**Pluralism in Qur’an:**

**Results of Divisive Interpretation**

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We are born accidentally or by chance of birth in whatever faith we are born. Usually most of us live and adopt to the faith in which we are born. Some do question their faith, some convert to another faith or walk away from their faith, but that is separate from the points I wish to make here. Every faith is based on divine principles. Reading from 10:47, 14:4 and 16:36, and I can paraphrase that, “to every people (was sent) a messenger in their own language and in their own country and that when their messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged.” However, a lot depends upon how the Holy Scriptures are interpreted. There are good interpretations done by scholars with global vision and there are interpretations that are not good, they are exclusive of other faiths and with limited vision. I call them Divisive Interpretations. Divisive Interpretation leads some people to believe that only their religion is right and all other faiths are wrong. This kind of divisive and exclusive interpretation has led nations to wars. Even today some nations are victims of divisive interpretations that they are taught and they believe that other faiths are null and void.

In some Muslim countries, Divisive Interpretation is more widespread. Religious discrimination and violation of human rights emanate from the teachings of divisive interpretation.

Divisive Interpretation has annihilated Pluralism verses which are there in the Qur’an. Divisive interpreters have introduced the theory of Abrogation applicable to the Qur’an. In order to annihilate all the verses which are full of Pluralism and interfaith harmony, they say, “All the verses on pluralism are abrogated.” Pluralism is never taught and translation is done in such a way that the real meaning of pluralism never comes out.

Some divisive interpreters have translated the verses on pluralism in such a way as to render them useless, meaningless and irrelevant. They only teach, “People of other faiths are infidels or kafirs. They are not included as believers in God.”

The following are key words and verses that are the main cause of radical thinking that arises from Divisive Interpretation:

**Islam:** The word Islam means to submit or surrender to One God. This, in my view, encompasses all the people of any faith who say they believe in God. Divisive Interpretation has narrowed the definition to surrender and submission only as shown by Prophet Mohammed, PBUH. It considers every other person who is submitting to God non-believers if they do not believe in Prophet Mohammed and the Qur’an. To radicals, it is not important if people believe in God; they say believing in Prophet Mohammed is more important. Such thinking lays the ground work for mistrust, enmity and wars.

***Auliya* or Friends:** Here is an example of a radical translation of Surah 5:51: “Do not take the Jews and Christians as your friends.” The correct translation should be saviors. “Do not take the Jews and Christians as your saviors.”

Muslims are permitted to marry from among Christians and Jews. Marriage cannot happen if trust, love and friendship is not present. Marriage is always preceded by greater trust and understanding. Hence translating the word auliya as friend does not make sense.

The correct translation of the Arabic word *Auliya* should be saviors instead of friends. *Auliya* in Arabic means one who is *wali*, meaning God-centered with holy knowledge in the Qur’anic message. Of course, Jews and Christians have their own Holy Scriptures and their own Apostles. They do not generally know about Qur’an or Prophet Mohammed. This is the reason why Muslims are advised not to take Jews and Christians as saviors or spiritual guides regarding their spiritual life in this world or life in the Hereafter. All over the Qur’an, the wrong translation and interpretation is used for the word “auliya” as friend instead of as savior. This kind of preaching puts Muslims in a different mind-set with people of other faiths. Divisive interpretation leads to a mind-set which becomes combative and self-righteous and causes people to be ready to put down other faiths.

In the days of the Crusades, all interpretation of Qur’an was anti-Christian. This was because Muslims were facing existential threats from the Crusaders and translations of Qur’an were focused on creating enmity with Christians and recruiting mercenaries to fight against the Christian Crusaders. These political conditions also had great influence on the science of interpretation. Divisive interpretation was essential for survival in the days of the Crusades. BUT IN THE 21ST CENTURY, MUSLIM SCHOLARS ARE RE-VISITING OLD INTERPRETATIONS AGAINST PRESENT DAY CONDITIONS. More and more LIBERAL PERSPECTIVES are being brought out.

**Universal Message of Pluralism:** Living in the 21st century as part of one humanity, scholars in the Muslim world are now looking at the interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadiths in a global context in the light of establishing peace and harmony among religions. We find that the time has come for Muslim scholars to bring forward -- as part of the regular teachings in Muslim literature and sermons -- the true global values in the Qur’an as explained below:

**Heart of Pluralism in Qur’an, Hadith and the Prophet’s Last sermon:[[2]](#footnote-2)**

1. Qur’an 5:48: *“To you we have given the scriptures, just as WE have given the scriptures to people before you* [Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, etc. Islam came after all these religions.] *We have protected your Scripture* [Qur’an] *in its entirety. So judge among people from what knowledge has come to you. To each among you* [this includes all religions and spiritual traditions…not excluding anyone] *WE have prescribed the LAW* [spiritual laws coming from Torah, Gita/Vedas, Bible, Qur’an, etc.] *and an OPEN WAY* [meaning spiritualists who follow their spiritually guided conscience and who do not have their own Holy Scripture, such as native Americans and indigenous people or Yezidis of Iraq. God is inclusive of all His creation for His Mercy and Compassion.] *If God would have willed, HE would have made all of you into one single community* [religion]. *But this is not part of HIS plan. HIS plan is to test you in all that HE has given you. So strive as in a race in all good works. God alone will tell you the truth in matters in which you dispute.”*
2. Qur’an 10:47, 14:4 and 16:36: Qur’an reiterates pluralism, *“To every people was sent an Apostle in their own language and in their own country.”* Jews and Christians are considered as People of the Holy Scriptures. Most modern reformers and thinkers are now including people of all faiths as receiving the message of God. God does not discriminate based on their birth faith or ethnic origin.
3. Quranic verses that strengthens Pluralism: Muslims believe there are 124,000 prophets [which may be understood as numerous or countless] sent to every nation. All Prophets are equal, (2:136, 2:85, 3:84 & 4:152) and logically, the followers of any Prophet are also equal, because the core message is to stand for fairness, justice and having faith in God and the Last Day. This kind of Islamic knowledge defeats the radical thinking of divisive interpreters who attach superiority of Muslims over people of other faiths.
4. Prophet Mohammed’s Last Sermon: Here again, the Prophet reiterates pluralism: *“All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over non-Arab and a non-Arab has no superiority over an Arab. Also a black person has no superiority over white and a white person has no superiority over black, except by righteous thinking.”*
5. Qur’an 2:62: Rewards for All Good people from any faith: Having given examples of pluralism in Qur’an, I want to point out that God gives hope to all good people of any faith through rewards. Reward could be salvation, nirvana or Heaven….only God knows what the reward will be. No human can decide on this. Surah 2:62 says, “*Those who believe* [in the Qur’an*], those who follow the Jewish Scriptures, the Christians* [of any denomination] *and the Sabians, any who believe in God* [here any means Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrians, etc. etc.], *the Last Day and does righteousness* [meaning to stand for justice as honest witnesses] *shall have their rewards from their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”* This verse is repeated twice more in Qur’an.

Radical or Divisive thinkers have abrogated these verses which are repeated 3 times in the Qur’an. By this strategy they are controlling the mind-set that is full of distrust and suspicion about believers in other faiths.

1. Qur’an 2:256: *“There is no compulsion in religion.”* This principle is now universally accepted by all countries. Divisive interpreters have killed this verse by applying the Theory of Abrogation. They say this verse applies to people who lived before the time of Prophet Mohammed and had not received the message of the Prophet. They believe present day people must accept Islam as the final religion.

**Conclusion:** In the Muslim world80% of Muslims are non-Arabs, and Arabic is not their mother tongue. Non-Arabs are reading translations of the Qur’an, which are now abundantly available all over the world. They are finding monumental differences in translations and interpretations of the Qur’an. The Theory of Abrogation has wrecked the peaceful and merciful message of the Qur’an. There are Muslim scholars who do not believe in the Theory of Abrogation and they are looking for a more realistic interpretation that will transform the radical interpretation and retranslate the Quran as a blessing to all humanity in its pluralism. They read the verses on pluralism and diversity with pride and they are ready to reform the minds of young Muslims. The unfortunate events of 9/11 have galvanized American Muslims to defeat the radical interpretation.

New translations and interpretations are coming from Western born Muslims as well as open-minded intellectuals from the Muslim countries, and they are stimulating a review of the traditional translations, contrasting with fundamentalists’ way of thinking. It is certainly my hope that this is the beginning of the revival of the true spirit of the Quranic principles and entire Muslim world will begin to embrace the true global teachings that are full of pluralism, freedom of religion, democracy and human rights. If all these universal principles are put in proper perspective then Secular Governance is the most logical outcome. We have a lot of work to do to achieve this with the full cooperation of all the people from the world.

1. Iftekhar Hai is President of the Interfaith Alliance of United Muslims of America. www.umaia.net. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Words in brackets are the author’s commentary on the text of Qur’an, Hadith and Last Sermon of Prophet Mohammed, PBUH. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)