**Muslim Minority and
Communal Harmony
in India:
A Study of the Views of
Wahiduddin Khan**

BY KHALIL AHMAD

The Muslim Minority and Communal Harmony in India: A Study of the Views of Wahiduddin Khan

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Abstract

The partition of the Indian subcontinent placed her religious harmony at stake. In post-independence India, one of the most crucial issues was to maintain communal harmony between the Muslim minority and non-Muslim majority. Renowned Muslim Scholars and organisations came forward and expressed their concerns on the issue. However, Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) suggested a different methodology, contrary to his contemporaries. Through the application of descriptive and content analytical methods, this study investigates Khan's ideas of communal harmony in post-independence India. The study found that Khan emphasised *da'wah* and peace activism. Contrary to his preceding views, he blamed the Muslim populace for communal disharmony in the country. Further, based on his reading of the Treaty of *Hudaibiyyah*, he recommended Muslims take a unilateral and passive step to establish communal harmony in the country and assumed it to be the only possible way for the Muslim minority. This study observes that Khan's understanding of *Hudaibiyyah* is questionable as he ignored all other significant incidents of the *sīrah*. Nevertheless, his views on the unity of religion remains significant.

Keywords: Wahiduddin Khan, Communal Harmony, *Hudaibiyyah*, Muslims, Islamic Thought post-independent India.

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In post-independence India, the Muslims are the largest minority and the second largest religious community in the country, as they constitute 13.4% of the entire population.¹ Despite this, the Muslim community faces many challenges, including but not limited to preserving communal harmony in the country. In such critical circumstances, many Muslim scholars and leaders came forward to guide the community. Some of them suggested traditional teachings of Islam as the solution to the problems while others alluded to modern and secular approaches should be adopted. Wahiduddin Khan, an Islamic scholar, with a background in both Islamic and modern sciences, had presented his inimitable understanding of Islam which he considered as most appropriate for the contemporary world. As per Khan, he proposed a balanced understanding of Islam which was more appealing to the modern mind. He articulated that his ideas may bridge the gap between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority. Khan's articulation of a wishful narrowing of the Hindu-Muslim divide in a post-partition India alluded to his demeanour as the *al-Risala* approach.

Wahiduddin Khan: A Short Introduction

Despite graduating from a traditional religious seminary in 1944, he was sceptical about the traditional understanding of Islam which he viewed as not able to provide the solution to the emerging issues in the modern world. Finally, in 1948, he began to study Islam based on its primary sources instead of depending on the secondary ones such as commentaries and translations. As a result, as he claimed, he 'rediscovered' Islam. This rediscovery of Islam brought him to believe that Islam is relevant in the contemporary world. Khan began to study the scholarly works of Western scholars and academicians, particularly Bertrand Russell's works which significantly influenced Khan's views.² Afterward, Khan started to propose a new understanding of Islam which, as according to him, appeals to modern minds. His research led him to discovery to explore the need to present Islamic teachings through modern styles. His presentation of Islam to the world was based on his concept of peace,

¹ "Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India," http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/religion.aspx (accessed 8 September 2019).

² The contemporary condition of Muslims encouraged Khan to research on subjects related to it. Although, he studied in an Arabic school, but his constant reading of English books had an impact on his writings and enabled him to write in current modern-day style, he considered. As per him, since he was a graduate of traditional seminary, he was unable to understand Islam in the modern context. After long research and a direct study of primary sources of Islam; the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, which took him around 25 continuous years, he was able to present the result of his reading, he says. He asserted that by removing the theoretical obstacles, he rediscovered the truth. Additionally, this struggle of unveiling the truth aged him before the time but the practical steps were yet to be taken and he believed that the generation after him might do that. See, Wahiduddin Khan, *The Vision of Islam*, (New Delhi: Goodword books, 2014), 6-7.

tolerance, and co-existence.¹ He was referred to as a 'Gandhian' in his views; Khan considers non-violence as the only method suitable for Muslims in post-independence India.

Khan's Intellectual Development and Contribution

Wahiduddin Khan initially was influenced by Abu al-'Ala Maududi's ideology and officially joined the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1949. Maududi² influenced him through his idea of radical social reform and his inclusive understanding of Islam. Due to his oratory abilities and dynamic writing skills, Khan was nominated as a member of the Majlis Shura (The Central Consultative Committee). He began writing for *Zindagi (The Life)*, the magazine of Jamaat-e-Islami and proved to be a persistent writer. Khan's first work was published in 1955, entitled *Naye Ahad ke Darwaze par (On the Threshold of a New Era)*. The second work of Khan, *Mazhab aur Jadid Challenge (Islam and Modern Challenges)* was much appreciated by Muslim scholars.³ It was then translated into Arabic and was also incorporated into the curriculum of various Arab universities. In these books, as per Khan, he presented a perception of Islam well appealing to young minds.⁴

However, after a short period, Khan disagreed with Maududi and asserted that his understanding of Islam was wrong and believed that Maududi's views were a reaction towards the domination of Western colonialism in the Muslim lands. He further argued that Maududi's views were not based on an authentic understanding of Islam. Khan claimed that the Jamaat had an agenda to establish Islamic rule which was impractical to the Indian context and was not in line with the tenets of Islam. Khan concluded that Maududi's understanding of Islam was dominated by his desire for Islam's political domination. Khan considered the Islamic mission was to work for self-reform and individual spiritual development which Maududi undermined. Khan argued that the emphasis of Jamaat on Islamic rule and the implementation of the Shari'ah will deteriorate the already delinquent atmosphere, further widening the Hindu-Muslim divide in the country. He believed that the essential task of Muslims in India was to focus on *da'wah* and promote communal harmony

¹ Yoginder Sikand, *Muslims in India since 1947: Islamic Perspectives on Inter-Faith Relations*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 49-50.

² Maududi (1903-1979)

³ Wahiduddin Khan, *Mazhab aur Jadid Challenge (Islam and Modern Challenges)*, (New Delhi: Goodword books, 2011).

⁴ Yoginder Sikand, *Peace, Dialogue and D'awah Analysis of the writings of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan*, <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/01032002/0103200280.htm> (accessed 6 October, 2018).

between the Muslims and the people of other faiths. However, in 1962, after serving the movement for thirteen years, he detached from the Jamaat.¹

Khan was also inspired by the Tablighi Jamaat due to its unique and apolitical foundation. As per Khan, they focus primarily on the reform and purification of an individual. He termed them as a 'God-oriented organisation' and viewed them as the most appropriate collective movement which mirrored the practice of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. However, soon Khan observed a lack of critical and rational thinking among the members of the movement and their rigidity in following Islamic jurisprudence. He also pointed out that the intellectual solution for the challenges faced by the contemporary world is absent in the movement. Finally, in 1975, he distanced himself from the Tablighi movement as well.² Hitherto, he developed a new understanding of Islam which he considered would appeal to the modern mind. Subsequently, in 1976, he established his own Islamic research institution, the Islamic Centre (Delhi), in order to promote his understanding and interpretations of Islam. Together with the establishment of the centre, he started an Urdu monthly magazine called *al-Risala* consisting mostly of Khan's articles. English and Hindi editions of the magazine were launched in 1984 and 1990 respectively. The magazine garnered a wider audience both domestically in India and elsewhere on the international stage, distributing online copies as well, where most copies of the magazines are available on the internet.

Khan's understanding of Islam was a result of his affiliations with the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat. It seems that he was also affected by the polarised situation between Hindus and Muslims in the country, and believed in his interpretation of Islam as the most authentic and appealing. He considered his understanding was a creative interpretation of the Shari'ah. At this point, his views distinguished him from his contemporaries: the Muslim scholars and organisations such as the Tablighi Jamaat, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind.³ Khan's writings were mostly focused on inter-faith dialogue, non-violence, and peace. He authored and published over 100 books that were translated into various languages. He rejected the claim that Islam is a religion of violence. As per Irfan, Khan addressed public and private gatherings in order to advocate policies, which was constructive, nationalistic, and inter-nationalistic in nature. Furthermore, he argues that Khan

¹ Sikand, *Muslims in India since 1947*, 50-51.

² *Ibid.*

³ Sikand, Yoginder. (2004). "Peace, Dialogue and D'awah Analysis of the writings of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan," <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/01032002/0103200280.htm> (accessed 25 September, 2019), 50-51.

attempted to serve the cause of national and international unity based on peace, non-violence, and inter-faith dialogues. Khan contributed articles to various national and international magazines and daily newspapers concerning different issues. He also translated the Qur'ān into the Urdu language, along with a commentary, *Tazkīr al-Qur'ān*. He also established the International Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS) with the aim of spreading spiritual wisdom based on peace for mankind. Nevertheless, most Muslim religious and political leaders opposed his views and considered that he was an 'anti-Muslim, a 'Hindu agent', and a 'nationalist Mawlana'.¹

In his writings, Khan discussed Indian-Muslim issues in the light of modern and Islamic knowledge. Furthermore, Khan never hesitated to quote Western scholars in his writings while critically analysing any subject. He touched on many sensitive issues related to Muslims in the country. He generally wrote and spoke in Urdu, but also wrote in English and Arabic. He was received awards for some of his works, such as his work on the biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, *Paighambre Inqilab (Muhammed; The Prophet of Revolution)*, and *al-Islam Yatahadda (Modern Challenges to Islam)*.² Furthermore, in 2000, he was awarded 'Padma Bhushan' which is the third-highest civilian award by the Government of India. In 2015, Khan was awarded the Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Ibn Ali Award for his activism in promoting peace.³ In January 2021, he was also awarded Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award, for his extraordinary contribution in the field of spiritualism.⁴ Khan has also written on the Hajj and explained its philosophy through his personal experience rather than talking about the process and its historical background.⁵ Moreover, Khan's various travelogues recount his many national and international voyages. However, he only discusses some important, ethical, and moral points.⁶ Khan has also published a compilation of his speeches which were broadcast on the radio from 1968 to 1996. These speeches were pre-written and delivered during Islamic festivals.⁷

¹ Irfan, A. Omar. "Islamic Thought in Contemporary India: The Impact of Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan's Al-Risala Movement." In *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. I. M. Abu-Rabi' (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 75 – 85.

² Wahiduddin Khan, *Paighambre Inqilab (Muhammed; The Prophet of Revolution)*, (New Delhi: Maktaba Al-Risala, 1982). Wahiduddin Khan, *Al-Islam Yatahadda (Modern Challenges to Islam)*, (New Delhi: Goodword books, 2011).

³ *The Milli Gazette*, <https://www.cpsglobal.org/content/maulana-wahiduddin-khan-awarded-sayyidina-imam-al-hassan-ibn-ali-award> (accessed 25 September, 2019). He has been given many awards for his activism for peace and religious harmony. See, Wahiduddin Khan, <https://www.cpsglobal.org/mwk> (accessed 25 September, 2019).

⁴ Ministry of Home Affairs, https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2021AwardeesList_25012021_0.pdf (accessed 30 August 2021).

⁵ Wahiduddin Khan, *Haqiqate Hajj, (The Philosophy of Hajj)*, (New Delhi: Maktaba Al-Risala, 2003).

⁶ Wahiduddin Khan, *Safarnama; Ghair Mulki Asfar (Travelogue: International Voyages)*, (New Delhi: The Islamic Centre, 1992), 380.

⁷ Wahiduddin Khan, *Nashriyat Taqirren (Speeches on Broadcast)*, (New Delhi: The Islamic Centre, 1998).

The *Al-Risala* Movement

Khan initiated *al-Risala* to introduce a new way of understanding Muslim issues in the country, especially related to socio-political aspects and sentimental religious matters. His views and analysis of the subjects were mostly against the existing religious organisations that were seen as the representatives of Indian Muslims or Muslim authoritative organisations in the country, including but not limited to Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (a famous religious movement of scholars of Deoband). Therefore, Khan was criticised for his approach. However, his innovative interpretations of Islam had attracted many and were also supported by a number of Muslims and people of other faiths.

Khan referred to the Qur'ān in order to validate his approach to delivering his message. Nevertheless, on various issues of Muslims, he is seen as a compromising Muslim figure by many. Emphasising his approach, Khan constructs the basis of his approach on the Treaty of *Hudaibiyyah*, which was established by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ between the people of Makkah and Muslims in 628 AD. This treaty emerged as a significant bedrock for Islam and Muslims.¹ Khan believed that his method may eliminate conflicts faced by Muslims in the world in general and in India in particular. His emphasis lies in the adoption of this particular methodology as the sole route to salvation for Indian Muslims. Hitherto, Khan espoused a non-belligerent approach for the Muslims, which is devoid of malice, albeit, equivocally embracing all other communities in the country. He further stated that Muslims should also avoid the use of the terms 'other' and 'we' and, strive for optimistic solutions in overcoming the existing communal problems in the country. He asserted that Muslims should focus on *da'wah* and ignore controversial and conflicting matters. Khan considered these conflicts and confrontations as the major obstacles hindering the development of Muslims in India. His goal was to reform the Muslim attitudes in order to develop better relations with the so-called 'other' by infusing 'moral spirit' by practising Islam. Hence, his movement can be defined as a movement of moral reform.²

The core duty of a believer is to convey the message of Islam to everyone around him. He should not be affected by his or her contextual condition and should continue the universal work of *da'wah* despite any adversaries; no restriction, either national or regional should obstruct him from his duty. Khan believed that Muslims were suffering from various problems

¹ Safiyur Rahman Mubarakpuri, *Al Raḥīqul Makhtūm*, (Makkah: Rabita 'Alam al Islami, 2005), 429-443.

² Omar, *Islamic Thought in Contemporary India*, 75-85.

due to their negligence of *da'wah* work. The work of *da'wah* is most essential for all Muslims. However, a believer must observe two essential characteristics as mentioned in *āyah* of the Qur'ān,

﴿ I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I am to you a trustworthy adviser. ﴾¹

Khan elaborated on the characteristics necessary for conducting *da'wah* work; *nasīḥah* (sincere advice) and *amānah* (trustworthiness). The most important quality of a true *dā'ī* (caller/inviter) is to be a sincere sympathiser for his or her addressees, irrespective of their negative behaviour or reaction towards him or her. The message of *da'wah* is a trust (*amānah*) from God unto the believers. Hence, a *dā'ī* must be trustworthy (*amīn*) in conveying the message of God. Khan viewed that through *da'wah* work Muslims can develop personal relations with people of other faiths.²

A caller's core responsibility is to propagate the message of the Almighty to the masses, with the intention of attaining a better Hereafter. No other objectives such as worldly gain, political, economic, or communal interests should occupy him. Khan identified other characteristics of a *dā'ī* which include humility and prioritising the welfare of people.³ In addition, a *dā'ī* must not expect anything in return from his addressees except reward from God. Such sacrifices of a *dā'ī* will develop a sound and peaceful relationship between him and his *mad'ū*, the addressee. In all circumstances, a *dā'ī* must have a sense of love for people. As per Khan, participation in the politics of the country based on communal lines would be more dangerous for the Muslims community. It will obstruct the *da'wah* work and jeopardise the relationship between the Muslims and people of other faiths. In short, Khan believed that the foundation of *da'wah* must be based on love and a deep sense of welfare of other people. However, as per Khan, Muslims play just a contrary role by hating people of other faiths and blaming them for their sufferings.⁴ The Khan's stance on *da'wah* being a responsibility of Muslims is reasonable. Nevertheless, some flaws in his opinion are obvious especially his blame on the Muslim minority for communal clashes and having a negative attitude towards the majority community.

¹ *Sūrah al-A'arāf*: 68.

² Wahiduddin Khan, *Rahe Amal, (The Way of Action)*, (New Delhi: Maktaba Al-Risala, 1990), 111.

³ Wahiduddin Khan, *The call of the Qur'ān*, ((New Delhi: Maktaba Al-Risala, n.d.), 70.

⁴ Wahiduddin Khan, *Dawate Haq, (The True Message)*, (New Delhi: Maktaba Al-Risala, 2016), 68-69.

An avid advocate of communal harmony, Khan recommends Muslims to seek repentance for their deplorable attitude. Nevertheless, it is not clear how Khan measured the negative attitudes of the Muslim minority towards people of other faiths. He did not present evidence of what mistakes had been committed by Muslims. In fact, Muslims in India are the main victims of any communal riots in the country. Further, as per the Government reports, such as the Sachar committee, suggests that Muslim social, economic, and educational conditions are worse compared to other communities.¹ Nevertheless, Khan says that the second crucial task for Muslims is to appropriately meet the challenges based on a contemporary context. He asserted that earlier *Sūfiyah* presented Islam in India with love, compassion, and humility devoid of any discrimination. Consequently, the masses embraced Islam, especially those from the Hindu lower castes. Hence, Muslims in India must learn from such events and follow similar methods. In addition, the message of Islam should also reach the elite classes and policymakers of the country. Khan believed that the divisions between communities in India has increased significantly, particularly between Hindus and Muslims. Muslims must establish a good association with the Hindus. Nevertheless, Khan was severely criticised to be favouring Hindus through equivocal interpretations of his theories and actions, which also included interactions with Hindu polity. He asserted that for the sake of *da'wah*, Muslims need to avoid any confrontations with the Hindu community.²

Al-Risala Principles

Khan believed that reform had been an integral part of various religions of the world due to the distortion in their original teachings. Thus, reform became mandatory for those religions to eradicate unsolicited practices. In contrast, the originality of Islam, as per Khan, continued from the very first day of its inception. Hence, according to him, Islam itself is not in need of reformation but the lives of Muslims should be reformed accordingly. Thus, Khan feels that no contradiction can be found between Islamic values and humanistic principles. For

¹ Prime Minister's High-Level Committee Cabinet Secretariat Government of India *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*, (New Delhi: Cirrus Graphics, 2006), 8-16. See also, Rakesh Basant, Abusaleh Shariff, *Handbook of Muslims in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), M.K.A Siddiqui, *Muslims in free India*, (New Delhi: Institute of objective studies, 1998), Omer Khalidi, *Indian Muslims Since Independence*, (New Delhi: Vikas publishing house, 1995).

² Irfan A. Omer. *Re-Thinking in Islam: A Study of the Thought and Mission of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan*. PhD dissertation (America: Temple University, 2000), 84.

instance, the concept of equality in Islam does not vary with the notion of human dignity in the contemporary world.^{1,2}

In short, considering the above thoughts, the *al-Risala* movement revolves around certain principles. For example, greater self-criticism should be exercised by the Muslims and the history of Muslim rule of erstwhile undivided India should not be glorified. *Ijtihād* must be practised by Muslim scholars for re-assessment and articulation to replenish an Islamic jurisprudence which is compatible with today's world. Moreover, the foundation of this re-thinking must be based on non-violence and reconciliation. Furthermore, the reforms should inculcate introspection rather than a critique. Khan espoused a practice of *ijtihad* in relevance with modern challenges, pertaining to contemporary India. However, he ignores that the Muslims not only contributed to Indian architecture but developed a new civilisation based on universal values.³ Arshad Islam writes,

"Islam had an enormous impact on the social and cultural life of Hindus.⁴ Both communities influenced each other in their daily practices and culture, and many Muslim elements were incorporated into Hindu religion, art, literature and science, and vice-versa, due in large part to the close assimilation of Sufi practices, which themselves exhibit numerous Hindu and Buddhist themes not derived from exoteric Islam."⁵

Nevertheless, Khan rejected the notion of 'we and they'. As per Khan, there is no perception of 'we' and 'they' in Islam. Such perception has been created by numerous leaders in the Muslim world. These leaders tend to interpret Islam as an ideology against others without realising the complications that such a worldview may create. Therefore, Khan criticised these leaders and considered them as having a narrow interpretation of Islam. Although the term 'we' appears to mean all Muslims, in a real sense it includes only those who agree with

¹ Wahiduddin Khan, *Fikre Islami, (The Islamic Thought)*, (New Delhi: Al-Risala Books, 1996), 6-7.

² Often such wrong perceptions even go contrary with the views of earlier Muslims such as Muhammed bin Qasim who subjugated Sind province of India in 712 CE and let people preserve their socio-religious practices and allowed them to maintain their matters as they wished. See, Khan, *Fikre Islam*, 199.

³ Abul Hasan Ali Nadawi, *Muslims in India*, (Lucknow: Islamic Research and Publication, 1980), 5.

⁴ The civilizational impact of Islam in India can be seen materially in a number of extant cities, mosques, tombs, palaces, forts, and other artistic buildings built over the centuries by Muslim rulers in different parts of India. Although a number of architectural buildings were erected during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, these vestiges are now extinct except the magnificent building of the Dome of Rock in Al-Quds that was built by the Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik as well as the great Umayyad mosque of Damascus. See, Islam, Arshad. "The civilizational role of Islam in the Indian subcontinent: The Delhi sultanate." *Intellectual Discourse* 25, no. 1 (2017).

⁵ Islam, Arshad. "The civilizational role of Islam in the Indian subcontinent: The Delhi sultanate." *Intellectual Discourse* 25, no. 1 (2017).

their narrow interpretation of religion. They claim to be representatives of the whole of Islam. Khan stated that:

“People generally divide human beings into ‘we and they’, but this is not the way of Islam. The way of Islam is to look at non-Muslim as addresses (*mad’ūs*). When we divide people into ‘we and they’, ‘we’ become objects of love, while ‘they’ become objects of hatred. This is the real problem of present-day Muslims. They have forgotten the reality that ideologically they are *d’ais* and all other human beings are their *mad’ūs*. No one is ‘they’; all human beings must become ‘we’, i.e. their own. Muslims regard other nations as their rivals, whereas if they regarded other nations as *mad’ūs*, they will feel that all human beings are their own.”¹

Khan argued that the Muslims are subject to self-criticism as they also developed some practices which are against Islamic teachings. Therefore, Khan also criticised ‘*Ulama* and Muslim intellectuals for not eliminating un-Islamic practices from their own society for which they had criticised the Hindus as in the example of the practice of a caste system.² Khan’s criticism of practising the caste system is sound as it is obvious in Muslim societies, especially in the northern part of India.

Khan differs from the worldview which for him is ideologically presented in the name of religion. For him, Islam is an individual’s quiet surrender to the Will of God which is purely personal.³ Khan pointed out various factors for the otherisation of non-Muslims and blamed several interpretations of Islam, especially the political one. Such interpretation has developed wrong thoughts in the minds of Muslims, including but not limited to, the claim that Muslims cannot live under the non-Islamic rule and they need to establish their own Islamic political system where they can follow Islamic teachings in every aspect of life. As per Khan, Muslims of such ideology believe that Islam is superior to other religions and it is mandatory for Muslims to wage *jihād* (armed struggle) to defend their lives and wealth from being targeted by others, stipulating the slogan of politics are inseparable from religion. Hence, Muslims must struggle to obtain political power to establish Islamic rule. Khan rejected such perceptions. Instead, he supports the adoption of secularism and modernity

¹ Wahiduddin Khan, *The Dawn Over Kashmir*, (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2012), 51.

² Wahiduddin Khan, *Fikre Islami*, (New Delhi: Al Risala Books, 1996), 6-7.

³ Irfan. A. Omar, “Islamic Thought in Contemporary India: The Impact of Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan’s Al-Risala Movement.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. By Ibrahim Abu Rabi’, 77.

by emphasising non-violent approaches and encouraging reconciliation (*amno şulh*) to establish communal harmony between Muslims and people of other faiths. He considered the rejection of secularism, modernity, and Westernisation by Muslim scholars is a consequence of the politicisation of the religion, which has no place in Islam. In addition to it, Khan affirmed his apolitical stance together with non-violence and reconciliation is the only possible way for Muslims.¹ However, it seems that Khan has developed much negativity about Muslims in general and hence he declares them blameworthy at all levels. In fact, Muslims are living as a minority, never calling for waging a war against the state. Moreover, no existing organisation in the country has such types of ideas as the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, and the Tablighi Jamaat.

Wahiduddin Khan on Communal Harmony: the Need for Self-Criticism and Reform Within

Khan left no stone unturned to achieve communal harmony and peace in India, by rejecting the claims reflecting political, economic, and social deprivation of Muslims, due to the communal politics, albeit baseless claims. According to him, the fundamental reason for such conditions was due to the Muslim community's negative attitudes. They should have departed from the nostalgia of the past.² For instance, anti-Muslim communal riots which took place in the 1980s were caused by the negative attitude of Muslims. Khan held this view on the basis of the mass murder of Muslims, while their properties plundered, during the aforementioned riots, where Khan sees a provocation of fanatic Hindu groups, on part of the Muslims. For Khan, the prime responsibility to avoid such communal tension goes to the Muslim community. According to him, Muslims are in minority, they are naturally meant to lose in the conflicts. He believed that conflicts emerged for the existence and readiness of two oppositions. For communal clashes, he blamed Muslim religious and political leadership for not having patience and tolerance in such alluring situations. Khan suggested Muslims adopt an extreme level of pacifism to avoid communal clashes even when provoked. However, at this point, Khan seems to be ignoring the rights of Muslims as citizens of the country. In fact, the Constitution of the country guaranteed fundamental rights to all

¹ Irfan Omar, "Islam and the Other: The Ideal Vision of Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan [sup*]." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36 (1999): 423-438.

² Wahiduddin Khan, *Indian Muslims*, (New Delhi: Maktaba Al-Risala, n.d.), 46-47.

citizens of the state, such as the Right to Equality (Article 14-18), Right to Freedom (Article 19-22), and Rights to Freedom of Religion (Article 25-28).¹

In order to validate his idea of reconciliation, Khan quoted various *āyāt* from the Qur'ān. He also cited Azad's model of collaboration with people of other faiths as well as his contribution to the development of India. According to Khan's doctrine of co-existence, Muslims must adjust and familiarise themselves with the pluralistic and multi-ethnic environment of the country. Moreover, the Muslims must take initiative to strengthen inter-ethnic and inter-cultural relations for improving cooperation on issues such as propagating moral values and working in the field of education. As per Khan, by adopting this form of activism, Muslims would be able to attract others to Islam and carry out the core Islamic practice of *da'wah*.²

Further, the foundation of Khan's approaches, ideas, and proposals for religious harmony revolved around his understanding of the Truce of *Hudaibiyyah*. However, his understanding of the truce seems to be selective and debatable. Other scholars argued that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ usually consulted his companions regarding wars and truces but the Truce of *Hudaibiyyah* was exceptional.³ It was neither based on *ijtihād* nor suggestions of the companions but directed through revelation. Hence, *Hudaibiyyah* cannot be taken as a model for all situations.⁴ However, Khan's understanding of the treaty will be analysed in the proceeding pages.

In addition, the principal objective of the *al-Risala* movement is Islamic activism which was translated by Khan as '*work of da'wah*' or in other words '*witnessing for Islam*' by words and actions. However, he asserted that to attain such a goal, a methodology based on a strong theological foundation must be applied. *Al-Risala* mostly revolves around two aspects: firstly, the need to develop a new theology. For this purpose, the study of Islamic history, theology, and tradition is vastly necessary. Hence, Khan suggested that the Muslims should derive a few reliable ideas based on these disciplines bearing the context of contemporary India in mind. Secondly, it is imperative for individual reform in Muslim

¹ Anwar Alam, India: The Struggle of Identity Politics in India.

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1435114/Professor_Anwar_Alam_The_struggle_of_identity_politics_in_india.pdf (accessed 4 July, 2019).

² Irfan. A. Omar, "Islamic Thought in Contemporary India: The Impact of Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan's Al-Risala Movement." In *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. By Ibrahim Abu Rabi', 61.

³ *Sūrah al-Fath*: 48.

⁴ Abu Muhammad 'Abdul Malik bin Hisham Al-Mu'afiri, *Al-sirah al-Nabawiyyah*. (Beirut: Darul fikr, 1998), vol. 3, 150-151 and 226.

societies. Muslims should develop such ideas based on passive, peaceful, and amicable approaches which can be implemented in Muslim majority and minority societies.¹

Gandhi and Khan

Khan admitted that he was much influenced by Gandhi's non-violent activism. He often referred to himself as a Gandhian and appreciated Gandhi's ideology of non-violence.² However, he opposed Gandhi's view which alluded to the transcendental unity of all religions; *one religion underlines all religions*, in which the latter believed that the truth in one religion is similar to that of others. Gandhi considered that the religious experience of a person might be similar to another person of another religion.³ Hence, Gandhi's approach to religion displayed the notion of religious pluralism. However, Khan rejected this view and stated that:

"One solution commonly advocated is to spread the conviction that all religions are essentially one: that they are simply diverse paths leading to a common destination. Islam, however, does not accept this view and, in any case, experience has shown that repeated attempts to bring about harmony on this basis have been a failure. The Emperor Akbar attempted to achieve harmony by state enforcement of his newly formed religion, '*din-e-Ilahi*'; Dr. Bhagwan Das spent the best part of his life producing a one-thousand-page book titled *Essential Unity of All Religions*; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) attempted to spread this ideal at the national level by a countrywide movement whose slogan was '*Ram Rahim Ek Hai*', meaning Ram and Rahim were one and the same. But events have shown us that all failed in their attempts to achieve the goal of communal harmony."⁴

As per Khan, Islam aims to establish communal harmony, and hence, accepting ideological differences is viewed as more rational and realistic. Islam inculcates on people to have tolerance and respect for each other. The unity will be brought by accepting the differences and believing in 'let's agree to disagree', strengthening the essence of tolerance.⁵ Khan articulated the concept of the transcendental unity of religions is unrealistic and illogical. On

¹ Irfan A. Omar. "Towards an Islamic Theology of Nonviolence: A Critical Appraisal of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's View of Jihad," (Part I), *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol. 72, no. 9 (2008): 671-680.

² Omer, *Re-Thinking in Islam*, 94.

³ Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Responses to Islam*, (New Delhi: D.K. Printingworld, 1994), 27.

⁴ Wahiduddin Khan. *Islam and Peace*. (Goodword, 2004.), 132.

⁵ *Ibid*, 132-133.

the other hand, a difference in terms of religions is a proven reality. Instead of claiming that all religions are the same, the spirit of tolerance, compassion, and dignity among people must be established. The aforementioned theory is tantamount to unity as an essence of accommodating all differences.¹ For a peaceful society, we need not eradicate the differences among people but should develop a sense of harmony by accepting such differences. Having differences is the very nature of human beings that can never be removed. Hence, the key to establishing harmony in society is mutual respect instead of mutual recognition. Differences, indeed, are not a sign of evil, but a quality to accomplish success and to respect other human beings.² As far as this idea of Khan is concerned, it is very much practical and sound.

Khan's Understanding of the Truce of *Hudaibiyyah*

Khan firmly claimed that his approach to communal harmony in India is based on the Truce of *Hudaibiyyah*. Based on that, Khan concluded Muslims must take a unilateral step and prefer peace over conflict, even if it benefits the opponents. In short, based on his reading of the Truce of *Hudaibiyyah*, Khan asserted that the foundation of the relation between the Muslims and the non-Muslims is *da'wah*. The Muslims are *dā'ī* and the non-Muslims are addressees (*mad'ū*). Thus, as per Khan, the Muslims are responsible for establishing a constructive relationship with people of other faiths even if it is based on unliteral conditions. In such a way, Muslims may follow the method of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.³ Some of the classical scholars have also had a similar view. For example, Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī quoted al-Shāshī on the classification of people and land. According to him, the non-Muslims are *ummaḥ al-da'wah* and Muslims are *ummaḥ al-ijābah*.⁴

However, it is not judicious to ignore all other incidents and occurrences in the life of the Prophet ﷺ and refer to only one incident for all situations. In fact, Islam always prefers to establish peace over conflict. However, in unavoidable situations, Islam had prescribed essential laws of conflict and peace agreements with opponents and allowed Muslim leaders to deal according to the circumstances. Further, a careful study of the *sīrah* illustrates that Prophet ﷺ used to deal with the issues, which occurred in his life, as per circumstances. It

¹ Wahiduddin Khan, "Ek Interview (An Interview)," *Al-Risala*, 267 (February 1999), 40.

² Wahiduddin Khan, "Pur amn Zindagi ka Raz (The Secret of a Successful Life)," *Al-Risala*, 284 (July 2000), 14-15.

³ Wahiduddin Khan, *Rahe Amal (The Way of Action)*. (New Delhi: Maktaba al Risala, 1990), 28.

⁴ Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, *Towards A Fiqh for Minority*, (USA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003), 29.

clearly reflects that there is no particular command which Muslims should follow. For example, the Battle of Uḥud was fought as a defensive war while the Battle of the Trench (*Aḥzāb*) the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ thought of establishing a peace treaty with some tribes by giving them some a portion of the yearly production of dates and, during *Ḥudaibiyyah* all of Quraysh's stipulations were agreed upon.¹ On the other hand, the Prophet ﷺ ignored Abu Sufiyān's request to continue the Truce, and *Fath* Makkah took place peacefully. In short, based on all the battles mentioned above, one may understand that all the events share the wisdom that the Prophet ﷺ espoused different methods to deal with different oppositions. However, to emphasise one particular practice of the Prophet ﷺ for all contemporary circumstances and claim it to be compulsory is debatable. Thus, Khan developed his thought based on his own readings which appears to be questionable.

Moreover, Khan's understanding of *Ḥudaibiyyah* was different to other scholars. Khan viewed that during *Ḥudaibiyyah* the Prophet ﷺ aimed merely to establish peace and avoided any conflicts even when he was provoked. Khan further stated that the Prophet ﷺ even sent 'Uthman, the softest person as his ﷺ emissary to inform Quraysh about his intention to perform 'Umrah in Makkah.² Nevertheless, as according to the scholars of *sīrah*, the Prophet ﷺ insisted the people of Makkah either establish the truce or the Muslims will confront them. Thus, the claim of Khan that Prophet ﷺ returned to Madinah after he was denied entry in Makkah is erroneous. Primarily 'Umar was chosen by Prophet ﷺ as his ﷺ envoy to inform Quraysh. Nevertheless, Umar used to be strict in dealing with pagan Arabs as mentioned by the famous Muslim historian Ibn Hishām. Thus, it was 'Umar himself who suggested 'Uthman's name as 'Uthman had many relatives in the city of Makkah.³

Furthermore, Khan claimed that the Prophet ﷺ and his companions agreed with the pledge of *Bay'at al-Riḍhwān* mainly because he ﷺ wanted to ensure them to be steadfast at *Ḥudaibiyyah*, and if the Quraysh attack the Muslims, they will fight them back. However, if they come to a compromise, the Muslims will agree and accept their conditions. Khan concluded that the pledge of *Bay'at al-Riḍhwān* primarily was not for the war or else the

¹ Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 3, 150-151.

² Wahiduddin Khan, "Bay'at Ridhwan (The Treaty of *Ḥudaibiyyah*)," *Al-Risala*, 164 (January 1989), 4.

³ Ibn Hishām, writes that the Prophet ﷺ firstly wanted to send 'Umar to convey the message of Muslims. However, he suggested the name of 'Uthman saying that people of Makkah keep tremendous enmity for him, and he does not have any relative in Makkah to protect him. On the other hand, 'Uthman has many relations in Makkah. Thus, Uthman was sent to Makkah as the convoy of Muslims. See, *Al-sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 3, 225-226.

Prophet ﷺ would not have been agreed with their conditions.¹ In order to validate his argument, Khan takes the view of Jabir Ibn ‘Abdullah who narrated that the pledge basically was for companions to remain steadfast at *Ḥudaibiyyah*. Khan seems to be ignoring the views of other companions of the Prophet ﷺ. As per Ibn Hishām, when the Prophet ﷺ heard rumours of ‘Uthman’s assassination by the people of Makkah, he ﷺ said “we will not move from here (*Ḥudaibiyyah*) until we take the revenge of ‘Uthman,’ and he took a pledge with his companions over *jihād* and death as narrated by the majority of companions.²

Moreover, to claim that the *Bay’at al-Riḍhwān* primarily was not for war or the Prophet ﷺ would not have agreed with unilateral conditions is also erroneous. According to the scholars of *sīrah*, Prophet ﷺ pledged, after hearing the rumours of ‘Uthman’s assassination, to take revenge for ‘Uthman. However, after ascertaining ‘Uthman’s safety, the Prophet ﷺ withdrew his intention of confrontation with Quraish.³ Likewise, during hostile situations, the Prophet ﷺ used to consult his companions and sought consensus even sometimes he ﷺ preferred their views. However, the Truce of *Ḥudaibiyyah* was completely a revealed order to Prophet ﷺ from God. Thus, it is an exceptional incident that cannot be taken as a model to apply in all circumstances. In addition, if one analyses the situation of the battle of Trench (*Aḥzāb*), he concludes that the Muslims in Madīnah found themselves in the most hostile state. Abu Sufiyān united the entire Arabia against the Muslims to exterminate them and to safeguard the political and economic supremacy of Quraish. They prepared for two years and accumulated an army of ten thousand soldiers. Muslims, on the other hand, panicked after knowing this. It was revealed in the Qur’ān that:

﴿[Remember] when they came at you from above you and from below you, and when eyes shifted [in fear], and hearts reached the throats and you assumed about Allah [various] assumptions. There the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking.﴾⁴

During this time, the Prophet ﷺ sought to establish a peace treaty with several tribes by giving them some portion of the yearly production of dates.⁵ The Prophet ﷺ thought it might

¹ Khan, “Bay’at Riḍhwan,” *Al-Risala*, 4-5

² Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, 226.

³ Ibid., see also Abī al-Fidā Ḥafiz Ibn Kathīr. *Albidayah wal Nihayah*, (Lebanon: Dār al- Kutub al- ‘Ilmiyah, 2003), vol. 3, 182.

⁴ *Sūrah Al-Aḥzāb*: 10-11.

⁵ Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, 150-151.

soften the situation and those tribes will withdraw their support from Abu Sufiyan. However, the companions disagreed with the Prophet ﷺ after knowing that it was the Prophet's ﷺ personal suggestion and not a revealed order; even S'ad ibn Abi Waqas erased the clauses of the agreement.¹ In short, Prophet ﷺ did not insist upon the Muslims that compromise is mandatory in all circumstances. In fact, it depends on the situation.

Alternatively, during *Hudaibiyyah* the approach of the Prophet ﷺ was completely different. A good number of Muslims were with him ﷺ and they had a better defensive strength than the battle of Badr. Furthermore, the Makkans' behaviour was provocative and distrustful, yet the Prophet ﷺ established the Truce without consulting with the Companions. He ﷺ accepted all the Makkans' conditions, even the fifth condition that if anyone from Makkah escapes to Madinah, the Muslims must return him/her, but not vice versa. This stipulation was objected to by the Companions, including 'Umar. However, Prophet ﷺ replied to his Companions: "I am Allah's servant and prophet, I cannot disobey Him, nor He will destroy me."² Imam Ibn Hajar and Ibn Kathir mentioned the *ḥadīth* of Bukhari, "Indeed, I am the Prophet ﷺ of God and I do not disobey Him."³ Ibn Hajar asserted that Prophet ﷺ was guided by revelation during the Truce of *Hudaibiyyah*.⁴ Moreover, as per scholars, the Muslims were in severe grief with the clauses of *Hudaibiyyah*.⁵ If compromising in all situations even with unilateral conditions was the fundamental teaching of Islam, then Muslims would not have been surprised and sad towards the Treaty, rather they would have been happy.

After a few years in 8 AH, the events of *fath* Makkah took place as a result of the violation of the Treaty of *Hudaibiyyah* by the Quraysh. Abu Sufiyan requested the Prophet ﷺ to maintain the Treaty. He also requested a recommendation from close companions of Prophet ﷺ but the Prophet ﷺ ignored him, consequently, *fath* Makkah happened.⁶ Thus, the discussion above clearly shows that the incident of *Hudaibiyyah* was an exceptional Treaty. It was not the fundamental teaching of Islam as assumed by Khan. However, Khan's view on

¹ Idris Kandhlawi, *Sirate Mustafa*, (Karachi: Altaf and Sons, n.d.), 317-318. The Qur'an mentions the enthusiasm of Prophet's companions during the battle saying, "And when the believers saw the companies, they said, 'This is what Allah and His Messenger had promised us, and Allah and His Messenger spoke the truth.' And it increased them only in faith and acceptance" (*Sūrah al-Ahzab*: 22).

² Ibn Hishām, *Al-sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, 227.

³ Ibn Hajar, 'Asqanī, *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Bukhārī*. Riyāḍ: Dār Ibn Ḥazm vol. 2, 1350. See also, Abī al-Fidā Ḥafiz Ibn Kathīr. *Al-Dimashqī, Albidayah wal Nihayah*, (Lebanon: Dār al- Kutub al- 'Ilmiyah, 2003), vol. 3, 183 and Abdur Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*. (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1992), vol. 2, 432-434.

⁴ *Ibid*, 1356.

⁵ Ibn Hishām, *Al-sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, 227.

⁶ *Ibid*, vol. 4, 26-28.

communal harmony that people should accept the differences to strengthen the spirit of tolerance seems to be practical because having differences is the very nature of humans. Thus, accepting differences of each other with tolerance can ensure unity among Indians.

Khan directly blames the Muslims for the communal riots in the country. He considered that the Muslim religious and political leaders were responsible for the polarising environment. The difficulties faced by the Muslims in India were mainly due to their attitudes and doubts towards the majority community. However, in contrast, Khan's early writings show that he also shared similar views on the communal riots as other Muslim and secular scholars. He used to believe that the Muslims were the main victims of the communal riots in the country. In 1964, he wrote that:

"Do we want to take these pre-planned and constant incidents of robbery and killing of Muslim minority by majority community to the court which are wrongly called communal riots? Such incidents made the lives of Muslims uncertain in the country that the killing of Muslims and robbing of their wealth can take place any time. The administration, police, and army, instead of protecting (Muslims) were also involved in such work. Such incidents became a normal thing in the country. It will not be surprised if someday the insurance companies of the country deny their policies to Muslim minorities because it might be a lose for the company instead of benefit... It is a pre-planned carnage (against Muslims) at national level in which government, administration, and majority community are involved."¹

Nevertheless, after a few years, Khan had entirely changed his views on the communal riots. He began to look at the Muslim community as the main cause for any communal tensions in the country:

"It is a proven reality that the communal riots in India started with the provocation of Muslims. It starts between one Muslim and one Hindu but soon Muslims create such a situation which makes it an issue between the two communities."²

He also considered that:

¹ Magazine *al Furqan*, (April – May 1964), 36-56.

² Wahiduddin Khan, "Asal Masla (The fundamental Issue)," *Al-Risala*, 130 (September 1987), 13.

“The communal riots happen at the places where Muslims are economically in a better position. Thus, it is understood (by Muslims) this (communal riots) happen to weaken Muslims economically. However, the simple reason is that (for the communal riots at those place) where Muslims are economically sound, they react emotionally.”¹

But why did Khan change his stance? Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, a prominent Indian scholar, stated that the Muslims were not only equal citizens of India, but they were also prime contributors to the country. They managed to enhance the Indian civilisation with a new spirit and awakened the people of the country with dynamic moral and spiritual values. In addition, the Muslims also initiated and led the freedom struggle against British imperialism and died for the freedom of the country.² Nadwi believed that the Muslims in post-independence India should have equal rights and the state should provide them protection.³

As per Khan, the fundamental reason for the Muslims' marginalisation in India was due to their negative mentality and attitude towards the majority community. However, this is in contrast with the reality mentioned before. His suggestion for the Muslims to be apologetic before the majority community was also discouraging and demoralising, especially for the Muslim youth. All Indians have equal rights, regardless of religion, race, and caste. Nevertheless, the Hindu extremist organisations have their own agendas against the Muslims and the Christians in the country. Khan's viewpoint also underestimated the Constitution of the country as it guarantees the protection to all citizens of the country irrespective of religion, race, caste, and gender, etc. Khan also ignored the equal protection laws, mentioned in Article 14 of the Constitution of India.⁴ In addition, earlier, people of India have experienced the message of peace, love, compassion, and selfless service to humanity by the great Muslim saints and pious people, such as Khawaja Nizamuddin Awliya,⁵ Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti,⁶ and many other Muslim preachers. In fact, the Muslims were chosen by

¹ Atiqur Rahman Qasmi, *Fikr ki Ghalti, (Mistake of the Thought)*, (New Delhi: Qazi Publishers and distributors, 2015), 301.

² Nadawi, *Muslims in India*, 5.

³ Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Welcome Address to all India Muslim Consultative Convention*, (Lucknow: Islamic Research and publication, 1964), 3-4.

⁴ Anwar Alam, “India: The Struggle of Identity Politics in India.” https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1435114/Professor_Anwar_Alam_The_struggle_of_identity_politics_in_india.pdf (accessed 4 July, 2019).

⁵ Khawaja Nizamuddin Awliya (d. 1325)

⁶ Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti (d. 1236)

God to be Indians and India as their home. This should encourage them to contribute devotedly to the progress and development of India.

Conclusion

One of the major challenges for the Muslim minority in post-independence India is how to establish communal harmony. Wahiduddin Khan called for Indian Muslims to unilaterally establish communal harmony and to stop religious riots in the country. But his ideas of how to engender communal harmony based on his understandings of the Treaty of *Hudaibiyyah* is questionable. The approaches of *Hudaibiyyah* cannot be applied in all circumstances and ignore other events of the *sīrah*. Further, Khan's early writings show that he believed the Muslim community were victims in the country's communal clashes. But later, he started to put the blame on Muslims for the religious disharmony which goes against the reality as has been proven by various commissions and reports. Undoubtedly, Muslims need to expedite the work of *da'wah* and contribute to the development of the country and play their role of *khair Ummah*. By revealing their positive behaviour to their fellow citizens, the Muslims may regain dignity and respect as the largest minority in the country. They need to engage with people and prove that Islam offers sustainable solutions for the problems of the country. The Muslims may win over the hearts of fellow citizens and establish a peaceful society that is free from any religious conflicts and also can re-emerge as part of the contributors to the country at the same time.

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