An Analysis of Islamic Principles on Religious Diversity and Religious Freedom at Workplaces

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Abstract

In order to build a prosperous economy in every multi-cultural society like Malaysia, it is important to accept religious diversity and ensure religious freedom at every workplace whether public or private. Islam itself as a religion recognises the diversity of religions and religious freedom at every aspect of life but rejects that all religions are of truth. This article studies the Islamic principles governing diversity of religion and religious freedom specially at the workplaces in the context of Malaysia. The objective of the study is to investigate relevant provisions of Islam that emphasizes the importance of employee's freedom to practice his religion at workplace and to examine to what extent religious diversity and religious freedom are allowed at workplaces under Islam. The study uses a legal and doctrinal methodology followed by an analytical approach. Both primary and secondary sources are used in interpreting data. The study finds that Islam has allowed religious diversity and religious freedom at all sectors of life including workplaces without sacrificing the Islamic standards for Muslims.

Keywords: Religious Diversity, Religious Freedom, Workplaces, Malaysia

Introduction

It is critical to comprehend the nature of the world and our place within it (Achour et al., 2015). When we consider mortality and how our efforts in this world are rewarded in the afterlife, we may easily put things into perspective. Because worldly problems can be overwhelming and complex, this is a particularly helpful way to analysing job stress. As a result, a person must constantly bring his or her problems to God in prayer and petition. These sorts of stress sharing not only serve as a coping mechanism to help us cope with stress, but they also attract supernatural intervention or support to help us persist in the face of adversity (Achour et al., 2015).

One of Islam's primary precepts is religious harmony and peaceful coexistence among Muslims and members of other faiths in everyday life. Islam obligates every Muslim to tolerate other religions. The concepts harmony, co-existence and religious diversity are found in almost all religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Muslims are taught to tolerate and collaborate with both Muslims and non-Muslims in Islam. In the same way, other religions also promote the idea of peace and non-violence. However, this expected harmonious relationships sometimes cannot be felt as the views of different religious communities about each other are mostly negative. Thus, to it is necessary for everyone to educate themselves about different religions. Malaysia is a multi-religious country where Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and Sikhs live in harmony, with religious tolerance, moderation, and collaboration (Muthaliff et al., 2017). People of all religion are contributing equally towards the economic development of Malaysia through public and private sectors. Majority of population being Muslim in Malaysia, it is necessary to learn about religious diversity practices and the concept of religious freedom in Islam specially in the context of public and private sector workplaces in Malaysia. This article attempts to analyze the provisions of Islam regulating religious diversity and religious freedom in workplaces with a view to create a religious diversity model for public and private sector workplaces in Malaysia.

Concept of Religious Freedom and Religious Diversity in Islam

Throughout Islam, the themes of variety and multiculturalism can be found in the Holy Quran and Sunnah. The Quran also takes into account racial, linguistic, and national differences. Differences in race and language are interpreted as divine indications. The Quran says:

> "And of His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors. Surely there are signs in this for those of sound knowledge." (Al-Quran, 30:22)

The above verse implies that humans must respect and learn from diversity. Another verse of Holy Quran mentions:

> "O humanity! Indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware". (Al-Quran, 49:13)

This verse informs us that our differences should not be a source of discord. The Quran also recognises religious freedom, emphasising the importance of religious diversity. It is stated in the Quran:

> "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things." (Al-Quran, 2:256)

Moreover, Quran strongly emphasizes on respecting and protecting all religious places. "Did not God check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure." (Al-Quran, 22:40)

The Prophet's (PBUH) tradition also includes a recognition of diversity. Prophet Muhammad favoured plurality and multiculturalism when establishing the Medina Charter. Medina was occupied by a population of ten thousand individuals at the time, divided among 22 Arab and Jewish tribes. Given such a diverse population, the Medina Charter emphasised the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims in terms of status and rights, and provided them with an equal opportunity to participate in governmental activities. (Muhtada, 2012). Muhammad (PBUH) highlighted the equality of human people in his final pilgrimage speech. The Prophet said:

> "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; white has no superiority over black, nor does a black have any superiority over white; except by piety and good action."

The greatest source of Islamic doctrine, the Qur'an, underlines that religion is not compelled (Zafar, 2014; Kasmo et al., 2015). The Quranic provision of "no compulsion in religion" (Al-Quran, 2:256) according to Muslim scholar Maududi (1991), this means that no one should be forced to become a Muslim because Islam is obvious and transparent, as are its proofs and evidence (Kasmo, et al., 2015). The Quran also forbids believers from mocking the objects of devotion of other religions (Chaudhry, 1993; Kasmo et al., 2015). So, it is clear from above discussion that Islam does not have any conflict with other religion in daily affairs of a human let alone the workplaces.

Importance of Religious Freedom at Workplaces

According to Al-Goaib (2003), religiosity is the practical and theoretical commitment to the basics of the Islamic religion through the fulfilment of Allah's rights, the protection of others' rights, following Allah's commandments, avoiding negative acts, and doing worship. Prayers, fasting, charity, and pilgrimages to Makkah should all increase a person's relationship with Allah and others; else, humans become meaningless rituals (Ghazali, 2004; Achour et al., 2015). All of Allah's rituals, including as fasting and prayer, are for the believers' benefit in order to achieve the highest level of spiritual and physical fitness (Ibrahim, 1997; Achour et al., 2015). According to Hawa (2004), spirituality cannot be maintained until all of the rites (*ibadah*) of fasting, pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*), and charity (*zakah*) are practised on a regular basis. These rituals (*ibadah*) were placed on Muslims by Allah to supply them with spiritual food on a daily, weekly, and annual basis in order to strengthen and renew their beliefs and cleanse their hearts of the stains of sin and impurity.

Numerous studies have found that religiosity is associated with happiness. Islam, like all other religions, is related with well-being, according to Noor (2008), since it provides advice on how to live one's life, provides comfort and support in good and bad times, and gives individuals meaning and identity. Muslims have depended on God as a coping method to deal with difficult circumstances for millennia in order to reach happiness (Ghazali, 2004; Achour, et al., 2015). The individual's natural link with their creator and their reliance on Allah (SWT) are the most significant factors for all Muslim employees. The importance of relying on God as a coping technique in the alleviation of anxiety, depression, and the restoration of hope has been established in some scientific investigations (Ghobary, 2004; Achour et al., 2015).

As said by the Prophet (PBUH), religion in Muslim society encompasses a far broader concept, "*Iman (faith) has over seventy branches, and modesty is a branch of Iman.*" (Sahih Muslim)

Living and contact within the community are also encouraged by Islam. This is evidenced by its call for regular congregational worship rituals, including as the five daily congregational prayers, the Friday prayer (*jumu'ah*), and the Eid prayers, as well as feast celebrations. All forms of religious solitude for personal spiritual entertainment are incompatible with this. As evidenced by numerous traditions that highlight the virtues of smiling to others, visiting the sick, caring for widows, orphans, poor, needy, wayfarers, consoling others, or offering sincere advice and consultation, the Muslim community bears a moral responsibility of emotional, spiritual, religious, and financial support to one another. Muslims are known for caring for others, including family members, the elderly, neighbours, visitors, strangers, and even enemies. These actions are viewed as commonplace gestures necessitated by every believing Muslim's religious and spiritual devotion. Not only are family members reported to be supportive in Muslim traditional societies, but community members and neighbours also contribute effectively to the domain of incumbent social support, which by today's social norms are evaluated no less than strangers (Achour et al., 2015).

The effects of job strain (i.e. workload, long working hours, work overload, irregular work schedule, number of children and their ages, and time spent with family activities) are considered sources of job stress and strain that may influence academic and administrative staff's well-being, according to the study. The usage of religion moderates the link between job strain and subjective well-being. Furthermore, those with a higher level of religiosity were found to have a higher level of happiness. As a result, religiosity is an essential and effective aspect in stress management. Prayer and supplication to God, patience, trust in God, and recital of the Quran are all examples of personal religiosity that Muslims can use to relieve stress in their lives. The Muslim social support method is a powerful collective reflection of individuals' religious adherence and internalisation of Islamic principles and norms, and as such, it harmonises with other coping techniques that are derived from the same common flow of wisdom, drive, and discipline. The strong focus placed on the individual's relationship with the Creator and reliance on Him in all parts of life as a strategy to cope with and lessen strain, stress, and depression, bringing about the restoration of hope, distinguishes Islamic from other coping techniques (Achour et al., 2015).

From an Islamic perspective, the aforementioned study focused on employment strain, job stress, and personal religiosity. It emphasises the relevance of personal religiosity in lowering job stress and ensuring Muslim employees' well-being. This study's contribution was centred on personal religiosity. Future study should focus on social support rather than separating family and community assistance. This could help us better grasp how to incorporate personal religion into our daily lives. We have demonstrated that turning to religion through faith, forgiveness, supplication, reading the Holy Quran, trust in God, remembrance, praying, patience, and gratitude to God is a common strategy for all Muslims to cope with life problems, and that turning to religion through faith, forgiveness, supplication, reading the Holy Quran, trust in God, remembrance, praying, patience, and gratitude to God are effective strategies to cope with life stressors (Achour et al., 2015).

Islam, on the other hand, respects the multiplicity of religions but does not believe that all religions are true. Cooperation is also necessary for the development of positive relationships among multi-religious members. They will appreciate and tolerate other religion devotees if this element is present in their lives. Respect for the festivities, rituals, and beliefs of other religious believers in their society can be considered as an example of cooperation.

As a result, everyone in a multifaith society should tolerate and cooperate with one another. Ibn Khaldun's theory of *Asabiyah* (spirit of kinship within the family or tribe) emphasised the importance of *Asabiyah* in strengthening relationships among individuals in the community. *Asabiyah* was evaluated positively by Ibn Khaldun. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldn emphasised that the spirit of *Asabiyyah* is mostly found in the primordial life of specific people or nations when they suffer adversity. When these groups or communities confront adversity, they will be forced to band together and protect their members from outside threats. People can use the sense of *Asabiyyah* to protect and enhance their group or society, leading to a better nation. The spirit of *Asabiyyah* can also manifest itself as a sense of unity among a vast group of people who remain unidentified (Halim, 2012; Zulkefli et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the principle of justice (*al-adl*) has always been emphasised in Islam. Justice means "administration of law according to prescribed and accepted principles, conformity to the law, legal validity the quality or fact of being just" (Ismail, 2015; Zulkefli et al., 2018). It is critical to emphasise the concept of justice in Islam. Islam places a strong emphasis on justice in inter-personal relationships inside the family, within the community, between communities and nations, and at the human-nature interface (Al-Quran, 4:58, 65, 105, 135). Kith and kin, the orphan, the impoverished, the slave, the wayfarer, and the needy all receive justice (Al-Quran, 2:17). Justice means "bond and hold society together and transforms it into one brotherhood" (Ismail, 2015; Zulkefli et al., 2018). Individuals or religious groups should be allowed to practise their religion in order to achieve justice and harmony (Zulkefli et al., 2018).

The Concept of Tolerance Islam: A Great Virtue at Workplaces
When it comes to defining the concept of tolerance, Islam has its own viewpoint. Jaffary (2003) says in Arabic, the phrase "tolerance" alludes to *al-tasamuh*, which specifies giving and receiving, not only expecting for some to give and others to receive (Rahman et al., 2013). Tolerance is a willingness to hear other people's points of view, and it works in two ways: offering one's point of view and accepting others', and it has no bearing on each other's religious beliefs in that shared area. This *tasamuh*, on the other hand, does not mean simply accepting to the point where it emotionally forces someone to accept something that goes against the religion's precepts. Islam's tolerance for religious freedom is founded on "firm on principle, tolerance with attitude." Islam encourages its adherents to adhere to the ideal of truth while maintaining respect for non-Muslims. According to Khadijah (2008), Islam places a great importance on *tasamuh* as one of its strengths. Al-Quran indicates in Surah *al-Muntahanah* that one of the key prerequisites that brought about tolerance was fairness and goodwill for individuals of differing convictions (Al-Quran, 60:8) *Tasamuh* is intimately linked to the notion of *mahabbah* (love), which needs everyone to be open-minded, sensible, and professional in particular situations. Nonetheless, *mahabbah* has a more ideal meaning and method than tolerance, because tolerance frequently causes societal misunderstanding; the question of who should 'give' and who should 'take' emerges. As a result, certain political groups have recently dared to question the Federal Constitution's credibility and sublimity. Tolerance is a much-needed universal value in establishing unity in difference, according to the preliminary discussion. When tolerance is practised as a culture in daily interactions between people of various religions, it can result in a society that is optimistic, open-minded, and kind. However, Islam only permits tolerance in topics that do not contradict its teachings' rules and obligations. In Islam, tolerance exists within a space that recognises an individual's autonomy, allowing him to live a peaceful and ethical life (Rahman et al., 2013). So, it is

necessary to adopt the Islamic virtue of tolerance at the workplaces as people of different religions and of different beliefs work together.

As a result, religious diversity is a fact that must be recognised. Religion comes in many forms, each with its own set of claims that must be evaluated appropriately. A positive attitude will lead to a positive situation, and vice versa. Religious tolerance is regarded by almost all world faiths as a virtue that must be practised by religious people in their daily lives. In the Islamic context, for example, the fundamental source al-Quran has analysed and explained that religious tolerance is a religious imperative (Rahman et al., 2013). Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism all have religious teachings on tolerance and harmony. Muslims are taught in Islam to tolerate and work with both Muslims and non-Muslims (Bakar, 2013).

Religious Pluralism and Religious Diversity: The Malaysian Context
Not very far ago, the previous Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak introduced the idea of One Malaysia, One Ummah with importance on the concept of *wasatiyyah*, that means moderation and tolerance (Nor, 2011). Najib believed that a more comprehensive and cohesive concept aligned with Islamic principles is essential in order to portray the idea of One Malaysia for dealing with issues and problems in the society. However, unlike *Islam Hadhari*, the notion was not widely pushed during Abdullah Badawi's time. The use of Allah's word in the newspaper The Sun on the actions of the leaders is crucial in the management of any state. Malaysia, for example, is an Islamic country. A country with over half of its population made up of non-Muslims must constantly be cautious when it comes to the concept of tolerance among its citizens. Many Muslim scholars attempt to trace this back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who successfully led a multicultural Medina. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) became the leader of Medina during the time, and established the Constitution (*Sahifat al-Madinah*) to ensure that the city's residents, including Muslims and non-Muslims, could live in peace. As a result, the perfect world of harmony would one day exist (Nor, 2011).

The Islamic notion of work as a religious calling, on the other hand, may be found in several verses of the Quran. The example is "and that man can have nothing but what he does (good or bad). And that his deeds will be seen. Then he will be recompensed with a full and best recompense" (Shihab, 2006; Hassan, 2015). These verses underline the importance of human labour and action. As a result, work is regarded not only as a right, but also as a duty and a responsibility. The crucial component is the notion that one did not end up in a job by coincidence or on one's own volition, but rather that one was placed there to serve a higher purpose (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Hassan et al., 2015).

Religious faiths, according to Ghazzawi and Smith (2009), are value systems via which an individual's religious faith can impact employee work attitudes (Wae-sor et al., 2015). Employees who are committed to their beliefs may discover that putting in long hours might help humanity flourish. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) preached in Islam that "hard work caused sins to be absolved" (Yousef, 2001; Wae-sor et al., 2015). As a result, it serves as a strong motivator for Muslims who strive to obey God. Employees who see work as a way to demonstrate their beliefs are more inclined to put up the effort necessary to be good employees. Employers will respond positively in return, resulting in a rise in employee work satisfaction (Wae-sor et al., 2015).

The scholars, on the other hand, say it is incorrect for Muslims to believe that religious pluralism solely refers to the concept of diversity or having multiple belief systems. Harussani,

the Mufti of Perak, warned Muslims to be wary of the dangers of "religious pluralism" and liberalism, which he said could draw Muslims away from Islam's tawhidic essence (Mustapha, 2006; Mutalib & Sulaiman, 2017). This is due of this concept, which has led to a liberal and secular approach to religion, particularly among Muslims. As a result, it has sparked heated arguments and controversies among Muslim communities, religious leaders, and scholars alike. Many people believe that religious communities should be guided by *muhibbah* (love) values while coping with diversity. It is a virtue that can bring people together and enable them to actively contribute to the nations' social and economic development (Mutalib & Sulaiman, 2017).

As a result, many people in Malaysia are paying close attention to the religious plurality debate. Religious academics and spokespeople, in collaboration with authorities and leaders, must examine a variety of issues, including religious, theological, social, and political ones. The muftis and religious scholars agreed in July 2014 to issue a fatwa proclaiming that religious diversity and liberalism are incompatible with Islam's principles. The Muzakarah of the Fatwa Committee of the National Council determined that liberalism and pluralism were incompatible with Islamic law. It is also critical to educate the general public and religious counterparts, particularly in terms of sharing common ideals between Muslims and Christians. It is clear that the dialogue may foster a healthy and meaningful relationship between these two religions, as well as pave the road for mutual understanding. In February 2010, the Interfaith Relations Working Committee was established within the Prime Minister's Departments to promote understanding and harmonious living among religious communities, in response to the country's rising religious tensions. It was, upon the approval, called as Committee to Promote Inter-Religious Understanding and Harmony (JKMPKA). The committee constitutes both governmental and non-governmental organizations, including Department of National Unity and National Integration (JPNIN), Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), Institute of World Fatwa Management and Research (INFAD-USIM), Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM) together with Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN), Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoist (MCCBCHST) and International Spiritual Fellowship (INSAF). It was founded on the same day as the National Unity Advisory Council, which was established on February 23, 1970. Its principal task is to carry out strategies aimed at promoting racial unity in the country. It is envisaged that the Committee will foster collaboration between federal government agencies, state departments, and religious leaders in order to find sound answers to religious challenges by fostering debates among experts and examining the country's current policies and regulations. Because of Malaysia's acceptance of religion's significance, *muhibbah*, or the spirit of living together, should be the guiding philosophy for committees and nations alike. The essence of *muhibbah*, which consists of seven different concepts (dialogue, kinship, harmony, sincerity, mutual trust, integrity, and respect), is hoped to continue to be a source of strength for all Malaysians and to bind the community with love, respect, and mutual understanding (Mutalib & Sulaiman, 2017).

Acceptance of various religious adherents in a particular community is critical for living in a peaceful and harmonious society. Islam is a religion that acknowledges the world's plurality of religions while rejecting the notion that all religions are true. The multiplicity of religions in the world can be defined as religious pluralism. Religious pluralism, on the other hand, might be described as the notion that all religions in the world are absolute truth. Pluralists believe that all religions are true and should be honoured around the world.

According to John Hick, all truth claims are true and should be treated with equal respect, which only means that Christians must accept the truth claims of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and others (Sintang, 2014; Zulkefli et al., 2018).

Controversy on Covering Body (*Aurah*): *Hijab*
Hijab is the Arabic word for veil. It refers to the Islamic clothing code, which requires specific areas of the body (*aurah*) to be appropriately covered in line with Quranic scriptures and Prophet Muhammad's practise (PBUH). The term *hijab* can also refer to the right manners and behaviours to be followed. Muslim men, as well as Muslim women, are required to wear the *hijab*. The term *hijab* is now commonly used to refer to the head coverings worn by Muslim women. It is referred to as *tudung* in Malaysian dialect. *Hijab* is sometimes misinterpreted as a symbol of female subjugation. *Hijab*, on the other hand, is essentially a choice for Muslim women. *Hijab* cannot be excluded as a key garment because it is a part of divine law. It is an essential component of a Muslim woman's identity. It also prevents women from being objectified (Zain et al., 2018). As a result, Muslim women must be permitted to wear *hijab* at work. In Islam, the notion of *ehsaan* emphasises being kind, forgiving, and tolerant in order to advance community wellbeing. The avoidance of extremes is viewed as the public interest, and both are equally significant principles.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Malaysia is a moderate Muslim country with a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural culture. The Federal Constitution is the supreme law under a hybrid system of civil and Islamic law. Islam is recognized as the state religion in the Federal Constitution in Article 3 (1) that says "Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation." Article 11 (1) states that "every person has the right to profess and practice his or her religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it." Clause (4) states that "law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam." So, Malaysia can impose the religious freedom and religious diversity practices as prescribed by Islam for the employers and employees of public and private sector workplaces within the ambit of its Federal Constitution. As Islam is a religion of peace and harmony, and no religious conflict is entertained in Islam, religious freedom of workers within the scope of Islamic law may enhance the productivity of an organization. Thus, it is recommended that the government, the employers and the employees should practice religious diversity and religious freedom under the scope of Islamic principles and under the restrictions of Islam.

Contribution
This study originates the findings that Islam's primary doctrine is religious harmony and peaceful coexistence among Muslims and members of other faiths in everyday life. Muslims are taught to tolerate, collaborate and also promote the idea of peace and non-violence with both Muslims and non-Muslims in Islam. The Quran recognises religious freedom and the importance of religious diversity. Islam respects the multiplicity of religions but does not believe that all religions are true, and it is necessary to respect for the festivities, rituals, and beliefs of other religious believers in their society. Apart from that, when tolerance is practised as a culture in daily interactions between people of various religions, it can result in a society that is optimistic, open-minded, and kind. As Malaysia is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural culture country, it is submitted that an acceptance of various

religious adherents in a particular community as well as in public and private sector workplaces in Malaysia are critical for living in a peaceful and harmonious society.

Acknowledgment

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