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A Contrastive Analysis of Yusuf Islam and Zakir Naik's Styles of Religious Propagation (or Preaching)

Maziah Mustapha^{*}
Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak^{}**

Abstract

Like Christianity, Islam promotes religious propagation to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As such, Islam and Da'wah (promulgation) are words inseparable in the Muslim world. Propagation done through acts of kindness and beautiful preaching are highly recommended in the Qur'an and Sunnah. As a peace-loving religion, Islam calls for a resourceful methodology in disseminating the lofty ideas and ideals enshrined in its holy scripture. Moreover, the Prophet of Islam himself demonstrated to his followers on the rightful manner in which the religion should be promulgated, not only to the Muslims but also to non-Muslims. Taking precedent from the Prophet and his followers, this paper examines the styles and methodologies used by two renowned contemporary Muslim preachers; Yusuf Islam (1948-till present)¹ and Zakir Naik (1965-till present). In the Muslim world, both of them are merited for their intellectual competency in engaging their audience in any form of religious discourse, particularly pertaining to Islam and Christianity. Their personalities and contributions have drawn the interest of the researchers to conduct a contrastive analysis on both of these celebrated Islamic preachers. More specifically, this study will objectively look into the similarities and differences exhibited in their methodology, body language and styles of public speaking, etc. The Textual-Analysis method will be employed to interpret the relevant data related to this study that can be retrieved from their public lectures and written documents.

Keywords: Contrastive Analysis, Zakir Naik, Yusuf Islam, Religious Propagation

Introduction

What draws the interest of the Muslim and Non-Muslim scholars to study other religion is not the same. In most instances, the latter's

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¹ Robert Windeler. Cat Stevens. <https://www.majicat.com/>. Retrieved on 26th June 2019.

interest to study Islam is to find faults with its teachings. In modern times, with the advent of Orientalism, there came a huge interest in Western scholars to know eastern culture and religion. Among all religions, Islam seems to be the most popular religion in Oriental studies.¹ Though the bulk of Orientalists study Islam mainly to discredit the Qur'an and the personality of the Prophet (PBUH), but there are a few who objectively study and give credit to Islam and the Muslims contribution to human civilization.² Conversely, the former's interest is due to the reason that the Qur'an speaks on the belief systems of earlier religions; particularly Judaism and Christianity. In the past, many Muslim scholars had undertaken serious interest in the area of comparative religion. During the classical period of Islam, scholars like Abu 'Tsa Muhammad ibn Harun al-Warraq (889–994), Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Nadīm (995 or 998), Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Al-Bīrūnī (973–1050), Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥazm (994–1064), Tāj al-Dīn Abū al-Fath Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm ash-Shahrastānī (1086–1153), and Taqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), Abū 'Abd al-Lāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Lāh l-Lawātī ṭ- Ṭanḡī ibn Baṭūṭah (1304–1368 or 1369) showed keen interest in comparative religion. In modern times, the Muslim world saw towering scholars dominating the field, such as Rahmatullah Kairanawi (1818–1891), Ahmed Hoosen Deedat or better known as Ahmad Deedat (1918–2005), Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi (1921–1986), Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933 till present), to name a few. These great scholars produced voluminous writings using different methodologies to showcase their scholastic works. Among the more popular methods used during the classical era of Islam were polemical refutation, comparative and analytical analysis and dialogue. Such methods are still accredited to these days. In continuing the legacy of the past in the area of comparative religion, the contemporary digital era also saw the appearance of many charismatic Muslim scholars and preachers. Among them personalities like Yusuf Islam, Zakir Naik, Yusuf Estes (1944 till present), Shabir Ally (1978 till present), Bilal Philips (1946 till present) are notable. Many of their public lectures and debates are made available to millions around the globe via the internet, YouTube and social media. Equipped with the proper knowledge about Islam and other religions,

¹ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books A Division of Random House), 1979.

² See Mohammad Ilyas & Sajidah Ilyas, *The Road to Recovery: Borderless Interactions of Islam and the West*, (United Kingdom: Islamic Research Institute of Great Britain), 2005.

these Islamic evangelists came to respond to the many false allegations, criticisms, misinformation and disinformation concocted by Orientalists and non-Muslims against Islam.

Due to space limitation, in this paper, the researchers would only want to perform a contrastive analysis between Yusuf Islam and Zakir Naik. Both these preachers have their own personal experience in turning out to be an Islamic preacher. Yusuf coming from the world of music, while Naik from the medical profession. Eventually, both have dedicated their lives to the service of God by inviting others to the path of virtue and bliss.

Yusuf Islam's Life Background

Yusuf Islam is one of the most prominent preachers of Islam in the Muslim world. He enjoys popularity not only among the Muslims but also non-Muslims. He was born on 21st July 1948 in Marylebone in London. He was raised in a Christian business family and given the name Steven Demetre Georgiou at birth. Yusuf's father was a Greek Cypriot by the name of Stavros Georgiou (1900-1978), while his mother was a Swedish lady named Ingrid Wickman (1915-1989).¹ Like Yusuf, at one point of their lives, both his parents converted into Islam and during the last days of their lives, they died as Muslims.² Yusuf was the youngest among his three siblings.³ His conversion into Islam made it possible for him to marry Fawziah Mubarak Ali in 1979.⁴ His family expanded further with the coming of five children and nine grandchildren.

Though a detailed record on Yusuf's educational background seems missing, nevertheless, during his early childhood, he attended the St Joseph Roman Catholic and went through a strict training in Christian ethics and theology. He completed his primary education at Local West End Primary School. Although he was not performing well academically, his performance in arts was exceptional. For this reason, he decided to pursue his study in the science of arts at Hammersmith School of Arts. Upon graduation, he established himself as a singer-

¹ Yusuf Islam, *Why I Still Carry A Guitar*, (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia), 2015, p. 7-8.

² *Ibid.*, p.22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27. See also: "Cats Stevens Yusuf". <https://catstevens.com/biography/> Retrieved on 1st February, 2018.

songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. His involvement in the music industry catapulted him into fame. The success he made in the music world as a celebrated artist gave him the title Cat Stevens. Some state that his inclination and success in the show business came as a result of his many years of involvement in the family music business. Not only that, the musical environment in which he grew up also created the interest in him to be close to music. His house was located nearby a coliseum and an entertainment outlet. His life before coming into Islam was one full of glamour, wealth and excitement, and he was an outstanding, wealthy, and a charming young man. At the age of 18, he became a megastar. The years between 1967 and 1977, marked the pinnacle of success for him.

While enjoying the peak of success in his music career, life started to take a different course for Yusuf. In 1969, he was diagnosed for tuberculosis and had to go through treatment. After recovering from this life-threatening ailment, his music and lyrics of his songs also went through a dramatic change. They started to represent his personal emotion. From that point in his life, Yusuf used to question; what is the purpose of life, death, happiness, etc. In his search for answers to his life, he started to wander and move on from one ism to another. Yusuf's spiritual quest took him from Christianity to Hinduism, Taoism, Zen, Buddhism, Vegetarianism and Numerology. His spiritual journey did not stop until he was finally introduced to the Qur'anic concept of life and God.¹

Cat Stevens' Conversion into Islam²

His conversion into Islam was a difficult and sweetest thing that ever happened to him. As such, it deserves mentioning here. It was a shocking news to his family, people around him and to his devoted fans. Stevens defended his reason to embark on a new spiritual journey. He also told that the decision was made after giving a serious thought about it and one that was not made haphazardly. He self-confessed of what he had undergone in life and that has intensified his long-held quest for spiritual truth. In describing his spiritual journey into Islam, he said the following: "To some people, it may have seemed like an enormous

¹ Yusuf Islam, *Why I Still Carry A Guitar*, p. 7-23.

² Anne Sofie Roald, "The Conversion Process In Stages: New Muslims in The Twenty-First Century", *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol: 23 (3), 2012, pp. 347-362.

jump, but for me, it was a gradual move to this." ¹In a magazine interview, he reiterated his spiritual journey by saying;

"I had found the spiritual home I'd been seeking for most of my life. And if you listen to my music and lyrics, like "Peace Train" and "On The Road to Find Out", it clearly shows my yearning for direction and the spiritual path I was travelling".²

Reading the Qur'an in a way gave solace to Stevens' troubled heart. Later, he reflected his spiritual yearning in songs he wrote and sang. After understanding the cardinal teachings of Islam, on 23rd December 1977, he officially declared himself as a Muslim by choosing Yusuf Islam as his new name.³ After becoming a Muslim, he took a long break from the music world. During the break, he spent more time understanding the Qur'anic message and contemplating as to whether music is permissible in Islam. After getting advice from scholarly people, he made a comeback to music with a noble intention. His return to music happened exactly after thirty years. His return to music this time around was with a certain determination that he is going to utilize music as a vehicle to carry the message of Islam and peace to the global community. Yusuf's understanding of the Qur'an through the English translation surprised many. He was able to articulate many of philosophical ideas in it like many born Muslims, perhaps sometimes better than them. They were equally elated to see how creatively he used music to promote Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Besides, the huge admiration he received from his fans, there were some posted on Western social media that harshly criticized and passed derogatory remarks on his conversion into Islam. Such remarks at times were aimed to belittle his status as an iconic figure in the world of music. One such cynicism on Yusuf will be the "The Cat Sat on the

¹ Harry Lime, "Cats Steven -aka Yusuf Islam", <https://books.google.com.my/books?isbn=0244190941>, 2019. Retrieved on 26th June, 2019, p.14.

² Andrew Dansby, "Cat Stevens Breaks His Silence", <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/cat-stevens-break-his-silence-20000621>. 2000, Retrieved 1st February 2018.

³ Yusuf Islam, *Why I Still Carry A Guitar*, p. 20.

Mat”. In recent times, in his interviews, he has defended his position on how he views things differently as a Muslim compared to his critics.¹

Yusuf’s Rapport & Style of Communication

The obvious qualities one can see in Yusuf when it comes to communication with people are his ability to use diplomacy and persuasion in his communication. He treats every individual with due respect regardless of the person being a Muslim or non-Muslim, an ordinary fan or a member of the media. Such qualities have been of great help for Yusuf to communicate his more complex ideas on religion and religiosity. His respect for other people’s ideas and feelings is a reflection of his religiosity and good personality. He speaks genuinely well without having any prejudice against the ones he is communicating with. By understanding the background of the people with whom he is in a conversation makes him and the discussant or the interviewer feels comfortable. In many of his interviews, Yusuf looks relaxed and enjoys every moment of the show. The training he got long before coming into Islam, on how to present himself on stage came handy for him when later he took the role of an ambassador or spokesperson for Islam. Another positive trait about Yusuf is his fluency as a native speaker of English. As such, he speaks with all clarity and decency without any ambiguity.

Music as a Medium of Communication²

One hears too often in the media that great artists, musicians and music composers have spoken on the same ideas that music is a universal language. There is an old wisdom that says good music creates harmony in the human soul. To Yusuf, the realization that music can be a good medium to communicate came after his return from his isolation from the music world. Moreover, he also felt that music can be a beautiful way of communication and creates a neutral ground for people to interact with one another. His new insight on the role of music in the Islamic propagation, made him say the following:

“There is a great deal of ignorance in the world about Islam today, and we hope to communicate with the help of something more refined than lectures and talks. Our recordings

¹ Ibid., p. 29.

² Ibid., pp. 51-57. See also: Carl Morris, “Finding a Voice: Young Muslims, Music and Religious Change in Britain”. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42137940.pdf>. Retrieved on 26th June 2019.

are particularly appealing to the young, having used songs as well as Qur'an verses with pleasing sound effects".¹

In defending his new position on music, Yusuf said that he has not come across any Qur'anic verse or Hadith, which disapproves music as being distracting to a Muslim from carrying out his daily obligations. Moreover, Yusuf is of the opinion that Muslim scholars and the Ummah should give priority to the more pressing problems in the society than to debate on a minor issue like music. His argument sounds convincing as one can see that in the Muslim world millions of Muslims suffer from famine, sectarian wars, terrorism, displacement, etc. Going by the objectives of the Syariah, the major and more serious and life-endangering problems should be given the top priority over the minor issues. To Yusuf, since there is a large following for his music in the West, he should not waste this opportunity to communicate the Islamic way of life with those who are still groping in their spiritual darkness. To the large majority of his non-Muslim fans in the West, Yusuf's creative approach to Islamic propagation using music was not at all seen as a threat. Yusuf's new stand on music did bring good opportunities for him to be interviewed in many radio and TV programs. Not only that, more often he was given the platform to share his Islamic ideas in public lectures, interfaith dialogues, etc.

Authentic Sources²

As a young Muslim growing into maturity in the religion of Islam, Yusuf learn to rely on authentic sources of the religion and its standard practices. A good example in his case will be to believe that music as a whole is not allowed in Islam. Later through research, he realized that not all but some healthy and good music is allowed in Islam. He also acknowledged religion should not be judged by looking at the behaviour and practices of the adherents as they can be misleading in many ways. As such, he called people to look at the book of authority of the religion before they pass on a judgment. This also applies to Islam. To him, the realities we see in people can be very far from the ideal teachings of the religious texts. Other than going to the authentic sources, he also highlighted on how media can mislead, misinform and dis-inform

¹ Hidayathullah, Mohammad, "New Recordings by Yusuf Islam". 2001. <http://www.islamicvoice.com/march.2001/news.htm#new>. Retrieved on 1st February 2018.

² Yusuf Islam, *Why I Still Carry A Guitar*, p. 66.

people. He proves his case by stating his views on Salman Rushdie saga. He further explained on how the media manipulated his opinion to paint a negative image of him to the British people. According to him, the media reports projected that his views are in line with the Fatwa passed on by the Muslim clergies in Iran. Besides that, he was not given a fair media coverage to explain the truth of the matter.¹

In his spiritual development in Islam, he came to realize that within the Muslim society there exist varying sects and denominations as is the case in other religions. In his quest to understand Islam, he came to realize that there are scholars who belong to the Salafi, Jama'at al-Tabligh, Sufi, and many other movements. Though their metaphysical framework is the same, but somehow they differ in their implementation of the Syariah ruling in Islam. After understanding the sects in Islam, Yusuf has taken a moderate stand neither going to either extremes (not too relax or too harsh). He believes that as humans, our action speaks louder than words. So, he thought that the best way to promote Islam is by showing compassion toward others. This he believes to be a good way to invite non-Muslims into Islam.

Storytelling Method

Yusuf uses storytelling as a common approach in conveying his message to his audience. "Why I Still Carry a Guitar" is a classic example of how effectively storytelling can be employed as a medium to convey his message. Through experience he has found out that narrating his own biographical sketch and the path he has taken in seeking spiritual enlightenment of his soul has been so effective. To many of his audience, Yusuf's experience in life getting involved in drug, going in and out from one religion to other is no different from what they themselves go through in the West. Listening to his success story of cutting loose from the vicious circle of the West gives hope and confidence to his audience. Many of them feel; if Yusuf can purify his soul and turn out be good in life, perhaps they too can get out from their turbulent lifestyle.

Zakir Naik's Life Background

Zakir Naik Abdul Karim Naik was born as a Muslim in Dongri, a predominantly Muslim locality in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India on the 18th October 1965. He was born in a family of doctors. He married

¹ Ibid., p. 42.

Farhat Naik who in many ways shared the same interest in life. Naik was once a student at St. Peter's High School and later went to pursue his higher education at Kishinchand Chellaram College in Churchgate. He became a full-fledge medical doctor after finishing his studies and training at Topiwala National Medical College, BYL Nair Charitable Hospital and University of Mumbai. Holding a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS), he worked as a doctor for a while.

Coming in contact with Ahmad Hoosen Deedat (1918 – 2005) in 1987 was a turning point in his life. Inspired by the genius and debating skill of Deedat, Naik changed his profession from being a medical doctor to an Islamic preacher. During his preparatory state as a preacher, he went through a rigorous training under the tutelage of the great Deedat. His da'wah (evangelical) activities propagating the message of Islam started in 1991. As a base for his religious activities, Naik established the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), a non-profit organization. Having a dynamic personality and intellectual acumen qualified him to occupy the leadership vacuum of his time in India. According to the BBC online news, Zakir became a hero for young Muslim youth in India.

"Zakir Naik has made himself into a brand. He is a package. His image is that of a man who is western-educated, with a medical background and wearing suit and tie. He has also cultivated the image of a man of Islam. He sports a beard and wears a skull cap"¹

A considerable number of individuals from other faith converted to Islam after listening to Naik's scholarly presentation. He felt quite confident back then as well as now in debating subjects on the concept of God, prophet-hood, revelation, and other controversial topics like terrorism and extremism with scholars and theologians alike from other religions. While many adore his intellectual ability and memory power in the Muslim world, some religious organizations, academics and media reporters criticize Naik's provocative statements and cynicism against other religious scriptures and dogmas. For them, Naik's work is none other than one that disparages the doctrine of others.

¹ "The influence of controversial preacher Zakir Naik".

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-38259592>, Retrieved on 1st February, 2018.

Despite the controversy that surrounds him, between 2009 and 2015, saw Naik soaring into popularity. Naik's name was listed in the 'The 100 Most Powerful Indians list published by Indian Express', the 'Top 10 Spiritual Gurus of India' and 'the top 70 list of the '500 Most Influential Muslims in the World'. He also received many awards for his contribution for his outstanding service to Islam, Inter-religious Study, Education and Philanthropy, and act of volunteerism for the cause of Islam. Naik's crowning achievement came when he was awarded the Honorary Doctorate 'Doctor of Humane Letters' (Honoris Causa) by the Vice Chancellor of the University of The Gambia.¹

Besides the popularity he enjoyed during live appearance, Naik is also a popular figure online. He is the highest amongst the Muslim English Speakers who received more than 8 million likes on his Facebook Page. YouTube Vice President, Tom Pickett, certified Zakir Naik as 'awesome' for his 'likes' and 'popularity' on YouTube. His Peace TV Network also received good response ever since it was launched in January 2006 till October 2015. His TV programs broadcast in English, Urdu, Bangla and Chinese turned out to be the largest watched religious program in the world.² In addition to public lectures; live and on social media, Naik has also authored a number of books. Coming from the science background, one of his remarkable books is entitled "Qur'an and Modern Science - Compatible or Incompatible?"

Zakir Naik's Styles of Religious Propagation

Naik is a competent scholar of comparative religion who is full of confidence and courage when he speaks to his audience. These qualities of Naik have been admired by his fan group all over the world. Moreover, his audience among scholars and laypersons will be amazed at his ability to quote out of memory textual references from the Qur'an and other religious books. Quoting copiously religious texts during debate and Q & A sessions tantalizes his audience. This intellectual feat which is a rare ability found among religious preachers convinces many to convert into Islam. Besides that, his proficiency in the subject-matter and the prior preparation before debate gave him the self-confidence and propelled him to emerge victorious in many of the encounters he have had with scholars from other faith groups. In many of the debates, he is

¹ King Faisal Prize, "Dr. Zakir A. Naik", 2015. <http://kingfaisalprize.org/dr-zakir-a-naik-2/>. Retrieved: 31st July, 2018.

² Samadia Sadouni, "Ahmad Deedat, Internationalisation, and Transformation of Islamic Polemic", *Journal of Religions in Africa*, Vol: 43(1), 2013, pp. 53-73.

far from being apologetic to his opponents. As such, he speaks forcefully making cross reference to the different scriptures.

Zakir Naik's Style of Public Speaking¹

Though for his fellow Muslims, his debating skill and style of public speaking seem quite amazing and entertaining at the same time, non-Muslim audience finds them quite the opposite. To them, Naik is a provocative speaker who likes to attack and make fun of other people's faith and belief systems. Naik's claim came under adverse reaction from non-Muslims when he said that his debates and public forums are aimed at spreading the true message of Islam. To them, his public lectures are filled with hate campaign against people of other religions. It became obvious to many of his fault finders that his style of preaching was seen provocative in nature. One of his critics said:

“Naik's presentation with a self-pretentious smugness, which was designed to address the demand of a harsh inner city youth, wrangling his pant around his knee. The critique also posed on his preference to use sectarian language, and on his illogical arguments and his radical approach in the beginning of his public lecture. Even the religious radicals who do sermons never begin their discourse by saying; “Here I'm going to start my indoctrination session to prove that my religion is better than yours. In the next few hours, I'll do my best to convince you of my idea and ultimately convert you to my religion.”²

It is obvious that in many of his public lectures, Naik likes to ridicule and make a mockery of other people's faith, scripture and catechism. A few of his provocative questions include; “to which Christian

¹ Jasbeer Musthafa, “Mediation And Muhammad's Message: Characteristics Of Online Islamic Evangelism Consumed By Indian Youth”, *Malaysian Journal Of Media Studies*, Vol: 16 (1), 2014, pp.13-24. See also: Anis Izzati Ismail, A Rhetorical Analysis On Selected Speeches Of Dr. Zakir Naik. Unpublished thesis for the Master of Human Sciences in Applied Linguistic, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 2017.

² Unnikrishnan Dinesh, “Zakir Naik's IRF's alleged Islamic State Connection Makes A Strong Case For Action Against Preacher”. <http://www.firstpost.com/india/zakir-naiks-irfs-alleged-islamic-state-connection-makes-a-strong-case-for-action-against-preacher-2916108.html>. 2016. Retrieved: 11th Feb. 2018.

denomination you belong to, are you circumcised, why do you eat pork, which bible do you read, is this the teaching of your church or Jesus Christ, etc.”. Besides that, he also pesters his questioners by asking; why don't you become a Muslim now, will you be a Muslim if I answer your question, are you prepared to accept Muhammad as your prophet, etc. All this provocations and more from Naik were never seen by him as acts that do not go in tandem with the ways of the Prophet.

Unclear Methodology

Naik's methodology has come under criticism from Muslim and non-Muslim academics. Particularly, the non-Muslims state that Naik's interpretation of their scriptures can be quite problematic. Though on the one hand, they claim that Naik's talent to memorize many of the textual references from the Qur'an and other varied religious texts can be an added value to his presentation, his references from their Holy Scriptures are taken out of context, especially from the Bible and the Hindu scriptures. They strongly claim that all his cherry picked quotations are taken out of context without referring to the storyline in which they are stated. The learned among the Christians allege that Naik's Biblical interpretations are meant to fit his preconceived conclusions. As such, his methodology has been analogically described as an arrow shot on a blank board which was later drawn a bull's eye around it.¹

As a Controversial Preacher

Overzealous of his religious beliefs has led Naik's into making many controversial and provocative statements. In many instances, such statements have provoked the anger of people living in multi-religious countries of the world, particularly in India. Habitually, during public lectures, Naik used to make disparaging remarks on other religious books other than the Holy script of the Muslims. Whenever the opportunity arises during public debate/ forum he would openly declare that those religious books are inauthentic and contain nothing else other than fallacious teachings. To many, the act of disparaging other people's religion can cause polarization and disharmony within a society that can eventually disturb the peaceful co-existence of a multi-religious society. Some Muslim scholars, feel that Naik as an ambassador of Islam should

¹ Rayhan Mahmud Shihab, “What Are Your Thoughts About Zakir Naik Allegedly Inspiring/Influencing Dhaka Terror Attacks of 2016?”. <https://www.quora.com/What-are-your-thoughts-about-Zakir-Naik-allegedly-inspiring-influencing-Dhaka-terror-attacks-of-2016>, Retrieved: 7th August 2018.

not get entangled himself in controversies belittling other people's religion. Conversely, he should only focus on the beauty, tolerance and values preached by Islam.¹ Furthermore, there are claims made against him saying, he called Muslim countries not to tolerate the building of places of worship other than mosques. His exact words on this issue are: "How can we allow (building of churches or temples in an Islamic state when their religion is wrong and when their worshipping is wrong?)".²

The alleged Naik's statements on suicide bombing also become a controversy when the media reported that he approved the act as a war tactic. Having said that, Naik also refused to accept that the 9/11 attack were perpetrated by a Muslim terrorist organization helmed by Osama bin Laden. On the contrary, he believed the 9/11 attack was an inside job carried out by the Bush administration. His views on 9/11 became controversial through a widely watched You Tube video in 2007. In this video, Naik stated the following:

"If he (Osama bin Laden) is fighting the enemies of Islam, I am for him". If he is terrorizing the terrorist, if he is terrorizing America the terrorist, the biggest terrorist, I am with him".³

Besides the above controversy, in his native India, Naik and his non-profitable organization Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) have been accused for some unlawful activities by the Indian counterterrorism agency which is known as the National Investigation Agency (NIA). As a result of this allegation, the Indian government has imposed a five-year ban on the IRF under the country's anti-terror laws. India's Enforcement Directorate, which investigates economic crimes, has accused the IRF of money-laundering. In addition to that, Naik's organization is also accused for recruiting young freedom fighters in the southern state of Kerala to join ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or ISIS in the Middle East. All this and many more of the accusations against him and his organization involved in terror activities have never proven true by the Indian Government. Naik not only denies these charges but has criticized ISIL or ISIS, referring to it as the "anti-Islamic state". In

¹ Stephen Schwartz, "Zakir Naik, Radical Islamist Video Evangelist". https://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-schwartz/zakir-naikradicalislami_b_6945990.html, 2015, Retrieved: 7th August, 2018.

² Zakir Naik, "Temples Are Not Allowed in UAE & Other Islamic Nations", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-QkUXThkkM>, 2015, Retrieved: 8th August 2018.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0i2N8jc5KB8>. Retrieved: 11th Feb. 2018.

refuting this allegation, he released a video that conveyed the Islamic message that violence and killing of the innocents are un-Islamic acts. In that video too, Naik went to the extent of stating that killing an innocent person regardless a Muslim or non-Muslim is the second major sin in Islam.¹ Interestingly, the latest reports by the US government and the Interpol, have cleared Naik and his organization. They have declared that Naik and his IRF neither involved in any form of terror activity nor linked to any terror organization.²

Many of his sympathizers feel that Naik should have avoided himself from making political statements like the one above, in order to make himself available to the millions of people who are still searching and wanting to know the real teachings of Islam. They believe that his provocative statements can get him into trouble and at the same time many countries will impose travel ban on him.

Comparative Appraisal

Yusuf Islam's growth in Islam was a remarkable one. He learnt through his experience on how to deal with Western media. His misconstrued stand on the fatwa on Rushdie by the Western media has taught him a good lesson. His return to music after a long break was a good idea. It opened many opportunities for him to be interviewed by the media. Given the platform to be interviewed, he used many of the radio and TV programs to explain clearly of what he believed to be the ideal teachings of the Qur'an. His body language and tactful way of answering during media interviews created a positive image of him and the religion he belongs to in the West. Moreover, after a thorough research on the subject on music in Islam, he realized that music as a whole is not prohibited in Islam, except the type of music that promotes vulgarism and profanity. Moreover, music that promotes free sex, homosexuality and substance usage is a total outright rejection in Islam. Conversely, music that awakens the human spirit to respond to humanity and God is not an objectionable thing in Islam. In realizing the fact that music plays a significant role in the lives of modern people, especially those living in the urban, Yusuf took the right decision to use music and songs to preach

¹ Saif Khalid, "Zakir Naik: Why India Wants To Arrest The Preacher". <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/05/india-arrest-preacher-zakir-naik-170521055023564.html>, 2017 Retrieved: 8th August 2018.

² Alope Tikku, "Premature: Interpol Snubs India On Red Corner Notice For Zakir Naik". <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/premature-interpol-snubs-india-on-red-corner-notice-for-zakir-naik-1788665>, 2017. Retrieved: 7th August, 2018.

religion and spirituality. There is saying that goes to go say “Music is noise presented in an orderly manner. Good music creates harmony in the human soul. It relaxes the human mind. Music presented without proper notes is noise that creates stress”.¹

Yusuf’s idea on capitalizing storytelling as a method to convey the message of Islam was a good one. Listening to the ups and downs of his life and his earnest effort seeking for the spiritual enlightenment of his life can be soul uplifting to his audience. What he has gone through in life is pretty much the same with many young people in the West. As such, his stories in a way can inspire and give hope to those who are doing the wrong thing and never too late to return to the right path. Storytelling is not a new approach in communicating ideas and idealism but an old one used in religious books, by prophets, sages and great teachers for many generations. Even in modern times, storytelling is still used by teachers in the school to teach moral values and good behavior, particularly at the primary level of schooling.

Yusuf’s approach of not condemning other religion attracts many to listen to his message on Islam. The researchers feel this is a good strategy on the part of Yusuf. By nature, people block their minds the moment we condemn their culture and religious belief system and are not prepared to listen to any amount of good advice and ideas we share with them. Yusuf’s approach in sharing his ideas in a harmonious manner provides enough room for the audience to go back and ponder over his ideas, and perhaps can make them change their lifestyle. Yusuf’s down to earth approach using simple and clear language can be a plus point in his Islamic propagation. In many of his YouTube programs he looks relax and composed taking the non-confrontational approach in defending his religious beliefs. Not only to Yusuf, but to all other Muslims, this approach will work well in their effort to deliver the message of Islam. Moreover, the Prophet of Islam used such a method in facing the pagan Arabs of his time.²

Naik , on the other hand, earned his reputation as dai (preacher) with the establishment of his Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) in 1991. Due to his unique character and mastery over religious text, he has earned fame and glory not only in India but elsewhere globally, particularly in the

¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak in SlideShare (Slide No: 13). <https://www.slideshare.net/maarji/my-quotes-58836218>. Retrieved on 27th June 2019.

² Al-Qur’an 6:108.

Muslim world. His uniqueness as a *dai* was well demonstrated in his braveness to voice out the grievances of the Muslim Ummah and the truth of Islam as a religion. His mastery of the subject matter in comparative religion has given credential to him to be courageous and this has been admired by his fan group all around the world. No doubt, to many in the Indian subcontinent, he is seen as their “hero” in defending Islam. Simplicity of his language during his public forum has drawn huge crowd and has made the audience to listen to him attentively. Far from being apologetic to other faith groups, he spoke forcefully by making cross reference to many different scriptures and scientific theories. His fearlessness in speaking up his mind will be seen as a personality trait by his followers for many years to come. Besides that, his power of memory and ability to quote from different religious texts amazed many among the sundry and laity.

Besides being a preacher, Zakir Naik as a man of science, knows how to use technology in a positive way. According to him, technology can work either ways: positive or negative. It can deliver the message of Islam in the fastest way to millions around the globe. At the same time the media has a tendency to portray the negative as positive, black as white and a villain as a hero.¹ In realizing the power of the modern media has led him to establish his own ‘Peace TV’ that reaches millions globally. Positive feedbacks from his online viewers have indicated that he has used media for a good purpose and not to create discord among people of different religion. Despite some negative reports against him, his fans look up to him as an iconic figure in the Muslim world for his commitment in clarifying the many misconceptions on Islam posed by non-Muslims. Over and above, he is good at highlighting the major differences and similarities that exist among the popular religions of the world.

In spite of the many accolades given to Naik, nonetheless he is also seen as a controversial preacher to many of his opponents and non-Muslim audience. By and large, Zakir Naik’s methods of da’wah (preaching) resemble that of his teacher and mentor the Great Ahmed

¹ Rayhan Mahmud, Shihab, “What Are Your Thoughts About Zakir Naik Allegedly Inspiring/Influencing Dhaka Terror Attacks of 2016?”. <https://www.quora.com/What-are-your-thoughts-about-Zakir-Naik-allegedly-inspiring-influencing-Dhaka-terror-attacks-of-2016>. Retrieved: 7th August 2018.

Deedat.¹ Being under the tutelage of Deedat, Naik tends to imitate the way and mannerism of his “Guru”. Deedat’s militancy in oral communication can be well understood as he was living during the apartheid regime of the then South Africa. Deedat experienced verbal harassment from the missionary groups of his country as such he reacted the same way. Moreover, in South Africa it is a common norm for people to speak with a little bit of militancy. Deedat, in realizing the realities in his country were different from that of his students in their countries of origin, he usually gave the options in the methods of da’wah. There was a time; he even spoke to Naik by saying: “My son, there are two ways of fighting the battle, either with holy water or with fire and I have chosen to fight with fire. If you can fight with holy water you are most welcome, but I have chosen with fire’.² But in the case of Naik, he comes from India which is the largest democracy in the world. As a democratic and multi-religious country, Indian people generally respect one another’s religion and the masses are careful about the sensitivities when it comes to religious matters. As such, Naik’s way of preaching should be more diplomatic and persuasive towards his audience and questioners. Quite the opposite to the preceding views, sympathizers towards Naik’s missionary works in Islam claim that, people who oppose him should not deny in totality the fact that he experienced life during the time when India was under the supremacy of a secular government; a government which harboured ill feeling towards many minority communities, of which Islam is one. Later in his life, when Islam was seen as threat by the Indian secular government, Naik thought that it was his rightful duty as a preacher to defend the pristine teachings of Islam which is very far from the false accusations of the non-Muslims.³

Apart from the above arguments and counter arguments, when Naik’s method of da’wah viewed in the light of the Prophetic traditions, it has become crystal clear that it is quite the contrary to the ways of the Prophet(PBUH). During the time of the Prophet (PBUH), he employed diplomacy, persuasion, tolerance, mutual-respect, etc. towards the

¹ Muhammad Haaron, “Ahmad Deedat: the Making of a Transnational Religious Figure”, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol: 27(2), 2014, pp. 66-93. See also: Rafiq Ahmad & Haroon Idrees, “The Life and Works of Ahmad Deedat: A Muslim Scholar of Christian Bible”, *Journal of Al-Iddah*, Vol: 31, 2015, pp. 159-179.

² Muhammad Haaron, “Ahmad Deedat: the Making of a Transnational Religious Figure”, pp. 66-93.

³ Ibid., pp. 66-93.

adherents of other faith, particularly the Christians of Najran. Moreover, in his approach in propagating the religion he focused much on the similarities rather than on the differences that exist between Islam and other Abrahamic faith (Christianity and Judaism). The Qur'an on its part has set the precondition on how such debates/dialogues between Muslims and others can take place in a harmonious situation. The following verse is one example of a prerequisite under which a peaceful dialogue can take place:

Say:” O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship None but God; That we associate No partners with Him; That we erect not, From among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God.” If then they turn back, say ye:” Bear witness That we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God’s Will).”¹

Besides his dialogues with the People of the Book, the Prophet (PBUH) used to preach to the pagans of Mecca. Upon hearing him, there were some among them who used to dispute of what he preached. Under such circumstances, he had been advised to part ways with them in a peaceful manner or follow the ethical manner of agreeing to disagree. The Qur'an calls upon the Prophet (PBUH) to part ways with the non-Muslims in a peaceful manner.²

However Naik on his part has defended that his style of preaching is in harmony with that of the Prophet of Islam. Naik further argued that his ways are not very far from what the Prophet (PBUH) has done during his time when faced with the challenges posed by the non-Muslim community of his time. In a similarly vein, when Naik’s mentor Deedat was criticised, he too said that his method is none other than the Prophet’s approach.³ The researchers feel that Naik was no different from his mentor. In analysing Deedat’s and Naik’s approaches one would discover that what was done by the two was none other than the norm of the day. Moreover, at the time Naik took the platform of Islamic da’wah, it was seen as an era whereby free speech and challenging debates were a common practice in many religious organizations; be they Islamic or others. In addition to that, intellectuals and religious leaders debated and contested ideas presented by

¹ Al-Qur'an 3:64

² Al-Qur'an 109:1-6, 42:15

³ Muhammad Haaron, “Ahmad Deedat: The Making of a Transnational Religious Figure”, pp. 66-93.

their opponents. As such, to claim that Naik is extreme in his approach is not a fair judgment.

Another way of looking at Naik's passionate effort in winning converts to Islam is nothing more than a reciprocal act to the ways practiced by Christian missionary organizations worldwide that try to entice desperate and 'lost' souls of the Muslim community in war zone areas of the world by giving material and financial support. Unlike the Christian missionaries, Naik tries to win over hearts to Islam through sound reasoning and intellectual debate.

Conclusion

In comparing Yusuf Islam and Zakir's approach to Islamic da'wah, this research has shed some light that any preaching done individually or by an organization should follow the ethical principles mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In Islam, one is not encouraged to be over-zealous in his passion to convey the message of Islam. At many times, being dogmatic and forceful in preaching the religion will bring tension, sour feeling, hatred between the conveyer and the recipient of the message. Diplomacy and persuasion will be the best ways to deliver a delicate and sensitive subject like religion. For the Muslims, the Qur'an calls them only to deliver the message of Islam in ways that are good; with kind words and good manners. The Qur'an further reiterates that the duty of the Muslims is just to deliver the message, and the change of heart of the listener can only happen with the will of God. The preacher should not feel despair or get angry when his message is not well received. Moreover the preacher should not think that it is his/her brilliance that makes an individual to embrace Islam. In many places of the Qur'an, Muslims are told that guidance to the path of righteousness only come with the will of God.

Recommendations

This research has objectively analyzed Yusuf Islam and Zakir Naik's styles of da'wah (preaching). Particularly, the researchers have looked into their personality, contributions, ways of preaching and the controversies that surround them. Upon weighing out the pros and cons on both preachers, the researchers would like put forward the following recommendations:

As Yusuf has learnt through experience on how the media can manipulate and distort opinions, he should choose to avoid answering questions that are not within his domain of expertise. Generally, this piece of advice applies to all Muslims, particularly those involved in da'wah activities. Since Yusuf has learned the power of music and how

well it works in his Da'wah activities, particularly in conveying the message of Islam to the West, the researchers suggest that it will be good for him to maintain this approach.

As for Naik, in order to be more successful as a preacher, he has to employ diplomacy and persuasion in his intellectual discourse. He has to be more lenient towards his questioners during public lectures. Such an approach will be closer to the ways of the Prophet in dealing with people. Naik should avoid disgracing his questioners by asking provocative questions on how good a believer the individual is in following his/her religion. Embarrassing non-Muslims in the midst of a vast Muslim audience is not a good thing. Conversely, they should be treated with honor and dignity. He has to give equal opportunity for the questioners to articulate their ideas and not to intrude or make fun of them when they are seriously trying to explain their opinion. Naik should not pester his non-Muslim questioners for a change of faith instantaneously at public forums. He has to respect their opinions and give ample time for them to ponder over his explanations, suggestions or invitation to embrace his religion. He has to overcome his over-reactionary character, high pitch and his mentality of always wanting to win in a debate. What will be ideal for him to do is to present his case and leave it to the judgment of his audience.

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