

The Strategies and Practices of Sheikh Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi in the Pursuit of Unity in Diversity and Harmony: The Global Viewpoint

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ABSTRACT

The Muslims of Bangladesh are separated into diverse religious, political, and social groups. Several scholars tried to unite Muslims. One of the most significant Islamic intellectuals of Bangladesh, Sheikh Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi, proposed a paradigm of religious harmony to unite the Bangladeshi people and global nations. According to him, religious harmony with the doctrine of Ittihad Ma'al al-Ikhtelaf (Unity in Diversity) is the only key answer to the current disunity at the national, international, and global levels. This study examines his concept and his role in the society and politics of Bangladesh by textual analysis of primary and secondary data. After analyzing religious harmony itself, we deliver a brief biography of Sheikh Azizur Rahman, presenting his contribution to both Sharia and Sufi education, and their effects on his vision. The study then emphasizes his thoughts on four steps of religious harmony and analyses in light of current social realities in Bangladesh and the Muslim world. This paper concludes that Sheikh Nesarabadi's thought and theory on religious harmony depend upon three foundations: common good interest, moderation, mutual respect, and the Tawhidic model. These contain the structure for religious harmony of Muslim unity whose implementation by Muslims can achieve the command of Allah to empower the Ummah to continue a leading role in the world as a Khalifah of Allah SWT almighty.

Keywords: *Sheikh Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi, Unity and Diversity, Harmony, Muslims, Bangladesh, Sharia, Sufi,*

INTRODUCTION

“Unity in diversity” is a linguistic combination of two antonyms (Amin and Khan 2019): *unitas* (“unity, oneness”) and *varietas* (“variety, variousness”). It is an idea of “unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation”, that transfers focus from unity based on a simple tolerance of political, religious, linguistic, social, physical, ideological, cultural, and psychological differences, to a more complex unity grounded on an understanding that diversity improves human interactions. The primordial philosophical ideas that underpin this concept date back to early Western and Eastern philosophies, including Taoism c. 400-500 B.C. In pre-modern Western society, it has been in an imbedded form in certain organic ideas of the cosmos established in the nations of early Greece and Rome.

“Unity in diversity” has practical implications in many fields, including politics, religion, cosmology, philosophy, and ecology (Keller and Ortega-Aponte 2015). It is used as a common motto or slogan by diverse political parties and religions as an expression of harmony and unity between different persons or societies. It posits that diversity has its own goals for humankind relating to dissimilar things, ways, thoughts, and experiences, which create verve in lived experience, avoiding monotonous ways of thinking and living, and repetitive expressions and approaches.

Harmony is vital in confirming solidarity and unity among different-religious believers. Living in a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere is essential when the society comprises varied religious supporters (Zulkefli, Endut et al. 2018). In other words, religious life in a country is connected to four kinds of activities (Kharlie and Kubis 2020): understanding, appreciation, service, and practice of religious teachings. The role of religious organizations is in cultivating the understanding and appreciation of religious communities and their appreciation and manifestation of their religious ideals. Religion seeks to imbue life with moral, ethical, and divine meanings for humanity, communities, and nations. Religious education seeks to foster and inculcate related values, via religious institutes and government. The government role relates to guidelines, assistance, and security, in order to progress the excellence of religious harmony for all modules of the nation. Fayzul (2019) explained that religious harmony by unity in diversity determines the state of “inseparableness”, which establishes togetherness among fundamentally different ingredients in diversity. Huq (2019) noted that religious harmony, by unity in diversity, is an idea theorizing that all ethnic, national, religious, community, and individual differences are not the central reasons of conflict; rather these differences redirect the affinity and productivity of the combined cultures that embrace a community, from the local to international stages.

According to Islam, unity is a relationship essential for the establishment of ties amongst believers, who trust in the oneness of Allah, in the messenger of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and in the Quran. The Quran undoubtedly declares that all of mankind are equal on some grounds. Firstly, all human beings are the servants of Allah, as in Surah Fussilat (41:53), where Allah says: “We will show them our signs in the horizons and within themselves”. Allama Ibn Kathir, interpreting this verse, states that “within themselves” means what the mankind is made of, what is inside and outside of them, and it may also refer to their bodily reality. As the utmost signs of

Allah, humans are to be united in one object as His servants, worshipping Him alone, and humans are created in the unity of humanity, from a single pair, as the Holy Quran (4:1) enjoins: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women". This verse evidently shows that the source of the human being is one man and woman (i.e. one soul), separated into the panoply of human types and societies exhibiting in their inherent diversity their fundamental unity as members of the same species – the union of mankind.

The Quran clearly describes diversity as a beautiful blessing from Allah (SWT) (Ali 2006): "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (49:13).

Nursi (2017) (p.115, Khutb-e-Shamela, Dhaka: Liberty Publication), noted that religious harmony with unity in diversity is also a political point promoting freedom of multicultural society. Neo (2019) considered that states have accountability for ensuring, objectively and neutrally, the application of numerous religions, beliefs, and trusts. Their role is to support maintain religious harmony, community order, and tolerance in a democratic culture, mainly between opposing parties. Islam (2020) noted that religious harmony in diversity is a fact of natural settings according to the Islamic paradigm, and Robby (2020) viewed the crisis of harmony among Muslims today as a major problem attributable to the absence of harmony, causing the various difficulties faced by the worldwide Muslim community. Notwithstanding, Quranic commands, Prophetic narrations, and memorable Islamic civilizations that highlighted unity among believers, Muslims of the current day fail to integrate and develop the very idea of religious harmony and unity.

Bangladesh is a microcosm of the broader division of the Ummah, with Muslims in the country being divided and separated (Mahmudur Rahman 2019), (p. 35-351, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing). Even Islamist political groups, which should be the icon of Muslim harmony, cannot avoid this separation. Many Ulama are worried with unimportant sectarian differences and are failing to help the society and to deliver much needed divine support and leadership. The divergence among Bangladeshis makes a bad image of the nation and the Ummah, and is vitally damaging to religious harmony and social diversity and the life of the people of South Asia. Sheikh Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi was a revolutionary symbol who developed an inclusive philosophy of revitalization and transformation by uniting the Muslims in Bangladesh (Huq 2019). According to him, Unity in Diversity and religious harmony with *Ittihad mal Ikhtelaf* is the suitable method to deal with this matter. This paper investigates his thoughts on Unity in Diversity in Bangladesh by textual analysis process to examine primary and secondary sources. The next section presents a short biography of Sheikh Azizur Rahman.

LIFE AND EDUCATION

Sheikh Muhammad Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi was born in to a renowned and devout traditional Muslim family in Jhalokathi, Barisal. His father, Maulavi Mofizur Rahman, was a famous preacher and a passionate follower of Pir Badshah Mian, who was directly guaranteed and chosen by Haji Shariatullah. Rofikullah states that he was a colleague and contemporary of Munshin Meherullah

(Huq 2019), a well-known Muslim revivalist and rhetorician of Bengal. Sheikh Nesarabadi's ancestors were of Arab origin, and immigrated to Bengal for the aim of spreading Islam (Rahman 2018). His mother, Zinatunessa, was well-known as a sincere woman, known for her high ethical position and charity. Sheikh Nesarabadi learned basic education and Islamic principles from his family milieu, gaining primary knowledge in his own village under the observation of Maulavi Muhsinuddin Faridpuri. After receiving his primary schooling, Sheikh Nesarabadi went for more study to Bhola Alia Madrasah, where he expended about five years from 1930-1935, until finishing with the fourth mark (Rofikullah 2013), (quayed sahib hujur (rah): life and works, p. 22, jhalokati: Hezbollah publication). In 1935 he shifted to Sarsina Alia Madrasah for advanced education, and he received his *fazil* degree (equal to a modern honors degree) in 1940, with an outstanding mark. Rofikullah (2013) (quayed sahib hujur (rah): life and works, p. 22, jhalokati: Hezbollah publication) noted that he scored third place under the whole Calcutta Madrasah Board.

Rahman (2009) (quayed Saheb: An example of integrity, *Insan Kame: Quayed Saheb Hujur (Rah)*, p. 14, Jhalokathi: Quayed Saheb Foundation.), charted his educational trajectory. Upon completing his undergraduate education at the Sarsina Madrasah, Sheikh Nesarabadi relocated to Calcutta Alia Madrasah for higher studies in 1941. All the biographers of Sheikh Nesarabadi clarified that he completed his graduate degree in 1942. Throughout his education in Calcutta Alia Madrasah, Sheikh Nesarabadi saw and learned various branches of knowledge and spiritual education from great scholars of his age, which later influenced his views and activities. Alongside modern education, Sheikh Nesarabadi got his divine teaching from the great Islamic philosopher, spiritual, ingenious leader, and social activist of Bengal, Hazrat Maulana Nesaruddin Ahmed, and Pir Shahab Sarsina. Maulana Nesaruddin Ahmed was a follower of Maulana Abu Bakr Siddiqui, Pir of Furfura in West Bengal. For the duration of his mystical journey, Sheikh Nesarabadi became an adept of the four main Sunni Sufi chains in Bengal (Chistia, Naqshbandiah, Mujaddidiah, and Muhammadiyah), and later joined the Qadriyah order via his Sheikh Nesaruddin. After completing his formal education, he became a senior lecturer at Sarsina Madrasah in 1942 (Muhibullah Jami 2009). (Philosopher Quayed Saheb (Rah): life and thoughts. Jhalokathi: Hezbollah Publication, p.15).

Based on the above discussion of his brief life summary, it is evident that Sheikh Nesarabadi was possessed of abundant knowledge and spiritual appreciation about several thoughts and paths. His diverse educational background and career experience motivated him to drive the notion of religious harmony by Unity in Diversity. The following section discusses his views on religious harmony.

NESARABADI'S THOUGHT ON UNITY, DIVERSITY, AND HARMONY

To appropriately analyze the use of religious harmony as a legal belief and social standard, it is essential to determine what it actually means (Neo 2019). What features are required for a society to be considered harmonious? Does harmony denote the mere absence of strife, or is it something more active and innovative? Harmony is commonly understood according to its musical connotations, which at their simplest pertain to the simultaneous sounding of multiple notes. The Oxford English Dictionary describes "harmony" as a "[c]ombination or adaptation of parts, elements, or related things, so as to form a consistent and orderly whole"; a more value-laden conception of harmony suggests an "[a]greement of feeling or sentiment", "peaceableness", and "concord" (Dictionary 2020). Concerned with characteristics of religious harmony, Sheikh Nesarabadi was a thoughtful and analytical reader of the era. He distinguished the central

dimensions of the broken world. In drawing the situation of the earth, Sheikh Nesarabadi properly observed that:

“If we look at the world today, the ideologies of the people around the world in a variety of religions, philosophies, and geographical boundaries, have been divided into pieces. Even people of the same religion have become prisoners, and several captives. The Muslim world is divided into different schools of thoughts and political ideologies”. (Nesarabadi 1998), (Speech 4: Necessity of Unity and its way. Jhalokathi: Hezbollah Publication).

In this regard, in his first religious harmony conference (“Unity”), Sheikh Nesarabadi very openly demonstrated that we should not emphasize minor matters, rather we should concentrate on major and relevant responsibilities. Particularly, he criticized the widespread inappropriate methods looking for to deal with the concern of disunity (Nesarabadi 1998) (Speech 4: Necessity of Unity and its way. Jhalokathi: Hezbollah Publication).

As noted by Fayzul (2019), he believed that both total atomization and generally “consistency” (i.e., homogeneity and social conformity to a universal identity) were unharmonious with Islamic educations, and he went on to enlighten the necessity of unity:

“Many of us feel that we need the overall ‘consistency’. In contrast, some want the total ‘isolation’. I think both groups are incorrect in terms of their views and approaches... Liberty is essential in individual life, and rights and liberty of opinions are essential in social lives. Again, as national unity is essential for national independence and distinct national identity, unity among the nations is essential for international peace. As the Muslims need unity for upholding their religion (Islam), all patriotic people should be united for the interest of the state and nation”.

As noted above, according to his interpretation, the only route to achieve religious harmony by unity is Al-ittehad ma al-Ikhtelaf (Unity in Diversity). Sheikh Nesarabadi’s methodology to resolve the biggest challenges facing humankind was realistic and achievable. To foster the coexistence of multiple and diverse parties, he suggested four different points or stages of his unity theory for harmony, as discussed in the next section.

UNITY OF MUSLIMS

Imam Al-Bukhari describes the religious tolerance and unity of knowledge and faith in the hadith of reliable collections defining the believer as follows (Сафиназаров 2020): “None of you can truly be a believer except you love for your brothers what you love for yourself”. The believer is considered to be an enlightened and educated selfless man, the same in words and deeds; conscientious, decent, real, true and religious, generous and plentiful, with control over base desires, living in love with his nation and motherland, rational, and the possessor of moral virtue. Producing believers requires educating believing and motivated individuals in the family, at school or higher educational institutions, by developing honesty and purity as spiritual aspects of education and knowledge. According to him, all behaviors are manifestations of three elements: beliefs, education, and training.

The most fundamental duty of the believer, and the Muslims in general, is to worship Allah, which entails unity and working for a more just and human world. Sheikh Nesarabadi saw the central

tactic to realize the mission of Islam in terms of the significance of unity among Muslims, and he spent his whole life endeavoring to unite Muslims and Islamic parties on one stage. As he recalled, "I was fighting to combine scholars and *Masayekh* since my student life. So if I stated any individual rules, that would be my intention to create obstacles in the way of achievement" (Fayzul 2019). In his first speech at the Unity Conference in 1997, Sheikh Nesarabadi quite widely confirmed the impact of unity among the Muslims and Islamists. In terms of the unity of Muslims, He highlighted the necessity for a "united movement", free from isolation, for the sake of Islam (Fayzul 2019):

"So, like our individual and familial life, we have to establish Islam in socio-economical and state life as well, and we have to take this as a mandatory duty upon us. Islam is the religion of peace. If we can have established Islam in our personal, familial, social, and state life, then there is the possibility of getting salvation, prosperity, and real peace. In order to establish Islamic ideology in individual and familial life; the endless efforts and united movement of Islamists is the most essential matter".

Given this particular quotation, it is clear that his fundamental aim was to follow Allah (SWT) and make a flourishing, peaceful humanity, and he saw Islamic political movements as a vital aspect required to recognize this goal. Besides, to authenticate his cry for Muslim unity, Sheikh Nesarabadi advanced his dialogue from a Quranic viewpoint, noting that the Quran commands Muslims to be united and not separated. If Muslims do not follow the order of the Quran, and come to be divided, they will fall into the worst circumstances and lose their supremacy in the world. He mainly quoted the following two verses from the Holy Quran to support his plans on unity (Fayzul 2019): "Hold fast to the rope of Allah altogether and do not become divided" (Al Quran 3:103); and "And obey God and His messenger, and do not dispute, lest you falter and lose your courage. And be steadfast. God is with the steadfast" (Al Quran 8:46). Both of these verses determine the position of unity among the Muslim.

"Unity and Togetherness" are enjoined by both the Quran and Sunnah, and must be sustained and protected from barriers and harms (Aji, Karim et al. 2020). Unity is an Islamic ethos that is very vulnerable to human inclinations toward separation and damage, contrary to the ideal of togetherness in brotherhood, closeness, peacefulness and synonymy in harmonious communities and nations. Sheikh Nesarabadi's precise responses to challenges to strengthening unity among the Muslims are detailed later in this paper. In *Recommendations for the Achievement of Muslim Unity* (Hassan 2015), Nasarabadi's path to attain unity among Muslims is categorized under the following steps.

Obligation to Tawhid

The common beliefs of a country can play a significant role in people's affinities and alliance, and the unity among individuals and communities in a nation. When grounded in the belief in God's Oneness, upheld by the entire Ummah in all walks of life, Tawhid answers the Quran's call for believers to be joined in Tawhid. The essence of the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Mission is to invite mankind to Tawhid and life in accordance with this primordial condition. In modern times, Islamic political ideologies have cited Tawhid as a counterpoise to imperialist domination and narratives, based on separation and division among nations. As Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

"For We assuredly sent amongst every People an apostle, (with the Command), 'Serve Allah, and eschew Evil': of the People were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth)" (Al-Nahl, 16:36).

The Holy Quran stated about the Prophetic Duty and the foundations of Tawhid:

"Now then for that (reason) call (them to the Faith) and stand steadfast as thou art commanded nor follow thou their vain desires; but say: 'I believe in the Book which Allah has sent down; and I am commanded to judge justly between you. Allah is Our Lord and your Lord. For us (is the responsibility for) Our deeds and for you for your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together and to Him is (Our) final goal" (Ash- shura 42:15).

"Say: 'O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah'. If then they turn back, say ye: 'Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)'" (Al-Imran 3:64).

The above verses clearly establish "Tawhid" the real basis for union and harmony among the "People of the Book", and those who disagree with it are obviously out of fold of Islam and the Abrahamic tradition. Therefore, all Islamic education and tradition emphasizes that Tawhid is highest priority in raising the Ummah toward union and harmony.

To Avoid Takfir Fatwas

The concept of declaring someone to be apostate (Takfir) is a dangerous issue in Islam, particularly when undertaken without proper Sharia knowledge, rules, and regulations. Nobody can issue a fatwa of Takfir except a national mufti or Sharia judge (Hassan 2015), but it has become a common slur used by political interests on the basis of envy and hatred. The causes of clashes between Muslims are generally based on socio-economic and political issues, and not fundamental doctrines. Mainstream Islamic organizations urge Muslims to avoid Takfir and to resolve their disputes amicably, in a spirit of union, love, and patience. According to all Islamic interpretations, someone who admits belief in Tawhid and other articles of faith is a Muslim.

Identification of Common Enemy

All Muslims, scholars, and academics should be conscious of any danger from common enemies to their societies, and should know such elements. Nowadays, the Ummah is faced with serious risks in terms of culture, economics, and politics, with dedicated enemies attempting to subvert younger generations by social violations (Basher 2020).

Attention to Common Matters

A central matter that may lead to the unity of Muslims is that the Muslim society should emphasize their shared problems, which offer opportunities for direct unity due to common interests, but mutual beliefs and values have been totally ignored in this context. Tawhid, prophecy, the Hereafter, prayer, fasting, Zakat, Hajj, Jihad, Qibla, the Quran, and a lot of other issues are common to Muslims. Such mutual things can lead them to the union of the Ummah.

Devotion to Islamic Brotherhood

Islam states that all followers are brothers, as the Holy Quran said: *"All believers are brethren"* (49:10); thus all Muslims should be conscious of the positions of their siblings and should share their pain and sorrow. It is necessary to raise common sense of kindness and to encourage the impression of being one united Muslim Ummah, despite geographical and political divisions.

Duties of Muslim Governments

Muslim administrations should play a strong role to continue brotherhood among Muslims, mainly by undertaking the following steps.

Responsibility to Media

Muslim governments should observe and regulate television, print, radio, and electronic media to prevent spreading hate among diverse religious and ethnic groups. Uncontrolled media is too dangerous for Islamic unity in many respects, and the so-called free media is not built on any principle. All matters are within the range of checks and balances and this significant field of public activity is no different. Freedom of expression does not mean uncontrolled comment at all. Consequently, our governments could control this important area responsibly, to meet national, ideological, religious, and cultural goals. Passively consuming everything regurgitated from the West will affect non-Western societies negatively.

Intensive Care of Intelligentsia

The second stage is to observe scholars, academics, authors, and writers. It is the responsibility of intellectuals and authors of Islamic society to be conscious of the role of the state, responsible governance, and stability. Intellectuals and writers must avoid fanning the flames of hatred with their articles, papers, and books, they should work in kindness toward unity and the national concerns of the Ummah.

Observing of the Mosque Pulpit (Minbar)

It is the duty of our governments to observe the imams and preachers of the mosques, since they are directly related to the society, and their speeches are highly influential, particularly in avoiding discrimination and extremism in society. Governments should design training sessions in this regard for experts in this field with due consultation of senior scholars. Muslim jurists, scholars and imams are the religious leaders of the people and there is great respect and trust placed on them. It is their responsibility to guide and train people through their Friday sermons and other religious events, and to build social ethics, rather than confusing the masses with matters of dispute.

Control over Radicalism

It is compulsory for Muslim governments to control the extremism and the extremists at the starting level. Policies should be formulated to handle this with the help of well-known Muslim scholars and personalities. We need to distinguish the root causes of radical attitudes and address related socio-political injustices etc.

Special Focus on Education Sector

It is also responsibility of the government to attention on educational area. Educational curriculums should be designed to positively advance unity, harmony, tolerance, perseverance,

community, and open-mindedness among youth, ensuing national interests in societies are prioritized and achieved.

DIFFERENT STAGES OF HARMONY

To differentiate Sheikh Nesarabadi's historic model on unity with disagreement in depth, his life and works abundantly explain his practical suggestions on unity. Throughout Islamic history, very few major intellectuals have evaded being dragged into public controversies and sectarianism, but Sheikh Nesarabadi achieved this. As Rahman exactly pointed out (Mahmudur Rahman 2019): (The political history of Muslim Bengal: An unfinished battle of faith. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 35).

"I like to refer some of the outstanding personalities for example Jamal Uddin Afghani, Allama Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, and many others who sacrificed their intellect and energy for the cause of Islam and Muslim world. They were not involved in the controversies of Sunni-Shia dilemma, or any school of thoughts or regional politics; Shaikh Nesarabadi was in that group".

Having briefly explored his discourses, speeches, and writings we can distinguish four points: theories for a harmonious society, inclusive unity theory, country, and world. Sheikh Nesarabadi confidently understood that his theory of unity with a difference was the only solution to bring all people under one umbrella. Consequently, he recommended four different points of unity necessary for a united, harmonious and peaceful world:

1. Harmony of nations, or international unity for the sake of humanity or world peace.
2. Patriotic unity or national unity against corruption and injustice.
3. Harmony of Muslims for the sake of Islam and Muslims.
4. Harmony of believers or theists (including Hindus) against atheists.

We may imagine these four kinds of harmony in a radial circle, as shown in Figure 1.

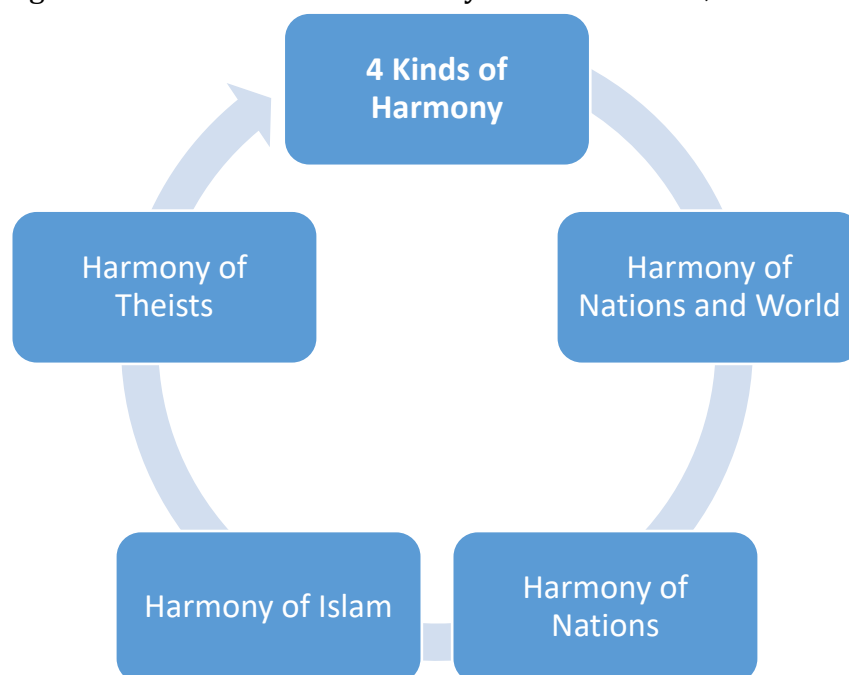


Figure 1. Kinds of Harmony.

Hence, Sheikh Nesarabadi innovated his four-level theory of harmony to support peace. The following division demonstrates details on four steps and how the idea could be effectively applied in practice.

CHALLENGES TO REACH THE UNITY OF MUSLIMS

Nowadays, it appears hard for young people to know and appreciate the unity of the Ummah (Ali 2019). The Ummatic awareness of Muslims due to the above-mentioned issues has been shattered. Islam is no more taken as the ingenuous and truthful worldview and the way of life. This opinion of Islam and the Muslim Ummah has almost gone into unconsciousness.

To counter this matter, we saw the rise of another flow of thought of Islamic revivalism that criticized and analyzed the current wrong worldviews and philosophical contexts, and recognized the universality of the fact of Islam, and the necessity of the renewal of the realm of Ummah related to the Islamic worldview and the oneness of mankind. This guidelines of Islamic revitalization should be implemented totally and essentially for the significant global unity of the Ummah, which needs rigorous intelligent determinations and the use of the Islamization of the modern human knowledge through the development of teaching in the Muslim world. It also involves critically engaging with modern Western philosophies and models of growth and transformation with the renewal of Islamic philosophy and civilization.

In light of the above arguments and goals, this study highlights some of the significant features of the suggested outline of unity of Muslims. This agenda first addresses the obstacles to attain international unity. The following points represent the statement of the necessary model.

Concern for transnational unity among Muslims has not achieved its commensurate level due to some shortcomings, as described below.

The Lack of Proper Islamic Knowledge

The lack of Islamic knowledge among the huge majority of Muslims is the main cause for not practicing Islam. A current survey presented that more than 80 percent of Muslims living in Canada are “less committed” and “least committed” to practicing Islam (Ali 2019). Yousif (1993) in his *Muslims in the Canadian Mosaic* declared that this absence of commitment to Islam extends a future identity crisis for Muslims (Yousif, 1993, p. 16). Rahman (1994) argued that urgent and formal action was necessary to maintain Muslims’ sense of Ummah. Researchers have understood that Muslims who are active in secular cultures can avoid identity dilemmas over the creation of Islamic learning methods in time-space situations (Rahman 1994). Teaching the Islamic system of life, Sharia, and Islamic ethics are central issues for Muslim childhood and families. The knowledge of Islamic values benefits Muslims to raise their Islamic knowledge, which imbues them with a moral system in the correct way and permits Muslims to engage with modernity in a constructive way, seeking societal harmony and stability. This teaching model should demonstrate the essentiality of the Islamization of current human knowledge.

The Absence of the Values of Islamic Education

Lack of Islamic ethics is another main reason for moral ruin in secular education (Ali 2019). What types of morals should be encouraged by an education system? This crisis of morals has been a main issue behind many past failures, contributing to modern difficulties like teenage pregnancy

and drug use, associated with Muslim disunity. Islamic morals are not rooted in most teaching systems, even in formal religious pedagogy. The youth do not realize the importance of steadiness, hard work, punctuality, in-depth research, and practice. They do not know that Islamic ethics offer a comprehensive code of life (Rahman 1994). The application of accurate Islam in our lives can convey peace, safety, and global unity to the Muslim Ummah.

Failure of Muslims to Realize the Cause of the Lack of Unity

Many methods and approaches have been discussed to explore the matter of the disunity of Muslims and to overcome the status quo through transformation and revitalization (Ali 2019). Several reform actions dealt with signs of the issue, but no due action and study has been done to deal with the source reasons of the disunity. Al-Alwānī (2019) noted the critical requirement for a systematic, epistemological restructuring to detect the main and important reasons of the crisis and to discover a sound system and rationale for reformation.

Muslim scholars must play a collective and active role as they carried out in the past (Al-Alwānī 2019), with some epistemological and methodical modifications to reestablish their traditional authority. Muslim youth must study the Islamic way of life and moral system in their schooling, family atmospheres, and communities. The necessity for change in teaching system was recognized and explained, but at the national level it is not practiced. Government strategies for the education of youth do not purport to understand what kind of education system is needed. According to Ismail Faruqi (Al-Alwānī 2019), the current education method is the cause of disunity between Muslims.

Crisis of Muslim Mind

Muslim scholars have identified many reasons for the apparent failure of Muslim nations, but they generally pertain to a crisis of Muslim thought and a lack of rational integrity and innovation (i.e. a movement of '*ijtihad*' in its wider sense) (Ali 2019). The advance of Islamic standards of knowledge has an impotent role to play as an alternate to the old paradigms of religious and secular mind patterns that currently lead the educational structure in the present world and Muslim countries. Al-Alwānī (1995) noted that Muslim thinkers could not identify the important issues of improving Muslim thought. Despite the major significance of this problem, it has not been taken into attention sincerely. In addition to that, the cause for missing concern has not been considered by Muslim intellects scientifically; consequently, efforts should be put ahead to paradigm a plan to overcome the dilemma of Muslim thought.

Therefore, it has been highlighted by al-Alwānī and Abū Sulaymān that inactive mind and thought (i.e. intellectual stagnation) is the *raison d'être* of the failure and disunity of the Ummah. It is argued that the current crisis in Muslim thought is much more shocking than in the past. This is not due to the incompetency or insignificance of Muslim thinkers, but the central reason is due to the lack of agenda of a Tawhidic standard of thought. Due to this, Muslim philosophers are not able to understand the correct nature of analysis, or devise serious and creative approaches to move forward.

Lack of Collective Efforts

Another cause for the continuing problem is the lack of collective and constant efforts. Matters of improving the Muslim rational system and the Islamization of current human knowledge have been given some importance by Muslim intellectuals, but all these determinations took place at the individual level, and could not find expression in official and popular projects at the level of Ummah; a lack of joint, coordinated efforts is a major shortcoming (Al-Alwānī 2019). Muslims could not attain the historic objective of transformation and revitalization in spite of their huge influences in resounding out the duty of knowledgeable reorganization and social renewal. To achieve this goal, sincere united efforts have to be completed to answer to the challenge of restructuring Muslim concentration in particular, and the mindset of humankind in general.

Lack of Knowledge of Muslim Leadership

According to some scholars, “Western cultural imperialism” (Ali 2019) is one of the contemporary challenges that is more profound than classic economic colonialism. Cultural colonization is the creation of the cultural supremacy of modern Western culture and the domination of other political and cultural expression, iterated via international law and norms based on Western mass media, which emanates the message that Western culture and mores are enlightened and superior to other traditions (Banu 1997).

It is time to improve common understanding among Muslim intellectuals and Muslim government leaders to think through an Islamic direction of intelligent and appreciative apprehension that can intelligently grasp the opportunities of modernity while avoiding the pitfalls of Western cultural nihilism and moral relativity. One of the important facts to attain multinational unity of Muslims is to have strong situation in knowledge, science, and technology over hard attempts in the field of education and research, as well as a solid understanding of Islamic moral models surrounded by Muslim philosophers are supposed to work. Figure 2 illustrates the main challenges to Muslim unity.

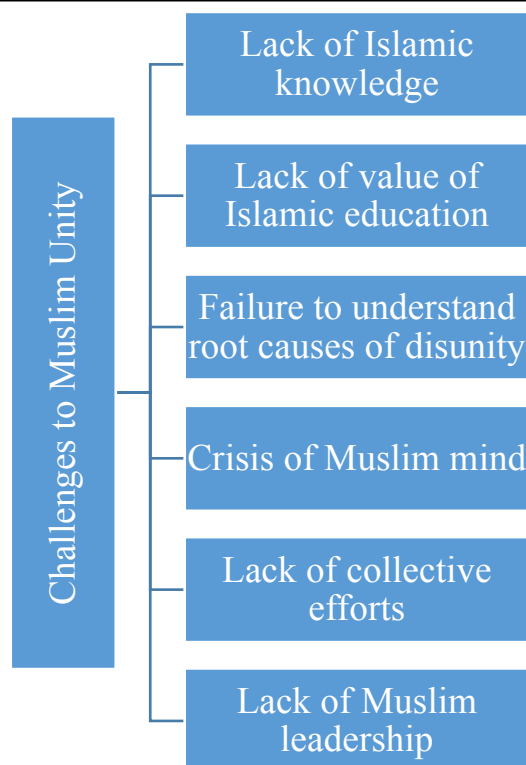


Figure 2. Challenges to Muslim Unity.

From the above discussion it is clear that the identified challenges are the main barrier to Muslim prosperity and advantages; Sheikh Nesarabadi realized the significance of these issues a long time ago. From his life experiences, Sheikh Nesarabadi saw some of the key challenges or motives behind the disunity among the Muslim groups, especially in Bangladesh (Huq 2019). According to his analysis, the main barriers to uniting Muslim political movements under one mission and vision are:

1. The fear of losing personal and group interests to those of a larger collective (i.e., the Unity Movement itself), and the related matter of party politics.
2. The proliferation of Islamic political parties in Bangladesh prevents the option of a united national Islamic front and stops building unity.
3. The third and the most crucial cause behind disunity is the question of leadership, and the desire to lead movements, described as *gaddi* (holding a seat) by the Sheikh.

The next section summarizes the Sheikh's future solutions to this regard.

Applied Aspects of Nesarabadi's Theory

In line with the statement of this study, Sheikh Nesarabadi presented a complete model to decrease the gap among the Muslims as described below (Muhibullah Jami 2009).

Emphasis on Common Issues

Sheikh Nesarabadi confidently advocated that coming together worldwide on common good matters, with harmonization of differences of views, can strengthen Islamic parties: "to implement unity theory and get united the first thing that needs to be inculcated is Unity in Diversity and

avoiding personal, party interest, party politics and giving up the controversial issues, being united based on universal/common issues”.

Emphasis on Tawhidic Unity

Islam confirms that the Holy Quran is the key to solving human problems, bringing *Shifa* (remedy) for believers. According to Muhibullah Jami (2009), (Jibon O Obodan, (life and sacrifice). Jhalokathi: Hezbollah Publication, p. 15):

“It also contains many kinds of solutions which will provide peace and tranquility to a man in the exterior world. In this context, just as the Qur’an opens up the dead-end ways of a society full of savagery and crudeness, returning them to safety and sanity with the illuminated remedies that it has brought within itself, it has also revived and rebuilt the social life with its principles of unity and solidarity”.

The most relevant issue in the process of Muslim unity and harmony is Tawhidic (monotheistic) unity, the vital component of the Islamic faith theory, with far-reaching implications for community consistency.

Emphasis on Moderation and Mutual Respect

Sheikh Nesarabadi’s unity in diversity philosophy is his moderate method and third significant practical point. He thought that the middle path or moderate method was the intrinsic spirit of Islam, and the best technique to unite Muslims. He was a gentleman of equability, who never supported any form of radicalism. Given his accommodative methodology, he was intelligent to motivate significant figures of Muslim groups in Bangladesh. He clarified his accommodative method about the practices of diverse *tariqas* (Muhibullah Jami 2009), (Jibon O Obodan, (life and sacrifice). Jhalokathi: Hezbollah Publication, p. 15):

“I have called followers of different tariqas to come back to the original ideology of Islam, with their minor controversial issues to be united. Due to controversies in Zikr... The followers will accomplish Zikr according to their own Pir’s provided methodology”.

He believed in intimacy or united efforts, not isolated actions in Islamic or Muslim development and growth. His resolution can be signified by the supports of Muslim unity shown in Figure 3.

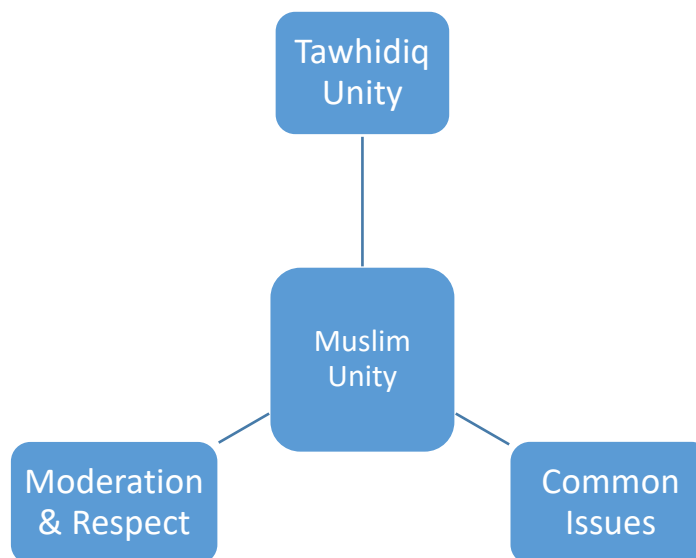


Figure 3. Pillars of Muslim Unity.

APPLYING RELIGIOUS HARMONY WITH AL-ITTIHAD MA'AL IKHTLAF STRATEGIES

In line with the statement of this study, it is clear that the “unity with differences” philosophy is the only comprehensive resolution to religious harmony among the Muslims. Evidently, we can see Western political formations, particularly the example of the European Union (EU 2020), as an image of the institutionalization of unity with different countries. The total number of EU member states is currently 27, with different national languages, cultures, political systems, religious denominations, and economies, however they are generally united under the EU, with many sharing the same currency, and all having freedom of traveling, business, and labor among themselves. This example is germane to this study because the EU unwittingly manifests the Sheikh Nesarabadi’s idea of unity of religious harmony with differences, unlike the Muslim world and Bangladesh.

Muslim World

The “Muslim world” is divided into numerous divisions and segments. West Asia is the heart of the Muslim Ummah, and here we see the ridiculous situation of Sunni-Shia sectarian differentiation being used as camouflage for the geopolitical power fight between the US and non-aligned nations, manifest in the US Arab fiefdoms of the GCC versus the Shia Crescent of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon (Ashwarya and Alam 2019). It is a fact that cultural and linguistic patriotism is used to destroy any vision of national unity in Muslim-majority countries. Notwithstanding the profoundly rooted hates that fragment the Muslim world, Sheikh Nesarabadi’s idea *al ittihad ma'al Ikhtelaf* can move toward the unity of religious harmony based on the following facts (Fayzul 2019):

- Foreign power should not interfere in the Middle East, and no foreign soldier should remain in the Middle East and the GCC.
- The Arabs should resolve their challenges themselves, via the OIC or Arab League.
- The Sunni-Shia problem must be solved by dialogue, not defense or political crisis. Muslims should be united with different cultures and languages, like the EU, for their own interests.

- An independent Palestinian supreme state should urgently be established as per UN Resolutions in Gaza and the West Bank.
- Israel should stop its occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh, the third most populous Muslim country in the world, requires efforts for the regeneration of Muslim advancement and harmony. On the basis of the philosophy of Sheikh Nesarabadi, the question arises of how the idea can be applied in his native country of Bangladesh. Grounded on the previous investigation of his methodology, the next facts requiring agreement on mutual concerns can be identified:

1. There should be a common serious steps of free vaccine for COVID-19, because Bangladesh is among the top 20 countries in terms of confirmed cases, with a positive case rate of 19.09-22.91% as of June 1, 2020 (Hossain 2020).
2. Bangladesh should follow international human rights norms on freedom of speech, accountability, labor rights, women and girls' rights, and religious freedom.
3. Natural capital should be used as per national interest, and not be stolen or embezzled.
4. There should be global education for all, to develop the student's skills in business, science, engineering, and information technology, etc.
5. All Bangladeshis must agree on an effective religious harmony is urgently needed, with organized religious groups and parties, etc.

It is understood that Sheikh Nesarabadi's humble but thoughtful viewpoint can change the balance of Muslim unity as well as global unity, and radically advance the value of life in Bangladesh.

Patriotic Unity

It is interesting to note that Sheikh Nesarabadi encouraged nationalistic unity to remove corruption and injustice from the national level and the countrywide arena. He strongly understood that without eradicating corruption from the country it would be difficult to attain prosperity and community harmony; he recognized the key causes for the collapse of a nation as corruption and injustice, which is why he advised patriotic people to unite under one banner and fight against these wrong activities, as he stated (Fayzul 2019): "similarly for the interest of country and nation, all patriotic brothers need to be united irrespective of party and doctrine" (Huq 2019). He discussed the causes of exploitation at a speech in 1990: "albeit Government and political parties have taken some (insufficient) steps to eradicate corruptions and nepotism, the corruption still continues to rise". According to the World Bank, Transparency International Bangladesh reported that Bangladesh was the second-most corrupt country in the world in 2010 (TIB 2020).

It is obviously impossible for any country to implement the complete principles of Islam, and it is more shocking when one considers that the majority of populations live in poverty (Zhao, Yu et al. 2019), and can have enough money to bear corrupt activities to achieve their basic rights. Sheikh Nesarabadi highlighted the influential issues in corruption in Bangladesh, and the next section addresses two major components of corruption (Haque 2019).

ETHICAL VALUES AND POVERTY

An innovative, Islamic, nationalistic generation is very essential to establish Islam in every aspect of the state. The lack of a life established according to Islamic principles was a key enabled of the rise of corruption (Rahman 2018). Corruption is begun by poverty, due to unemployment, extravagance, and arrogance (Huq 2019). Muslims must shun these phenomena and attributes. Necessary and well-targeted public expenditure, a hardworking population, and new business policies can solve this problem. The next section concludes this study of Nesarabadi's thoughts on attaining religious harmony in Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion presented above, it is clear that Sheikh Azizur Rahman Nesarabadi was a spiritual revolutionary and a figure promoting harmony, union, and integration in the broadest sense of religion, including the socio-economic and political dimensions. Sheikh Nesarabadi on the one hand received modern education, and on the other he gifted himself with wide spiritual teaching, both of which he opened to offer a technique out of the present desperate stalemate faced by the people of Bangladesh, the Ummah, and mankind in general. It is understood from Sheikh Nesarabadi's thought that theory on the unity of religious harmony depends upon three standards: attention on common good issues, equability and joint respect, and the Tawhidic example. These include the agenda for Muslim harmony, which must be approved by Muslim political parties as well as individuals in order to achieve the command of Allah to qualify the Ummah to continue a leading role in the world as a champion of justice, peacefulness, and an integrated harmony.

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