

Living with Integrity: Navigating Minority Status in Light of the Qur'an and Hadith

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Abstract

This study examines the ethical and legal responsibilities of Muslims as a majority community toward non-Muslim minorities in Muslim-majority societies, as guided by the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Islam, as a comprehensive moral and social system, provides a well-defined framework for coexistence, justice, and protection of human dignity irrespective of religious affiliation. Drawing upon primary Islamic sources and historical precedents such as the Constitution of Madinah, the Pact of Umar, and Prophetic practices, this research highlights how Islamic principles institutionalized minority rights within a pluralistic society. The Qur'an emphasizes justice ('adl), human equality, freedom of religion, and the sanctity of life, while the Hadith literature reinforces obligations of protection, fairness, and compassion toward non-Muslims living under Muslim governance. This paper argues that non-Muslim minorities were not viewed as outsiders but as protected members of society (ahl al-dhimma), entitled to religious freedom, legal protection, socio-economic participation, and cultural autonomy. Historical examples from the Prophet Muhammad's era, the Rashidun Caliphate, and later Islamic empires demonstrate the practical application of these ideals. In a contemporary context marked by religious tensions and minority marginalization, this study reasserts the relevance of Islamic ethical teachings in promoting inclusive governance and peaceful coexistence. It concludes that living with integrity in Muslim-majority societies requires adherence to Qur'anic justice and Prophetic mercy, ensuring that minority rights are not merely tolerated but actively safeguarded.

Introduction

Islam is a comprehensive religion and heterogeneous society, where diverse people live under the banner of peace and harmony on account of religious freedom and tolerance. It juxtaposes the people beneath the shadow of universal brotherhood, where neither any caste, race, and custom base discrimination nor humiliation of humanity and personal dignity. Therefore, it became the largest religion in the world according to other religions. Since the prophetic era, it paved a way of simplicity and dignity to stay with the people for as time they want. The holy Quran and Hadith also promote religious freedom and tolerance among the people, Muslim and non-Muslims. From the era of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) non-Muslim or minorities live with immense pleasure and share their cultural harmony and religious tradition in their society.

Islam had an overwhelming and profound history in protecting the rights of minorities, which was demonstrated through early pace, Hilf-al-Fudul, and Madinah pact, both determine the social justice and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in the early Islamic state. Because, the holy Book, Quran indicates the different sort of legislation and catalogue of schedules in order to survive in the Islamic state. Even though the pact of Umar also solidified the rights of non-Muslims or minorities in the Islamic state (Khalil, 2025).

But nowadays the world is precisely altered, where minorities are persecuted and oppressed by the majority. They have no opportunity and privilege to live in a non-Muslim state as a minority due to lack of religious freedom and tolerance. In spite of being challenged and shackled, Islamic principles and teaching debased the and denounced obstacles faced by the minorities, and provide a reflective framework for preserving and protecting their rights, and treatment with polite, respect and fairness. Islam upholds diversity and inclusivity, spurring peace and mutual communication between different groups. Thus, Islam encourages the rights of non-Muslim corresponding with religious freedom and cultural entities.

Review of the Literature

Scholarly literature on minority rights in Islam covers classical jurisprudence, historical practice, and modern ethical interpretations. Early Muslim jurists such as Abu Yusuf and Al-Mawardi developed the concept of *ahl al-dhimma*, which ensured legal protection, religious freedom, and social security for non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. Modern scholars like Muhammad Hamidullah and W. Montgomery Watt have emphasized the Constitution of Madinah as one of the earliest examples of pluralistic governance, where Muslims and non-Muslims formed a single political community. Historical studies of Muslim Spain, the Abbasid Caliphate, and the Ottoman Empire further illustrate how minorities maintained religious and cultural autonomy within Muslim-majority societies. Contemporary scholars argue that Islamic ethical teachings promote justice and coexistence, though political misuse of religion has often distorted these ideals. This study builds upon existing scholarship by integrating Qur'anic principles with historical practice (IslamOnline, n.d).

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and textual research methodology. The primary sources of this research are the Qur'an and authenticated Hadith, which are examined to understand Islamic teachings on justice, equality, religious freedom, and the protection of minorities. These texts are analysed thematically to highlight their ethical and social implications in Muslim-majority contexts. Historical documents such as the Constitution of Madinah and the Pact of Umar are also studied to assess the practical application of these teachings. In addition, secondary sources including academic books and journal articles are consulted to situate the research within existing scholarly discussions. A historical-analytical approach is used to trace the development of minority rights across different Islamic periods. This method allows for a balanced and non-apologetic analysis grounded in authentic Islamic sources.

Concept of Minority

The formation of minorities in Islam is rooted in the recognition of religious and ethnic diversity as part of divine wisdom. The Qur'an acknowledges multiple faiths and emphasizes coexistence: "To you your religion, and to me mine". During the Prophet Muhammad's time, minorities like Jews and Christians were granted protection and autonomy through agreements such as the Constitution of Medina. They were known as *Ahl al-Dhimma* and were guaranteed rights in exchange for loyalty and a protection tax (*jizya*). Islamic governance promoted justice, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, laying the foundation for minority inclusion in Muslim societies (Khamenei, 2017).

Certainly, Almighty Allah has created our parents, Adam from the extract of clay and Hawah from the left rib of Adam, and spread their off springs throughout the world. Precisely, the creation of human beings exists in the best stature within. And did not create any kind of discrimination. Thus, Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! Indeed, we have created you from a male and a female, and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

Therefore, The Prophet Muhammad drafted the constitution of Madinah . Where different types of people and tribes could live peacefully. Because almighty Allah adhered and commanded the Muslim to respect them and engage with them in peaceful dialogue therefore a message to not argue with people of the book except in the best manner.

The Historical Evidence of Minority Rights

The evolution of minority right instigated from that tenure of The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He implemented the Charter of Madinah to protect the Christian Monks and Churches. Then He asserted that “no compulsion is to be one of them. their Church shall be respected no bishop shall be removed from his bishopric (in 628) . In the period of Umar ibn Khattab, a treaty was signed for the sake of Christianity in Jerusalem after conquering it to protect the Christian and their Churches. For instance, after the decline of the Rashideen periods, there emerged Islamic golden age from the 8th to 13th centuries under the Abbasid and Umayyad Caliphates. They extended their territories by conquering countries and propagated the Islam, causing the established pluralist society.

Umyyad Caliph constructed a religious society in Muslim Spain, a unique form of social coexistence of cooperation between Muslims, Christians and Jews. In Damascus, there broke out a drastic change in the Muslim World on account of the construction of the House of Wisdom. Which brought about new principles and discourse in the field of innovational technology. Later, it became an educational hub for deforest leaders; scholars remained as translators of the classical books, documents, and manuscripts from Greek and Latin to Persian and Arabic.

In the case of the Ottoman Empire, they also followed and imitated the footprints of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). By establishing pluralist society in their territories, and constructing a synagogue, churches and so on. As a result, they enforce tolerance and harmony among the people by offering religious economic and social rights respectively.

In spite of Muslim majority, the minority survived and lived a euphoric life in a society, where there was neither discrimination nor communal violence. Does this line become the first growing religion in the wall on account of following and maintaining Islamic core principles?

Equality of Human Beings

Almighty Allah created the universe and divided it into both heaven and earth. After that he created human beings in the best form as prescribed in the holy Quran:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ

And make them “the most honorable of all creation due to the Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wasallam)”.

Thus, Allah says:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference . This is also authenticated by the prophetic Hadith, i.e.

لا فضل لعربي على عجمي ، ولا لعجمي على عربي ، ولا لأبيض على أسود ، ولا لأسود على أبيض - : إِلَّا بِالتَّقْوَى ، النَّاسُ مِنْ آدَمَ ، وآدمُ من تراب

O people! Indeed, your lord is one, and your father Adam is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, none of a non-Arab over an Arab, nor of a red (white) person over a black person, nor of a black person over a white person except by piety. Verily, all of you are from Adam and Adam was from dust.

We can perceive from the Quranic injunction and the Prophetic tradition that emphasize the equality of human beings. The religious minorities under the Islamic legislation and divine rule, are privileged and offered it to their all sorts of right to survive in the heterogeneous society corresponding with their own societal people in sharing the cultural entity and religious identity. It does not resist and prevent the people from forming their cultural tradition and religious entity (Ibn Hamdoon, 1996).

One of the most influential figures of Islam is Salahuddin Ayyub, a great leader who fought against the enemies and infidels, and raised the flag of Islam, Conqueror of Jerusalem from Crusaders, symbol of Muslim chivalric honor due to his merciful treatment to Christian. When he retakes and reconquers Jerusalem and thinks his long-distance relationship of mutual respect and polite behavior with Richard the Lion hearted.

Freedom of religion

Religion holds profound significance in human life, offering moral guidance, spiritual comfort, and a sense of purpose. It shapes individual and collective identities promoting values such as compassion, justice, and humanity. Therefore, religion is the core aspect of human life. Every human being wants to express their faith in religion. Islam does not resist a person to express religious values. Therefore, Almighty Allahu prescribed in the holy Quran:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

Meaning: There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path. Ibn Kathir explained the Qur'anic verse: "There is no compulsion in Din (Religion)." in the following words: "Do not coerce anyone to embrace the religion of Islam, for its proofs and evidences are clear, obvious and manifest. There is no need for everyone to be coerced into embracing it."

This verse emphasizes that individuals should be free to choose their faith and belief. Forcing them into a particular religion is not permitted. This core message highlights the principle of religious freedom and prohibition of force conversion. This Quranic verse points out towards the freedom of religion. So, a minority has the right to express his religious faith and practice its rites and rituals and customs within Muslim majority society.

An illustration of the prophetic biography, who was an iconic, epitome, and greatest leader of the world. Who guaranteed the right for those who did not belong to Islam? Because the prophet Muhammad also respected and honored the religious identities of People of the Book. Therefore, he enforced charter of Madinah which offers the protection of people, churches, and synagogues. He informed them that no compulsion is to be on them. Their churches shall be respected no bishop shall be removed from his bishopric.

The golden Islamic history indicates towards the preservation and protection of worship places of the people of the book. Umar [®] signed the treaty of Jerusalem in favor of Christianity. Hence the worship places of people in the book are adorned and designed in Arabic inscription in Muslim Spain. So, we can comprehend the overwhelming and infinite role of Islam in preserving the right to emancipation of religion of minorities. Because, Islam neither oppressed and suppressed them nor ruined their shelters and worship places. But offered practicing their rites and customs within the dimension of Islamic power (At-Tantawi et al. 1973).

Protection of life and justice

Islam also provides the protection of life and justice for those minorities who live under the Islamic shadow. It is fundamental principles of Islam providing security to the people of the Book. Therefore, Islam enacted the zijiya in return for protection. To begin, the fourth Caliph of Islam, Ali [®] also up held the protection of minorities life consequently he said "the blood of those of non-Muslim subject is equal to our blood and blood money is like our blood money".

This hadith pointed out that majority and minority both are equal before the Islam. Whenever we protect the blood of Muslim then we have to save the blood of non-Muslim from enemies. So, it is the core message of Islam that equalizes the people.

Justice in Islam is a core ethical value, commanding believers to uphold fairness, equality, and rights of all individuals regardless of their background, even non-Muslims within an Islamic state. It is also a complicated matter arising against Islam, that Islam does not offer justice for minorities. But literally Islam also adhered just between minority and majority. Almighty Allah prescribed in favor of justice: Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes then being righteous towards them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly (Bhat, 2024).

Islam spurred fair and kind treatment to all. In another chapter Allah says on the behalf of justice to the prophet Muhammad: They eagerly listen to falsehood and consume forbidden gain. So, if they come to you 'O Prophet', either judge between them or turn away from them. If you turn away from them, they cannot harm you whatsoever. But if you judge between them, then do so with justice. Surely Allah loves those who are just.

The verse is teaching that Allah values truth and justice. It talks about people who like lies and take money or benefits in wrong ways. When such people come to the Prophet ﷺ to solve their disputes, Allah gives him a choice: He may judge between them, or He may turn away and not get involved. If he turns away, they cannot harm him at all. But if he chooses to judge, he must judge with complete fairness, because Allah loves people who are just. In Islam both the protection of human life and pursuit of justice are the fundamental divine obligations rooted in the sacredness of life and a commitment to equality and fairness for all individuals. The Quran emphasizes the preservation of life, forbidding its unlawful taking and requiring people to protect and aid the vulnerable.

Socio-political and Economic Rights

Islam provides a comprehensive framework for justice, equality, and human dignity. Under Muslim rule, minorities were granted socio-political and economic rights based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith. These rights ensured peaceful coexistence and protection for non-Muslim communities. The Qur'an emphasizes justice and fairness for all people, regardless of religion. Allah commands believers to act justly even towards those who differ in faith. Allah prescribes in the holy Qur'an: Allah does not forbid believers from being kind and just to those who haven't fought them over religion or driven them from their homes, (Surah Al-Mumtahanah) emphasizing that Allah loves those who are fair and equitable, even towards non-hostile disbelievers. It clarifies that justice should be applied fairly, distinguishing between peaceful non-believers and hostile ones who persecute Muslims. Under Islamic governance, minorities were allowed to practice their religion freely and manage their religious institutions. Their places of worship were protected, and religious interference was prohibited (Shafique et al. 2024).

Politically, minorities were considered protected citizens (ahl al-dhimmah). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever harms a non-Muslim under covenant harms me" (Hadith). This highlights the strong protection guaranteed to minorities. They had the right to legal justice and could approach courts for redress without discrimination.

Islamic teachings ensure economic security for minorities. The Qur'an forbids unjust exploitation and commands fairness in trade and transactions. Thus, almighty Allah states that: O believers! Do not devour one another's wealth illegally, but rather trade by mutual consent. And do not kill 'each other or' yourselves. Surely Allah is ever Merciful to you. Minorities were allowed to own property, conduct business, and earn livelihoods freely. Their wealth and property were safeguarded by the state.

The Islamic state also ensured economic welfare. Minorities were exempt from religious taxes like zakat and instead paid jizyah, which was often minimal and used for their protection and public welfare. The poor,

elderly, and disabled among minorities were supported through the public treasury. In the light of the Qur'an and Hadith, Islam guarantees socio-political and economic rights to minorities under Muslim rule. These rights are rooted in justice, compassion, and equality. Historical Islamic governance reflects these principles, promoting peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among diverse communities.

For instance, the Caliph Al-Mansur was one of the great rulers who hired non-Muslims, a Jew, Muse was appointed as a revenue collector. Even though, Caliph Al-Mutawakkil introduced the service for non-Muslims in government.

For example, there was a Christian vizier in Baghdad named 'Abdūn ibn Sā'id. One day, he visited the Qāḍī (judge) Ismail ibn Ishāk. When the vizier arrived, the Qāḍī stood up to welcome him. Some people present did not approve of this action. After the vizier left, the Qāḍī explained his behaviour by quoting a verse from the Qur'an: "Allah does not forbid you from being kind and just towards those who have not fought against you because of religion or driven you out of your homes. Allah loves those who act justly" (Surah Al-Mumtahanah, Verse 8). The Qāḍī then said that the vizier handled important matters of the Muslims and acted as a link between the people and the caliphs. This example, along with many others, shows that the way rules concerning religious minorities were applied in practice often depended on the personal attitude of the ruler and the officials he appointed (Yaqaen Institute for Islamic Research). This example shows that Islamic teachings support justice and respectful relations with peaceful non-Muslims. A Christian vizier held an important position and was treated with dignity. However, the actual treatment of minorities often depended on the attitude and decisions of rulers and officials in power.

Conclusion

Islam provides a strong and clear system for protecting the rights of minorities. The teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith emphasize justice, equality, kindness, and respect for all human beings, regardless of their religion. Non-Muslims living in Muslim societies were not treated as outsiders but as protected members of the community, with rights to practice their religion, own property, and live peacefully. Historical examples, such as the Constitution of Madinah and the practices of early Muslim rulers, prove that these principles were not only theoretical but also applied in real life. Minorities were given freedom, security, and opportunities to participate in social and economic life. Islam clearly rejects forced conversion and supports religious freedom, showing that faith should be based on choice, not pressure.

However, in today's world, many societies face problems like intolerance and discrimination. This makes it even more important to return to the true teachings of Islam. These teachings promote peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and protection of human dignity. Living with integrity in a Muslim-majority society means following these values in everyday life. It requires Muslims to act with fairness, protect the weak, and ensure that minorities feel safe and respected. True Islamic practice is not just about belief, but about ethical behaviour toward others. Therefore, by applying Qur'anic justice and the Prophet's example of mercy, societies can build harmony and unity. Islam, when understood correctly, offers a powerful model for inclusive and peaceful living in a diverse world.

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