

Globalization and Islam-Buddhist Relations in Nusantara

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And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Lo! herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge.

Qur'an 30:22

O humanity! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

Qur'an 49:13

ABSTRACT

Apart from being an economic endeavor the social dimension of globalization means accepting religious pluralism or multiculturalism by recognizing and accepting religious validity and equality between religions; it holds that religious truth is not the exclusive property of one religion but is available through the teachings of different religions

Drawing from the teachings of the Qur'an about human unity and religious diversity and also the history of Islam-Buddhism coexistence, this paper looks at the chances, challenges and opportunities for building Islam-Buddhism understanding in the age of rising Asian Islamophobia and Muslim-Buddhist conflicts in Asia.

Introduction

Islam was born in the cosmopolitan trading city of Mecca in a religiously pluralistic environment where there was the presence of different religions, races and social groups. Hence, religious pluralism is not something strange to the Qur'anic

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message when it addresses itself to all humanity. The modern age religious parlance of addressing and classifying religious views about the other or of othering the other religions is defined and found in the historic Vatican II document of *Nostra Aetate* being the “Declaration On The Relation Of The Church To Non-Christian Religions Proclaimed By His Holiness Pope Paul VI On October 28, 1965”², which was given a more detailed exposure in the famous classification of religious views along the lines of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism by both Karl Rahner (d. 1984) and also Alan Race (b. 1951).³

Islam defines and classifies religious diversities along two parallel lines of

(1) those who are Muslims – those who believe in the Qur'anic monotheism -, and

(2) the followers of other religions as *Ahl al-Kitab* – the People of the Book - i.e.

those who have received revelations before Muhammad which was initially applied to the Jews and Christians of Arabia and was later, with the spread of Islam, extended to include the Hindus, Buddhists, etc.

In fact, the essential Qur'anic view of seeing other religions as belonging to the category of *Ahl al-Kitab*, which is pluralistic in its view, has been abandoned and some Muslims clerics and religious bodies have gone to the extent of banning the adoption of the term religious pluralism which parallels along with that of *Ahl al-Kitab*. The Qur'anic usage of the *Ahl al-Kitab* has been substantially abandoned from everyday common Muslim religious language.

² “Nostra Aetate,” accessed February 28, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

³ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

Islamic theology of religions aims at facing the ongoing crises in the region and global challenges in a multi-dimensional manner, its demands going beyond rhetoric and repetitions. For, at stake, is the universal message of Islam which is inter-cultural and interreligious in orientation, and is not restricted to the politics of particular times and situations. The objective of this undertaking is to build and promote friendly and functional relations between Islam and different religions.

The Quran does not condemn other religions nor their adherents; rather, it calls for the building of religious humanism for the benefit of peaceful inter-human relations and societies. The Qur'an's support for religious freedom within the house of Islam and the world at large is conveyed in the following verse.

those who have been driven from their homelands without right for no other reason than their saying, "Our Sustainer is God!" For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques - in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled - would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succor him who succors His cause: for, verily, God is most powerful, almighty. (Qur'an 22:40)

Revisiting and reviving this teaching of the Qur'anic attitude in contemporary times of religious conflicts would, hopefully, contributive towards starting a discourse and dialogue of religions within the Muslim community by removing the spread of the plague of emerging insularism and negative attitudes towards other religious communities. Tendencies which only hurt the Muslims themselves and creates Islamophobias of different times among non-Muslims.⁴

⁴ Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Three Faces of the Rohingya Crisis: Religious Nationalism, Asian Islamophobia, and Delegitimizing Citizenship". *Studia Islamika*, [S.l.], v. 25, n. 3, 2018, p. 503-542, dec. 2018. ISSN 2355-6145. Available at: <<http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika/article/view/8038>>. Date accessed: 24 feb. 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i3.8038>.

The Qur'an views religious diversity as natural to human life, thought and society. Religious diversity serves as the means for competition to do good between religious communities:

Unto every community have We appointed [different] ways of worship, which they ought to observe. Hence, [O believer,] do not let those [who follow ways other than thine] draw thee into disputes on this score, but summon [them all] unto thy Sustainer: for, behold, thou art indeed on the right way. And if they [try to] argue with thee, say [only]: "God knows best what you are doing." [For, indeed,] God will judge between you [all] on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which you were wont to differ.
(Qur'an 22:67-69)

Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.
(Qur'an 5:48)

In light of the fact that the Qur'an employs the term Muslim to mean a believer in Transcendent or Ultimate Reality, as mentioned above, and does not refer to an ethnic Muslim community, the Qur'an holds the following principles of religious multiculturalism.

1) Everyone who believes in Ultimate Reality and does good is guaranteed salvation. This is mentioned in the following two verses of the Qur'an.

Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians - all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds - shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (Qur'an 2:62)

For, verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians - all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds - no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (Qur'an 5:69)

The above mentioned twice occurring verse in the Qur'an sets down a fundamental principle teaching of Islam that salvation/liberation/enlightenment is conditional upon three beliefs: belief in God/Ulimate Reality, belief in the Day of Judgment, and the performance of good deeds and righteous action in life.

2) Allah and other definitions of Ultimate Reality are identical.

This Qur'anic verse shows that God, or Allah, and Ultimate Reality or the Transcendent are identical:

We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: or our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves.
(Qur'an 29:46)

3) Diversity of religions is a part of God's plan and will last as long as the world lasts.

Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.
(Qur'an 5:48)

Muhammad Asad comments on the above verse as follows, "Thus, the Qur'an impresses upon all who believe in God - Muslims and non-Muslims alike - that the differences in their religious practices should make them "vie with one another in doing good works" rather than lose themselves in mutual hostility."⁵

4) Muslims must be tolerant and reverential toward other religions.

In keeping with the spirit of religious pluralism, the Qur'an categorically declares, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) This means nobody is to be forced

⁵ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran*, p. 154, n. 68.

to believe or convert to Islam and everyone is free to leave Islam. Everyone is free to believe or disbelieve in Islam, “Then whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve” (Qur’an 18:29). Prophet Muhammad did not only talk about no compulsion in religion but also practiced it as seen from below mentioned events.

Many commentators cite some events in which the Prophet himself implemented the requirements of verse 2:256 and prohibited his companions from compelling people to accept Islam. For instance, Tabari mentions that when the two Jewish tribes of Qaynuqa and Nadir were expelled from Medina, they had in their charge children of the Ansar (Medinan Muslims) who had been placed with Jewish families. The biological parents asked the Prophet’s permission to take their children back and raise them as Muslims, but the Prophet said, ‘There is no compulsion in religion.’ Tabari mentions another event which indicates how this verse worked in practice. A Muslim named Al-Hussayn had two sons, who having been influenced by Christian merchants, converted to Christianity and left Medina to go to Syria with these missionary merchants. Al-Hussayn pleaded with the Prophet to pursue the convoy and bring his sons back to Islam. But the Prophet once again said, ‘There is no compulsion in religion’, that is let them follow the religion of their choice, even though it is not Islam.⁶

Furthermore, Muslims and everyone is free to choose and practice their religions, “To you your religion and for me mine” (Qur’an 109:6). Diversity of language, race, ethnicity, color are to be honored and respected for the purpose behind it is to build human cooperation and respect for pluralism, which is a natural phenomena. The Qur’an remarks:

O human beings! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware.
(Qur’an 49:13)

⁶ Quoted in Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1994) p. 191.

Muslims are recommended to be cordial toward non-Muslims. Muslims should not be judgmental nor condemnatory of non-Muslims; read (Qur'an 6:52) and (Qur'an 42:15) cited earlier.

5) Islam is not a new religion but a re-confirmation of truth revealed before. Muslims believe in all prophets without making any distinction between them.

Islam's attitude of religious pluralism is reflected in the Qur'an being a reconfirmation of the message brought by previous prophets.

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it ... For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.

The apostle, and the believers with him, believe in what has been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer: they all believe in God, and His angels, and His revelations, and His apostles, making no distinction between any of His apostles; and they say: We have heard, and we pay heed. Grant us Thy forgiveness, O our Sustainer, for with Thee is all journeys' end! (Qur'an 2:285)

And it is the fundamental belief of the Muslims that though Muhammad is the last of a series of prophets, Muslims believe in all prophets without making any distinction between them:

Say: "We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed by their Sustainer unto Moses and Jesus and all the [other] prophets: we make no distinction between any of them. And unto Him do we surrender ourselves." (Qur'an 3:84)

Behold, We have inspired thee [O Prophet] just as We inspired Noah and all the prophets after him - as We inspired Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, including Jesus and Job, and Jonah, and Aaron, and Solomon; and as We vouchsafed unto David a book of divine wisdom. (Qur'an 4:163)

Above Qur’anic references and comments illustrate that contemporary Muslims in their efforts to brand the followers of other religions as *kafirs* – unbelievers, infidels - have very much deviated from the tolerant and pluralistic spirit of their own scripture. More about this below.

Modern Age Globalization and the Challenge of Religions

The roots of modern age globalization are rooted in the 2 dominant economic theories of:

- 1 Communism as described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their essay *The Communist Manifesto*, a booklet destined to become a kind of secular “sacred text” to millions, which talks of:
2. The capitalist economic system of Adam Smith.

21st Century Globalization or Globalization Now

Information Technology – iPhone and Android in which the whole world including China – as form of communist capitalist is involved.

- a high level of interconnectivity, in which information, goods, and services flow increasingly freely;
- an interdependence that is planetary in scope, with few, quickly vanishing independent localities;
- a contraction of social space, such that the whole planet is becoming “a new locality” and individuals in it “disembedded cosmopolitans”;[12](#)
- Market based economy
- A speeding up of time, with technological and cultural innovations coming at us at an accelerating pace and pushing centuries-long traditions out of existence;

- A widespread consciousness of the world as a single whole; we are keenly aware of our unity but take the plurality of cultures, religions, ethnic groups, races, and the like as a given.
- Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives
- Destruction of Ecology – Biodiversity
- COVID19 Pandemic

The current form of globalization, is multifaceted, it has an economic, political, technological and material dimensions and it is also tied to interreligious dialogue and cultural reproduction.

Implication of Globalization on World Religions - Buddhism and Islam in Southeast Asia

After his enlightenment the Buddha advised his 61 disciple monks to go out to the world with the instruction: “Go ye now, O Bhikkhus, and wander, for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Preach, O Bhikkhus, the doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, glorious at the end, in the spirit and in the letter.”⁷

Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in his last sermon during the Hajj told the first Muslims:

⁷ Vinaya-Pitaka, Mahāvagga, I.11.1, in *Vinaya Texts*, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, vol. 13 of *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. F. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1881), 112–13.

“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety (*taqwa*) and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves..

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people.”⁸

Hence, both Islam and Buddhism spread to the Nusantara – Buddhism from the 7th century onwards becoming the established religion by the 11th century of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Indo-Malay archipelago in the form of Siva Buddhism.

Followed by the spread of Islam first from India and China from the 12th century onwards in the maritime Southeast Asia or Nusantara and getting firmly established here by the 15th century.

Today, the Nusantara is the only part of the world where Islam and Buddhism exist as to major religions of the region at the ratio of 42% Muslims and 40% Buddhist.

Buddha and Muhammad - The Prophetic Dimension – Liberators of Humanity from Oppression

Both Islam and Buddhism are world religions. From a Muslim perspective of history of religions, God has since time immemorial sent prophets to every nation, only

⁸ See Al-Bukhari, Hadith 1623, 1626, 6361) Sahih of Imam Muslim also refers to this sermon in Hadith number 98. Imam al-Tirmidhi has mentioned this sermon in Hadith nos. 1628, 2046, 2085. Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal has given us the longest and perhaps the most complete version of this sermon in his Masnud, Hadith no. 19774.

some of which are mentioned by names in the Qur'an. The Qur'an mentions 25 prophets including Muhammad, all of them belong to Semitic religion. It was impossible for the Qur'an to mention all the world prophets; for if it did that, it would not be able to convey its message to the Arabs who were its main addressee, and who at that time did not know much about other religions especially those in Asia and Africa. Furthermore, the Qur'an is a book of revelation and not a dictionary of religions.

The Qur'an comments on the universality of the institution of prophethood in the following way:

And indeed, [O Muhammad], We have sent forth apostles before your time; some of them We have mentioned to thee, and some of them We have not mentioned to thee. (Qur'an 40: 78. See also Qur'an 4: 164)

And never have We sent forth any apostle otherwise than [with a message] in own people's tongue . . . (Qur'an 14:4)

Hence, Islam's position toward other religions is that of religious pluralism, recognizing the existence of different religions including Buddhism, as another verse quoted earlier clearly shows (Qur'an 5:48).

The religious experience of *nirvana* – enlightenment - by Buddha, and *wahy* – revelation - by Muhammad are sources of the essential message of moderation in religion.

The perfection of Buddha and Muhammad is connected to their achievements as enlightened prophets who overcame the impediments of religious ignorance. In the case of Buddha, this ignorance is rooted in the cycle of *samsara* – rebirth due to attachment as the cause of *dukkha* – suffering. In the case of Muhammad, it lies in the illusions of *kufir* – human rebelliousness or human rejection/denial of the existence of God - and *shirk* – polytheism or attribution of divine qualities to aught but God - as the cause of *khusr*, or

loss and disgrace.⁹ Interestingly, both Buddha and Muhammad from an Islamic point of view were neither *mushriks*, namely polytheists, nor *kafir*, namely those who associate other beings with God; they both rejected the petty gods of their respective communities.

Muslim Scholars of Comparative Religion – References to Buddhism

Classical Muslim scholar of comparative religion, al-Shahrastani (1086-1153 CE), in the section on *Ara' al-hind* (The Views of the Indians) of his magnum opus *Kitab al-Milal wan-Nihal* (The Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects),¹⁰ pays high regard to Buddhism and its richness in spirituality. This was done by identifying Buddha with the Qur'anic figure of *al-Khidr*, as a seeker of enlightenment.¹¹

More recently, the late scholar Muhammad Hamidullah observes that in line with the Qur'anic view of prophethood, Buddha can be regarded as one among the previous prophets not clearly mentioned in the Qur'an. According to Hamidullah, the symbolic mention of the fig tree in Chapter 95, Verse 1 of the Qur'an alludes to the prophethood of the Buddha. He concludes that since Buddha attained *Nirvana*—enlightenment - under a wild fig (*figus religiosa*) tree, and as that fig tree does not figure prominently in the life of any of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, hence, the Qur'anic verse refers to Gautama Buddha.¹²

⁹ Qur'an 103 : 1-3.

¹⁰ Muhammad Al-Shahrastani, *The Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, ed. William Cureton (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press LLC, 2002).

¹¹ Qur'an 18 : 64. See also Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions*, (The Hague: Mouton), 1976, pp. 113–14.

¹² Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muhammad Rasulullah*, (Hyderabad: Habib & Co), 1974, pp. 27, 107. See also David Scott, "Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons", *NUMEN*, Vol. 42, 1995, pp. 141–55.

By the fig and the olive,
 By Mount Sinai,
 And by this land made safe;
 Surely We created man of the best stature
 Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low,
 Save those who believe and do good works, and theirs is a reward
 unfailing.
 So who henceforth will give the lie to thee about the judgment?
 Is not Allah the most conclusive of all judges? (Qur'an 95: 1–8)

What further facilitates this Islamic interpretation is the status of Buddha. There is a lot of parallel between the Qur'anic concept of *risalah/nubuwwa*, or *messengerhip* /prophethood history of prophets (named and unnamed), and the Buddhist concept of "Buddha." Buddha is not a name, it is a designation like *nabi* or *rasul* – prophet. Buddhas appear over time to teach religion and the path to *nirvana* – enlightenment/salvation. Buddhist sources mention 27 Buddhas that have appeared over a period of 5,000 years.¹³

Buddha's enlightenment experience of *Nirvana* and Muhammad's experience of *wahy*/revelation were liberative experiences freeing both founders of religions from the shackles of ignorance and social bondages. Both these prophets sought answers to the questions about human predicament. What is to be human? Why is there anguish, suffering and injustice? The Buddha called it *dukkha*/suffering, the Qur'an calls it *kabad*/affliction. The parallel between the teachings of Buddha and Muhammad can be seen in the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths and the Qur'anic *surah* - chapter titled *Balad*/ City (Qur'an 90), respectively:

1. Life means *dukkha* - suffering.
2. The origin of suffering is attachment.
3. The cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. The (eight fold) path to the cessation of suffering. (The Four Noble Truths)

¹³ Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha - The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994) pp. 87-119. See also Jamshed Fozdar, *The God of Buddha* (New York: Asia Publishing House, Inc. 1973) p. 13.

NAY! I call to witness this land –
 this land in which thou art free to dwell -
 and [I call to witness] parent and offspring:
 Verily, We have created man into [a life of] *kabad* - pain, toil and trial.
 (Quran 90: 1-4)

I see analogical compatibility between the Qur'anic usage of the word *kabad* meaning "pain," "distress," "hardship," "toil" and "trial" and the Buddhist religious term *dukkha*, "suffering", and find it useful in explaining the Islamic concept of the meaning of life, its struggles and goal.

Through *Nirvana*, enlightenment, Buddha was liberated from the fetters of suffering (*dukkha*) and entered a state of relief, peace, calmness and rest. He was freed from the state of confusion, turmoil, anguish and distress and entered the state of bliss and detachment. Similarly, Muhammad's experience of the *wahy*, revelation, liberated him from the suffering caused by religious ignorance in his social milieu represented by the presence of *shirk* (polytheism, attribution of divine qualities to aught but God) and *kufr* (rejection/denial of the existence of One Unseen God), and led him into submission to God. Thus the Buddha through *Nirvana* entered the state of bliss, marking his freedom from suffering and rebirth, and Muhammad through the experience of *wahy* entered the state of *salaam* – peace, tranquility. Both became founders of two world religions which carry the message of human freedom and liberation. Buddha realized the state of being *arahant*, the state of enlightened human being, and Muhammad the state of being *rasul* – the messenger of God. Both are prophets from the perspective of Islamic history of religions, and each of them defeated the antagonistic forces or evil called *Mara* in Buddhism and *Shaytan* in Islam. This is described in the Buddhist narrative of the

Buddha's struggle with the forces of *Mara* during the process of his enlightenment as contained in the Buddhist text of *Sutta Nipata* (425-449).¹⁴ Similarly, in Islam, a *hadith* tradition of the prophet Muhammad remarks, “*aslama shaytani*” – my *shaytan* has become a Muslim/ believer, meaning that the prophet has trained and turned his lower faculties and instincts of lust, greed, false views, delusion and illusion into the service and obedience of God. The prophet has become *al-insan al-kamil* – the perfect man to which the *shaytan* prostrates or bows his will.¹⁵

Hence, through *nirvana* the Buddha realized his *Buddha-dhatu* – Buddha nature or the true pure nature and emptiness of every being; the original nature present in all beings which when realized leads to enlightenment, and the prophet Muhammad the state of *al-insan al-kamil* – the perfect human being. Both these prophets realized their enlightened human status in both religious and social terms in their respective societies.

The Buddha obtained *nirvana* from within himself on the basis of self-effort while seeking an answer to the question of *dukkha*/human suffering and salvation, and Muhammad obtained *wahy*/revelation from outside himself while seeking to discern the meaning of being *insan*/human, in terms of creation, the meaning of life and its end goal.

Islam Nusantara and Globalization

In the age of globalization, the Nusantara Muslims are facing great challenges in the areas of education, health, human resources development. On the one hand is the development of it HRD and on the other hand the need to foster and build Muslim-Buddhist understanding.

¹⁴ *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s. v. “Mara.”

¹⁵ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 2 edition. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011) pp. 113, 196.

We live in the age of market driven globalization which has come with the challenges to attain food security, ecological preservation and now COVID19. The market forces are unable to address these challenges in fact the whole world has come to a halt and it is forcing us to re-think the relation between religion, globalization and sustainability. It is challenging even the UN that there is a need to rethink how to attain the SDG goals in a new and more humane way than in the past.

So that we again start on the journey of human flourishing in contemporary new normal times of globalization along with religions.¹⁶ While globalization has brought about benefits its of easy connectivity, integration of global economy, use of advanced technology and knit the diversity of religions and cultures into a closer contact and also united and divided different countries under the influence of big powers such as USA and China into their own zones of military and economic influence. Globalization is has both positive and negative influences for sustainability of humanity and ecology. There is also increase of different types of violence in the forms of personal domestic violence and also at the levels of ethnic, religious, regional and international conflicts, violence and terrorism. In other words, it has made attaining personal, social, international peace and happiness a challenge facing all countries. There is also the rise of economic inequality between countries and also within countries as the two main ideologies of socialism and capitalism continue to compete. This has also affected the role Islam and Muslims can play in addressing the questions of self reliance, sustainability and security in a variety of ways.

¹⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*, Reprint edition. (Yale University Press, 2017).

Amidst this situation of excessive materialism and insatiability which misleads both the Muslims and humanity into forgetting Allah and the transcendence, the Quranic narrative of the two owners of garden as described in Surah Al-Kahf (ال كهف) offers an important lesson about how to address the challenge of materialism which can lead us to forget Allah and also how sustain ourselves and humanity at large amidst global crisis which is already here.

Surah Al-Kahf (ال كهف) reminds us:

1. When you entered your garden why did you not say: 'It is as Allah pleased, no one has power except Allah!' (18:39)
2. it was then that he realized that the real protection comes only from Allah. His is the best reward and His is the best requital.(18:44)

“In the globalized world of today, an “undue emphasis on material development alone” is suffocating love and compassion. Bereft of altruism, we aren’t merely incapable of rescuing globalization from its own dangerous shadows; more troublingly, we are betraying our very humanity ...Global redesign efforts shouldn’t be mainly about tinkering with globalization’s mechanisms so as to increase its output in global health, wealth, longevity, and aggregate creativity; they should be primarily concerned with curbing restless and competitive acquisitiveness and generating compassionate generosity in each person’s heart.”¹⁷

We have to realize that, “A world religion has a single truth for the whole of humanity, but there are multiple such religions. The consequence is competing visions as to how all should live in a single world ... To shape globalization with a view toward the global common good, religions will have to learn how to advocate universalistic visions in a pluralistic world without fomenting violence.

The second tendency ... Religions can shape globalization only if they resist being made its mere instruments, remain true to their universal visions of flourishing, and learn how to promote their competing visions in a constructive way.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸ Ibid., 58.

Islam and Multiculturalism in Nusantara

The Muslim individuals who brought Islam first to Indonesia and then Malaysia and southern Thailand in the 12th -15th centuries were the Sufi mystics. In religious terms, it was a meeting between the Hindu views of *moksha* – Liberation - through the notion of monism, the Buddhist notion of *nirvana* – enlightenment - through the realization of *sunyata* – Emptiness - and the Islamic concept of *fana'* – passing away of one's identity through its mergence in Universal being - as presented in monotheistic pantheism of the Sufis. Gradually, there emerged a hybrid culture, particularly in Java and in other parts of Southeast Asia, resulting in an Islam that was mystical, fluid and soft, and a spiritualism that is peculiar to the region.¹⁹ Today, Islam coexists with Hinduism and Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, the state of this relationship is diverse in the context of the regional and local histories of the various countries in these region. And both of them are facing the challenges of materialist globalization, ecological destruction, Pandemic of COVID19 and religious extremism.

These challenges demand that Nusantara Muslim and Buddhist pursue the path of Asian format of multiculturalism.

Two Types of Multiculturalisms

a) European

The post-colonial and the current globalizing eras marked by territorial wars, rise of ethno-nationalisms which of recent have transmuted into volatile religious nationalism

¹⁹ Alijah Gordon, *The Propagation of Islam in the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 2001). Anthony Shih, "The Roots and Societal Impact of Islam in Southeast Asia" *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* Spring 2002, Vol 2, p. 114.

conflicts that employ religions as political ideologies for “othering” and discriminating those who do not belong to the majority ethno-religious groups. This political ideologizing of religions diverges from their original objective to universally alleviate the suffering of humanity in different ways around the world. This new development is one of the side effects of the modern age’s materialist epistemology and ontology of violence threatening multicultural living and peace around the world. (Juergensmeyer, 1993, 2017; Milbank, 2006)

The global rise of religious nationalists is the new stage in the conflict between the religious fundamentalists and the secularists which began with the 1960’s European religious crisis which has now become global. (Juergensmeyer, 1993; McLeod, 2010) This phenomena has been described as the failure of multiculturalism, it is threatening the survival of the religious minorities around the world by raising an unfounded fear of the small numbers and triggering revengeful geography of anger. (Appadurai, 2006) It is an outcome of the modern age expelling of religion from the public sphere and its vengeful return led by the religious fanatics who engage in the politics of religious populism. (Fukuyama, 2018; Kimball, 2008)

The post-colonial era also saw the migration of Asian and African labor force to the West as “guest workers” who would one day eventually return to their home countries. The arrival of the guest workers changed the profile of the European nations which were hitherto mono-racial, mono-cultural and mono-religious, it impacted the social, cultural and religious makeup of the European and American demographic profiles and their socio-cultural-religious landscape. It raised the challenge of how to assimilate and integrate the guests into European and American lands. But the guest

workers did not return to their home countries and a new non-European generations of Asians and Africans were born in the West who practiced non-Christian religions of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Confucianism and Africa, etc.

Furthermore, the Cold War and the post-Cold War eras along with the yet unresolved wars in the Middle East, the rise of communistically-capitalist China and the rise of religious extremists in the Middle East, Africa and Asia put further multicultural pressures and challenges to the Western nations. It led to the emergence of five types of responses, one, the liberal multiculturalists; two, the rightist nationalists opposed to multiculturalism; three, the religious conservatives who opposed the presence of non-Christian religions and their symbolisms in the public sphere; four, the religious accommodationists who support interfaith coexistence and five, the ultra-secularist who dislike presence of religions in the public sphere. (Asad, 2003; Jürgen Habermas, 2004; Jürgen Habermas, 2008; Stepan, 2000; Taylor, 2018)

The end of the Cold War along with the collapse of communism and the beginning of the new current wars in the Middle East such as the two Iraq wars of 1990 and 2003; the rise of the al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the ISIS, the collapse of the Arab Spring the ongoing wars in Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan along with the anti-Tamil separatist war in Sri Lanka and Africa involving regional and global powers have caused political and economic havoc causing new massive migrations of the war refugees and the displaced people to the West.(Haass, 2010) Has raised the “Muslim Question” (Norton, 2013) leading to present rise of the anti-migration European ultra-nationalists and anti-Semitism in the UK, Hungary, Poland, Austria and Brazil. (Davies, 2018; Dodd & agencies, 2018; “Jair Bolsonaro threatens us all - The Boston Globe,” 2018) These

developments along with the fast rise of materialist communist turned materialist capitalist China raises important challenges to multiculturalism – the politics of recognition which will accord both respect for human dignity, non-discrimination and respect of human rights around the world. (Grassley, 2018; ““We can reach you wherever you are,”” 2018)

In the aftermath of the above critical developments for the future of Europe, there have emerged different views about multiculturalism in the West. Some have proclaimed its death while others propose development of policies that will foster multicultural or intercultural citizenship social renewal, through regulation and limits of accommodating national minorities. (“Chancellor Merkel says German multiculturalism has ‘utterly failed,’” 2010; Connolly, 2010; Rattansi, 2007, p. 136)

The European debate about multiculturalism between its supporters and detractors continues on unresolved. (Kymlicka, 1995; Kymlicka & Opalski, 2002; Malik, 2014; Modood, 2007; Murphy, 2012; Parekh, 2006; Taylor et al., 1994)

b) Asia

Unlike Europe, the debate about multiculturalism in Asia revolves around the question of how can postcolonial states rife with ethno-nationalist debates and conflicts centered around the questions of language, ethnicity and religious identities can become cohesive multicultural nations. Nearly, all Asian countries are embroiled in conflicts centered around invented politico-ethnic identities such as the Sunni-Shia sectarianism in the Middle East; the rise of Hindu and Buddhists ethnoreligious nationalists in India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka (Grant, 2010; Jerryson & Juergensmeyer, 2010; Juergensmeyer, Kitts, & Jerryson, 2015; Nasr, 2016; Sharma, 2015, 2015; Tharoor, 2018); (Yusuf, 2017)

The challenge of multiculturalism in Asia has a different face it faces the task of accommodating ethno-cultural-religious differences in post-colonial countries in states in face of disrespecting constitutions which makes the minorities exposed to violence.

To establish models of democracies which recognize multicultural differences rooted in the diversity of languages, ethnicities and religions amidst rising religio-political nationalists calling for the dismantling of the parliamentary systems which in their view benefit the minorities more than the majorities. (Yusuf, Can Islam and Buddhism coexist peacefully in SE Asia?, 2014); (Yusuf, Rising fundamentalism threatens culture of tolerance, 2015); (Hefner, 2001)

The globalizing age is an age of crisis of identity marked by increasing xenophobias, ethnoreligious exclusivisms, conflicts and wars challenging the building of a multicultural world. This development is placing constraints on respecting of basic human freedoms and accepting diversity of peoples and values as natural facts and not a threats.

The recent rise of religious fundamentalisms coupled with nationalisms in the form of religious exclusivism in Southeast Asia is a formidable challenge facing the construction of a cohesive ASEAN Socio-Cultural community which is ethnically diverse, multilingual and multi-religious which will, “lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented, people-centred, environmentally friendly, and geared towards the promotion of sustainable development to face new and emerging challenges in ASEAN.” (“ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025,” 2016)

The hitherto Asian cultural coexistence often cited as its hallmark is under tremendous pressures for survival amidst the growth and spread of unfounded intercultural biases, prejudices propagandized through cultural ignorance and misinformation. It raises urgent concerns of national security and for sustaining peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

Firstly, this paper has shown that globalization has 2 modes capitalist and communist both of which are based in the philosophy of materialism. While it has led to the improvement in the areas of economic, political and cultural connectivity, advancement of technology, etc. It has also disadvantages such as creating greater inequality causing unemployment, migration, wars like in the Middle East in Yemen, Palestine, Syria, the expulsion of the Rohingya in Myanmar and Uighur in China causing refugee exodus – today the Muslims constitute the largest group of refugees and war migrants around the world, it has also caused ecological destruction and rise of COVID19 pandemic which has brought the world to halt.

Globalization also has removed the role of religion from the public sphere which cannot be accepted as a universal model for many non-Christian and non-Western countries are not secular but semi-secular in orientation. Hence, religion and ethics cannot be removed from its role in societal matters and contemporary reform.

Hopefully, the current worldview state of world wide pandemic and economic slow down will hopefully make humanity rethinking about how to reform its ways about how to sustain itself in the new post-COVID phase of global age.

Secondly, it also calls for the monotheistic and non-theistic religions to embark on the part of moderation in religion. Their essential messages to humanity is to avoid extremism of all sorts in order to build mature human beings and peaceful societies; this is the ideal. Hence, reviving the message of the middle path of Buddha or the middle nation of the Qur'an is an urgent task, especially today when extremism of religious nationalists and fundamentalists are hijacking religions for violence. Violence and killing has no religion. Islam is a religion of *wassatiyah*, of middle position between religious conservatism and extremism.²⁰

And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you.

Qur'an 2:143

The Qur'anic concept of "a middle nation" tells the Muslims to be worthy of being "heir to ancient and universal truths, and to principles of social and human stability (often betrayed but never forgotten) of which our chaotic world has a desperate need; a nation which witnesses to a hope that transcends the dead ends against which the contemporary world is battering itself to death."²¹

Buddhism's notion of *Majjhima-Patipada*, middle way, and Islam's notion of *Ummatan Wassatan*, middle nation, both emphasizing moderation offer strong foundations of further cooperation between the two religious communities. The goal of building peaceful relations between the peoples of religions is an urgent need of the

²⁰ Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Dialogue Between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts *Ummatan Wasatan* (The Middle Nation) and *Majjhima-Patipada* (The Middle Way)." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2009, pp. 367–394.

²¹ Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and The Destiny of Man* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985) p. 26.

contemporary global age, otherwise immoderate views will only create animosity, havoc and conflict. Hence, adopting of multiculturalism based on the principle of mutual respect for all religions and cultural and peaceful coexistence are the need of the times. It is time to revive the Islamic values of:

- Respect for human dignity and respect for all religions and their followers following the model of Mithaq al Madina – the Constitution of Madina and the subsequent Muslim history. Such as the al-Andalus – the model of *La Convivencia* – Coexistence between Muslims, Christians and Jews as a model of diversity and unity in humane framework, can be adopted in the Nusantara where Islam and Asian religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism and different cultures have been coexisting for centuries.

This is to be revived as a model for sustainable future in the Nusantara.

- Promotion of Knowledge
- Preserving and sustaining the values of equality, freedom, human rights, justice, and altruism. The principles of a new world are embedded in the pluralistic vision of Islam and were embodied in the prototype of an Islamic society existing during the time of the Prophet Muhammad.
- There is no conflict between Islam and multiculturalism based in the Qur'an principle of religious inclusivism as a great resource for building of understanding between Islam and Buddhism.
- The long history mutual coexistence between Islam-Buddhism relations in Southeast Asia has many positive aspects but currently there is the rise of Asian Islamophobia in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and in the case of southern

Thailand causing the rise of Asian Islamophobia which causing conflict based on mutual ignorance and misunderstanding separating the followers of the two religions. It is affecting the Muslim minorities in Buddhist majority countries and Buddhist minorities in Muslim majority countries. The causes for which do not lie in the religions of Islam and Buddhism but in the rise of the Buddhist and Muslim religious nationalists cause conflict and terrorism as seen in in the Theravada majority countries of Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand against their Muslim minorities and also in the Muslim majority countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei where the Buddhist minorities are feeling vulnerable to the religio-nationalist threats of discrimination and intolerance.²²

- There is the need to build Islam-Buddhism understanding through deeper understanding of the parallels and differences between them. This can help building creating peaceful understanding and cordial relations between the two main religions of Southeast Asia.
- Muslims and Buddhists in Asia should abandon the exclusivist and narrow interpretation of the universal message of the Qur'an and Buddhism. They should opt for a multicultural understanding of the teachings of their religions,

²² John Clifford Holt, *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities: Religious Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Mahinda Deegalle, ed., *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, (Routledge, 2006); Neil DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka* (East-West Center Washington, 2007); Jean A. Berlie, *The Burmanization of Myanmar's Muslims* (Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Co Ltd, 2008); Melissa Crouch, ed., *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, 1 edition. (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2016); Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Three Faces of the Rohingya Crisis: Religious Nationalism, Asian Islamophobia, and Delegitimizing Citizenship." *Studia Islamika*, [S.l.], v. 25, n. 3, p. 503-542, Dec. 2018; Azeem Ibrahim, *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, (London: Hurst, 2016).

by focusing on building civil society and democratic institutions. Such a step has to be initiated both from the state houses to the streets. The contemporary age demands of the Muslims and Buddhist to rethink their views and attitude towards other religions. The way of the future is that of multiculturalism.

“Verily, God does not change the condition of a people unless they change it themselves”

(Qur'an 13:11)

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