sort”, he contends, that “this injunction of the Qur'ān... is entirely natural. To veil themselves is natural for women... For ... they are in need of a man's protection and help for themselves and for their children whom they love more than their own lives... and want by nature to cover themselves so as not to suffer assault, nor to be accused of unfaithfulness in the eyes of their husbands... Being weak, their creation demands that through veiling themselves they do not excite the appetites of men outside the stipulated degrees of kinship, nor allow any opportunity for assault” (Risale-i-Nur).

#### **3.3.4. *Revenge and Forgiveness from the view of Nursi***

The intention of revenge creates a lot of problem in the modern world. In Islam, fighting against enemy who directly involved in harming Islam and Muslim is obligatory but the pre-requisites of this fighting is unity of *ummah*. According to Nursi (Risale-i-Nur), Jihad against the enemy is necessary but unity is more urgent. Therefore, he called for unity. This unity, for him, can be attained and achieved through the internal jihad of transforming the self. No change can occur in society, the Qur'ān tells, without the change to the self. The power of unity is far greater than any military power. The starting point for unity and brotherhood is the change of the self, both mind and heart. An open mind leads to tolerance. We now deal with another pathway to tolerance, the open heart that is inclined to forgiveness. Forgiveness is the anti-dote to anger and indignation.

Nursi (Risale-i-Nur) states that forgiveness has the power to heal our hearts of hatred, and to stop our limbs of violence. We look at others with a sense of good will, and we forgave them for their mistakes. And we realize that we too can make these mistakes.

Nursi (Risale-i-Nur) discusses the concept of forgiveness in the context of a brotherhood of believers who are guilty of minor wrongs to each other. These minor wrongs are not being underestimated. They can cause the breakdown of human relations.

Forgiveness should not be confused with compassion. We pity those who suffer, and forgave those who cause us suffering. We naturally sympathize with those who suffer on account of loss of wealth, health, or a dear one. We identify with such suffering because we too could suffer similar misfortunes. According to the Nursi's view, the human heart has two tendencies, the tendency for brotherly affection (*ukhuwāt*) and the tendency for enmity (*'adāwāt*). True affection should be shared between brothers who have a common faith. It does not pay to lose a brother because of some small argument or insult. By cultivation brotherly affection, our enmity will change into pity (Risale-i-Nur).



### **3.3.5. Relation between Science and Religion from the view of Nursi**

A controversial argument is frequently observed that is the relationship between religion and science is good or bad. Since, we are living in the era of science and technology and we cannot even think anything without technology, we should have an understanding that there is no conflict between religion and science. Religion is developed by the super natural knowledge as it is considered as the revelation from the Lord, on the other hand, science is based on acquired knowledge gained by the mankind. The source of knowledge is Allah.

In this regard, Nursi has contributed a lot to make and promote a good relationship between religion and science. His approach to science as well as scientific approach to religion made him unique. Nursi believed that the science as a subset of religion. In this 30<sup>th</sup> word, he provides a brilliant exposition of the command that Allah has ordained, even for the minutest entity that exists in the heavens and the earth. He states that science does not provide all the answers, only certain answers can be provided for practically an infinite number of enquiries. The answers that do obtain for the science are only approximate in nature (Risale-i-Nur).

Moreover, Said Nursi describes the limitation of religion. He mentions that the contradistinction between the Euro-American world-view and the Muslim world-view, using the analogy with trees. He asserts that the world-view that science yields, to which Euro-American countries subscribe is like the *Zaqqum* tree. The world-view inspired by the Qur'ān in then compared to the Tuba tree. He goes on to illustrate the distinction using the parable of the travelers.

The Qur'ān proposes scientific approach to learn about the universe (32:27), and it helps the metaphysical enquiry by declaring that everything and every being in the heaven and the earth celebrates (al-Qur'an: 24: 41 & 17:44) Allah's praises. In this regard, everything that we find out via the science is actually a pointer to the Necessary being that Allah is. Indeed Qur'ān declares that the natural phenomena are the signs of Allah (3:190).

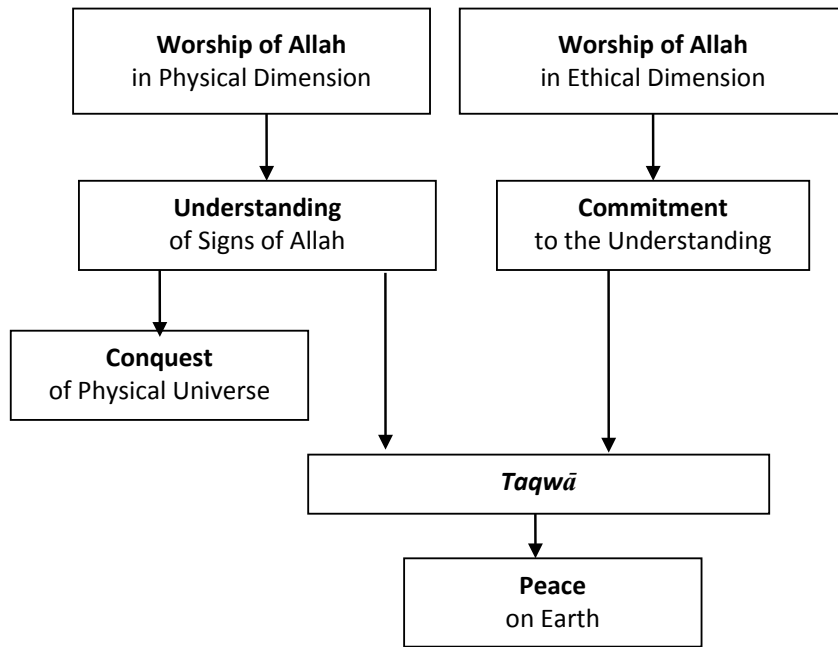
### **3.3.6. Islam Vis-a-Vis the Wes**

The issue of Islam vis-a-vis the West becomes another challenge towards promoting peace between Islam and the modern world. Some people do not allow anything form West as they consider it prohibited, on the other hand, some of them are very liberal and, in most cases, interested to accept everything without examining from religious perspective. It creates problem and becomes another significant challenge in this modern era. Nurs's views go to the middle of those two groups. As it is mentioned above that the misunderstanding is the reason behind this conflict, he suggests learning true knowledge of Islam and its teachings. There is no place of East and West or North and South. The issue is either Islam permits it or not. Yet, the West is now more developed and progressed in knowledge and economics; we should not forget our glorious history.

### **3.4. Nursi's Peace Theory**

Said Nursi spent his single moment of establishing true peace not only in his own society but also in the world which have been reflected in his speech and writings. He devoted his life to seek the pleasure of Allah in the way of establishing and promoting peaceful existence in the mankind

irrespective of culture, race, place, country and so on. Based on Nursi's views on peace theory that can only bring the peace in the globe, Rahim () structured a graph as in mentioned below:



According to Nursi (Resale-i-Nur) and based on the above graph, the first requirement for peace in the world is to worship Allah in true sense as He is the Creator (al-Qur'an: 2:30-34), Lord and only He should be worshiped. None is there who can be worshiped besides Him (al-Qur'an: 9:129). The worship can be from two dimension such as (1) form Physical and (2) form ethical dimension. The physical dimension of worship Allah lead people to the understanding of His Signs in this physical world and ethical dimension of worship leads people to the commitment of understanding that they are the servants of the Creator and He only should be worshiped. Once we have the understanding of the signs of this physical world, we do have the conquest in this world. Allah created mankind as His *Khalîfah* on earth (al-Qur'an: 2:30), then he made a promise with the mankind that those who believe and perform righteously, Allah will give them *khilafah* on the earth (al-Qur'an: 24:55). Moreover, both of these understandings lead a person to the piousness (*taqwa*) and *taqwa* can only bring inner and outer peace in this worldly life.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Said Nursi, a Turkish man devoted his life for Islam and Muslims. His contribution to the Islam and Muslim *Ummah* is remarkable. His writings are more effective towards promoting the true peace between Islam and the modern world. While Islam is facing a lot of problems, Nursi's peace theory could be useful. The theory could remove internal and external challenges faced by Islam, Muslims and Muslim world. According to him, the most important things to promote peace between Islam and modern world is to learn about true meaning of Islam and its teachings, to be pious as we have



been asked for, to earn the quality of forgiveness rather than taking revenge and finally to go back to submit ourselves to Allah (swt) as He is our Creator, Lord and Only he should be worshiped. None is there beside Him. We should also have the understanding that there is not conflict between science and religious. Science is a special knowledge which is also form the Creator. Science is working for the mankind with the attained and acquired knowledge to promote our life easier and flexible and religion especially Islam guide mankind towards peace in this worldly life and the life hereafter. To conclude, therefore, it could be said that the views and ideas of Said Nursi could be useful towards promoting peace and stability between Islam and the modern world.

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